

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus **— A Contemporary Application —**

James R. Hughes

© 2014 (updated 2019-07-07;

Bible Reference index replaced 2023-12)

Contents

EARLY LIFE OF JESUS	14
THE PRE-EXISTENT WORD (PART 1) – ABSOLUTES OF THE LOGOS [JANUARY 1]	14
THE PRE-EXISTENT WORD (PART 2) – ATTRIBUTES OF THE LOGOS [JANUARY 2]	16
THE PRE-EXISTENT WORD (PART 3) – APPEARANCE OF THE LOGOS [JANUARY 3]	18
THE PRE-EXISTENT WORD (PART 4) – ANTITHESIS OF THE LOGOS [JANUARY 4]	21
THE CONCEPTION OF JESUS (PART 1) [JANUARY 5]	23
THE CONCEPTION OF JESUS (PART 2) [JANUARY 6]	25
THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO JOSEPH [JANUARY 7]	27
MARY VISITS ELIZABETH [JANUARY 8]	29
MARY’ SONG OF JOY [JANUARY 9]	32
THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS [JANUARY 10]	34
THE BIRTH OF JESUS [JANUARY 11]	37
WITNESSES TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS [JANUARY 12]	38
CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS [JANUARY 13]	39
VISIT OF THE MAGI [JANUARY 14]	41
ESCAPE INTO EGYPT [JANUARY 15]	43
RETURN TO NAZARETH [JANUARY 16]	45
JESUS PRESENTED AT THE TEMPLE [JANUARY 17]	47
GROWTH AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS [JANUARY 18]	48
JESUS’ FIRST PASSOVER IN JERUSALEM [JANUARY 19]	50
JESUS’ GROWTH TO ADULthood [JANUARY 20]	52
JOHN: THE FORERUNNER OF THE MESSIAH	54
JOHN AS FULFILMENT OF HOPE [JANUARY 21]	54
JOHN’S MISSION [JANUARY 22]	57
JOHN’S BIRTH [JANUARY 23]	59
ZECHARIAH’S PSALM [JANUARY 24]	62
JOHN’S MINISTRY [JANUARY 25]	64
JOHN’S MESSAGE [JANUARY 26]	66
JOHN—NOT THE MESSIAH [JANUARY 27]	69
JOHN AND THE WORD INCARNATE [JANUARY 28]	71
BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION	74

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

JESUS' BAPTISM BY JOHN [JANUARY 29]	74
A VOICE FROM HEAVEN [JANUARY 30]	76
JESUS' TEMPTATION IN THE DESERT [JANUARY 31]	77
THE WITNESS OF JOHN—TO HIMSELF [FEBRUARY 1]	80
THE WITNESS OF JOHN—TO JESUS THE <i>LAMB OF GOD</i> [FEBRUARY 2]	81
THE WITNESS OF JOHN—TO <i>JESUS</i> [FEBRUARY 3]	84
BEGINNING OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY	85
JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES (PART 1) [FEBRUARY 4]	85
JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES (PART 2) [FEBRUARY 5]	87
THE CALLING OF PHILIP AND NATHANIEL [FEBRUARY 6]	89
THE INTRODUCTION OF NATHANIEL TO JESUS (PART 1) [FEBRUARY 7]	92
THE INTRODUCTION OF NATHANIEL TO JESUS (PART 2) [FEBRUARY 8]	94
JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE: WATER BECOMES WINE [FEBRUARY 9]	96
FIRST CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AT THE PASSOVER [FEBRUARY 10]	99
THE JEWS DEMAND A SIGN [FEBRUARY 11]	101
EARLY BELIEVERS [FEBRUARY 12]	103
NICODEMUS MEETS JESUS	105
NICODEMUS COMES FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH JESUS (PART 1) [FEBRUARY 13]	106
NICODEMUS COMES FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH JESUS (PART 2) [FEBRUARY 14]	108
NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH (PART 1) [FEBRUARY 15]	110
NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH (PART 2) [FEBRUARY 16]	113
WITNESSES TO JESUS AS THE TRUTH [FEBRUARY 17]	115
A LESSON ON DESCENDING AND ASCENDING [FEBRUARY 18]	117
JESUS' TEACHING ON THE LOVE OF GOD [FEBRUARY 19]	120
JESUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER [FEBRUARY 20]	122
JESUS PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH BELIEF <i>IN HIM</i> [FEBRUARY 21]	124
UNBELIEF: A PRESENT CONDEMNATION [FEBRUARY 22]	126
JOHN SUPERSEDED BY JESUS	129
JOHN'S SECOND TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS (PART 1) [FEBRUARY 23]	129
JOHN'S SECOND TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS (PART 2) [FEBRUARY 24]	131
FROM JUDEA, THROUGH SAMARIA, TO GALILEE	133
REJECTION AND INTRODUCTION [FEBRUARY 25]	133
AN OBJECT LESSON: LIVING WATER [FEBRUARY 26]	136

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

CHALLENGE AND EVASION [FEBRUARY 27].....	138
HARVEST PENDING, HARVEST PRESENT [FEBRUARY 28]	140
THE FIRST HARVEST FROM THE NATIONS [MARCH 1]	143
MINISTRY IN GALILEE; CALLING THE DISCIPLES	145
BEGINNING THE GALILEAN MINISTRY—INITIAL ACCEPTANCE [MARCH 2]....	145
FAITH BASED ON TRUST, NOT SIGHT [MARCH 3]	147
BEGINNING A GALILEAN MINISTRY—OPPOSITION AT NAZARETH [MARCH 4]	149
.....	149
A NEW HEADQUARTERS IN CAPERNAUM [MARCH 5]	152
CALL OF THE FIRST FOUR DISCIPLES [MARCH 6].....	154
HEALING A DEMONIAK [MARCH 7].....	157
HEALINGS [MARCH 8]	159
PRAYER, HEALING, TEACHING AND PREACHING [MARCH 9]	161
HEALING (CLEANSING) A LEPER [MARCH 10]	164
HEALING (FORGIVING) A PARALYTIC [MARCH 11].....	166
THE CALLING OF MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR [MARCH 12]	168
THE BANQUET AT MATTHEW'S HOUSE [MARCH 13].....	170
THE DISCIPLES' FEASTING INSTEAD OF FASTING [MARCH 14]	173
SABBATH CONTROVERSIES, THE SON'S EQUALITY WITH THE FATHER, AND CHOOSING THE TWELVE	175
JESUS HEALS ON THE SABBATH [MARCH 15].....	175
THE 'PROBLEM OF EVIL' [MARCH 16]	177
THE JEWS TRY TO KILL JESUS [MARCH 17].....	180
THE SON'S EQUALITY WITH THE FATHER [MARCH 18].....	182
THE SON IS LIFE AND HE GIVES LIFE [MARCH 19]	184
TESTIMONIES TO THE SON [MARCH 20]	186
CONTROVERSY ABOUT PICKING GRAIN ON THE SABBATH [MARCH 21]	188
HEALING A MAN'S SHRIVELLED HAND ON THE SABBATH [MARCH 22]	191
WITH CROWDS BY THE SEA [MARCH 23].....	193
CHOOSING THE TWELVE [MARCH 24].....	195
SERMON ON THE MOUNT	198
THE SETTING FOR THE SERMON [MARCH 25]	198
BLESSINGS AND CURSES [MARCH 26]	200
CONDITIONS FOR BLESSING (PART 1) [MARCH 27].....	202
CONDITIONS FOR BLESSING (PART 2) [MARCH 28].....	204
THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT (PART 1) [MARCH 29].....	206

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT (PART 2) [MARCH 30].....	209
THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT (PART 3) [MARCH 31].....	211
THE CURSES OF THE COVENANT [APRIL 1]	213
PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS [APRIL 2].....	216
SALT AND LIGHT (PART 1) [APRIL 3].....	218
SALT AND LIGHT (PART 2) [APRIL 4].....	220
JESUS ENDORSES THE OLD TESTAMENT [APRIL 5].....	222
THE CONTINUING VALIDITY OF THE LAW [APRIL 6].....	224
GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING THE LAW [APRIL 7].....	227
KEEPING THE LEAST COMMANDMENTS [APRIL 8]	229
EXCESSIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS [APRIL 9].....	231
HEART AND WALK OBEDIENCE [APRIL 10]	234
HEART-MURDER [APRIL 11].....	236
THE EXTREME CURE FOR ADULTERY IN THE HEART [APRIL 12]	239
DIVORCE [APRIL 13].....	241
LAWFUL OATHS AND VOWS [APRIL 14].....	243
RESTRAINING RETALIATION [APRIL 15]	246
CHRISTIAN LOVE [APRIL 16]	248
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP [APRIL 17]	251
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP – EXAMPLE 1: GIVING [APRIL 18].....	253
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP – EXAMPLE 2: PRAYER PRINCIPLES [APRIL 19]	255
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP – PRAYER’S PROTOTYPE [APRIL 20].....	258
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND FORGIVENESS [APRIL 21].....	260
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP – EXAMPLE 3: FASTING [APRIL 22].....	262
HEAVENLY TREASURES [APRIL 23]	264
WORLDLY WORRY [APRIL 24].....	267
JUST JUDGMENTS (PART 1) – CLARIFYING THE COMMAND [APRIL 25].....	269
JUST JUDGMENTS (PART 2) – SPECK PICKING [APRIL 26]	271
JUST JUDGMENTS (PART 3) – PEARLS AND PIGS [APRIL 27].....	274
ASK, SEEK, KNOCK [APRIL 28].....	276
THE GOLDEN RULE [APRIL 29].....	278
THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES [APRIL 30]	281
A TREE AND ITS FRUIT [MAY 1]	283
THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF FAITH [MAY 2]	286
THE MESSAGE AND THE MAN [MAY 3].....	288
GROWING FAME; PREACHING REPENTANCE	290
THE CENTURION’S FAITH [MAY 4]	290
RAISING A WIDOW’S SON [MAY 5].....	293

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

JOHN THE BAPTIST – IN THE KINGDOM [MAY 6].....	295
THE PARALYSIS OF INDECISION [MAY 7].....	297
WOE UPON UNREPENTANT CITIES [MAY 8]	300
PRaise TO THE FATHER [MAY 9]	302
INVITATION TO THE WEARY [MAY 10]	305
THE TRUE PROPHET WHO FORGIVES SIN [MAY 11]	307
PUBLIC REJECTION BY PHARISEES	310
TRAVELLING WITH JESUS [MAY 12]	310
JESUS AND “THE LORD OF THE FLIES” [MAY 13].....	312
BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT [MAY 14].....	315
FRUIT BEARING TREES [MAY 15]	317
ONLY THE SIGN OF JONAH [MAY 16].....	319
RETURN OF THE EVIL SPIRITS [MAY 17].....	322
THE TRUE FAMILY OF JESUS [MAY 18].....	324
PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM	327
THE PLACE OF THE PARABLES [MAY 19].....	327
THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES [MAY 20]	329
DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOIL [MAY 21]	332
A VISIBLE LIGHT [MAY 22].....	334
INVISIBLE BUT INEVITABLE GROWTH [MAY 23].....	337
WHEAT AND WEEDS [MAY 24].....	339
SPECTACULAR GROWTH [MAY 25].....	342
PARABLES REVEAL, NOT CONCEAL [MAY 26]	344
THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL [MAY 27].....	347
THE DRAGNET [MAY 28].....	350
LEARNING AND TEACHING [MAY 29]	352
CONTINUING OPPOSITION	355
POWERFUL PRESERVATION FROM THE STORMS OF LIFE [MAY 30].....	355
HEALING THE GERASENE DEMONIACS [MAY 31]	357
REACTION TO THE HEALING OF THE GERASENE DEMONIACS [JUNE 1]	360
RESPONDING TO A RELIGIOUS RULER’S REQUEST [JUNE 2].....	362
A REMARKABLE RESURRECTION [JUNE 3].....	365
HEALING A HAEMORRHAGE [JUNE 4]	367
HEALING THE BLIND AND MUTE [JUNE 5]	370
HONOURLESS PROPHET [JUNE 6]	372
FINAL GALILEAN TOUR.....	375

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

WORKERS SOUGHT [JUNE 7].....	375
WORKERS SUMMONED [JUNE 8]	377
WORKERS SCHOOLED [JUNE 9].....	380
WORKERS SUPPORTED [JUNE 10].....	382
WORKERS STRENGTHENED [JUNE 11].....	385
WORKERS STIRRED-UP [JUNE 12]	387
WORKERS SUSTAINED [JUNE 13]	390
WORKERS SENT [JUNE 14].....	392
“WHO IS JESUS” [JUNE 15].....	395
FLASHBACK TO A MURDER [JUNE 16].....	397
JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE.....	400
SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD [JUNE 17].....	400
FEEDING <i>TEN</i> THOUSAND SHEEP [JUNE 18]	402
ALONE ON A MOUNTAIN [JUNE 19].....	405
LESSON IN ASSURANCE: WALKING ON WATER [JUNE 20]	407
HEALINGS AT GENNESARET [JUNE 21].....	410
THE <i>WORK</i> OF BELIEF [JUNE 22]	412
MANNA FROM HEAVEN [JUNE 23]	415
ASSURANCE IN THE WILL OF GOD [JUNE 24]	417
MATERIALISTIC MYTHS VS SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE [JUNE 25]	420
SPIRITUAL EATING [JUNE 26]	422
HARD TEACHINGS [JUNE 27]	425
DEFECTION AND DECLARATION [JUNE 28]	427
INTERIOR VS EXTERIOR CLEANLINESS [JUNE 29].....	430
PRAYING FAITH [JUNE 30].....	433
HEALING BY SPIT AND SPIRIT [JULY 1].....	435
A SECOND MEAL IN THE WILDERNESS [JULY 2]	438
DEMAND FOR A SIGN [JULY 3]	440
YEAST OF THE WORLD [JULY 4]	443
INCREMENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT [JULY 5].....	446
JESUS THE MESSIAH	448
PETER CONFESSES CHRIST [JULY 6]	448
JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH [JULY 7]	451
DYING TO LIVE [JULY 8].....	453
A POST-CRUCIFIXION PREDICTION [JULY 9].....	456
THE TRANSFIGURATION [JULY 10]	459
JOHN, THE GREATER ELIJAH [JULY 11].....	461

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

COUNTERING UNBELIEF WITH EXORCISM [JULY 12].....	464
PAYING THE TEMPLE TAX [JULY 13]	466
TRUE GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM [JULY 14].....	469
THE SCANDAL OF HAUGHTINESS [JULY 15].....	472
FORGIVING A SINNING BROTHER [JULY 16].....	474
FEAST OF BOOTHS.....	477
JESUS RIDICULED BY UNBELIEF [JULY 17].....	477
JESUS REJECTED BY UNBELIEF [JULY 18]	479
RADICAL COMMITMENT REQUIRED TO FOLLOW JESUS [JULY 19]	482
UNBELIEVING REACTIONS TO JESUS [JULY 20].....	485
IS JESUS THE CHRIST? [JULY 21].....	487
JESUS' FRUSTRATED ATTEMPT TO ATTRACT THE JEWS [JULY 22].....	490
THE JEWS' FRUSTRATED ATTEMPT TO ARREST JESUS [JULY 23].....	493
FORGIVING A WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY [JULY 24].....	495
JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD	498
JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD [JULY 25]	498
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS AND THE FATHER [JULY 26]	501
CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM [JULY 27]	503
CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL [JULY 28].....	506
LIAR, LUNATIC, OR LORD OF ALL [JULY 29].....	508
JESUS HEALS A MAN BORN BLIND [JULY 30]	511
THE PHARISEES INVESTIGATE THE HEALING [JULY 31]	513
SPIRITUAL SIGHT AND SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS [AUGUST 1].....	516
LESSONS ON LOYALTY	519
THE GATE AND THE THIEF [AUGUST 2]	519
THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE HIRELING [AUGUST 3]	521
COMMISSIONING THE SEVENTY-TWO – LESSONS FOR PREACHERS [AUGUST 4]	524
RETURN OF THE SEVENTY-TWO – LESSONS FOR THE PEOPLE [AUGUST 5] ..	526
THE GOOD SAMARITAN [AUGUST 6].....	529
SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS [AUGUST 7]	531
PERSISTENT PRAYER [AUGUST 8]	534
WARNINGS OF WOE FOR UNBELIEF	537
JESUS AND “THE LORD OF THE FLIES” – THE SEQUEL [AUGUST 9].....	537
THE SIGN OF JONAH [AUGUST 10].....	539

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

THE LIGHT IN THE BODY [AUGUST 11].....	542
CONDEMNING HYPOCRISY [AUGUST 12]	544
A GUILTY GENERATION [AUGUST 13].....	547
WARNING ABOUT WITNESSING [AUGUST 14].....	549
WARNING ABOUT WORLDLINESS [AUGUST 15].....	552
WARNING ABOUT WORRY [AUGUST 16].....	555
WARNING ABOUT WATCHFULNESS [AUGUST 17].....	557
WARNING ABOUT ‘WAR’ [AUGUST 18]	560
WARNING ABOUT WARNINGS [AUGUST 19]	562
REPENT OR PERISH [AUGUST 20].....	565
CULTURAL CALAMITY [AUGUST 21]	568
HEALING A CRIPPLED WOMAN ON THE SABBATH [AUGUST 22]	570
KINGDOM GROWTH [AUGUST 23].....	573
THE ELECT ARE PRESERVED BY GOD [AUGUST 24].....	575
JESUS IS GOD [AUGUST 25].....	578
PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLESHIP	580
REFUGE AND REFLECTION [AUGUST 26].....	580
THE NARROW DOOR [AUGUST 27]	583
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM [AUGUST 28]	585
SABBATH SALVATION VS SPITEFUL SELFISHNESS [AUGUST 29]	588
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE VS HUMILITY AND HOSPITALITY [AUGUST 30].....	590
AN ETERNAL FEAST [AUGUST 31].....	593
THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP [SEPTEMBER 1]	596
MADE ALIVE IN JESUS.....	598
SEEKING AND SAVING SINNERS (PART 1) [SEPTEMBER 2]	598
SEEKING AND SAVING SINNERS (PART 2) [SEPTEMBER 3]	601
THE PARABLE OF THE GRACIOUS FATHER [SEPTEMBER 4]	603
GOOD STEWARDS FOR CHRIST (PART 1) [SEPTEMBER 5]	606
GOOD STEWARDS FOR CHRIST (PART 2) [SEPTEMBER 6]	609
THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS [SEPTEMBER 7]	611
LIVING FAITHFULLY FOR JESUS [SEPTEMBER 8]	614
FAITH IN THE FACE OF DISEASE AND DEATH [SEPTEMBER 9]	616
THE COMFORT OF THE RESURRECTION [SEPTEMBER 10]	619
LAZARUS, THE SIGN OF THE REALITY OF RESURRECTION [SEPTEMBER 11].	622
REBELS’ REACTION TO A RESURRECTION [SEPTEMBER 12].....	624
FINAL TEACHING TOUR	627

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

SALVATION'S GRATITUDE [SEPTEMBER 13]	627
THE PRESENT KINGDOM [SEPTEMBER 14]	629
HABITUAL AND HUMBLE PRAYER [SEPTEMBER 15]	632
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE [SEPTEMBER 16].....	635
JESUS LOVES LITTLE CHILDREN [SEPTEMBER 17]	637
QUESTIONS FROM JESUS' ENCOUNTER WITH A YOUNG RICH MAN [SEPTEMBER 18]	640
WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD [SEPTEMBER 19]	642
HUMBLE SERVICE IS KINGDOM GREATNESS [SEPTEMBER 20]	645
THE RESPONSE OF TWO HEALED BLIND MEN [SEPTEMBER 21].....	648
A SMALL MAN WITH A BIG HEART [SEPTEMBER 22].....	650
THE GIFT OF THE MINAS [SEPTEMBER 23].....	653
RETURN TO JERUSALEM.....	655
A PLOT TO HIDE RESURRECTION EVIDENCE [SEPTEMBER 24]	655
THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY [SEPTEMBER 25]	658
CRYING FOR THE CONDEMNED CITY [SEPTEMBER 26].....	661
CURSING A FRUITLESS TREE [SEPTEMBER 27]	663
SECOND CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE AT THE PASSOVER [SEPTEMBER 28] ..	666
THE TIME OF THE GENTILES [SEPTEMBER 29]	668
CONTINUING IN UNBELIEF [SEPTEMBER 30]	671
AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHALLENGED.....	674
THE MASTER DEBATER CHALLENGES HIS OPPONENTS' UNBELIEF [OCTOBER 1]	674
TWO SONS, TWO REACTIONS [OCTOBER 2]	676
UNTHANKFUL TENANT FARMERS [OCTOBER 3].....	679
INVITATION TO THE SON'S WEDDING BANQUET [OCTOBER 4]	682
AN EMPEROR QUESTION – SHOULD WE PAY TAXES? [OCTOBER 5].....	684
AN ESCHATOLOGICAL QUESTION – IS THERE A RESURRECTION? [OCTOBER 6]	687
AN ETHICAL QUESTION – WHAT IS THE HEAVIEST COMMAND? [OCTOBER 7]	689
AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION – WHO IS THE MESSIAH? [OCTOBER 8].....	692
BEWARE OF FALSE RELIGIOUS LEADERS [OCTOBER 9].....	694
WOE FOR RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITES [OCTOBER 10]	697
A LAMENT FOR JERUSALEM [OCTOBER 11]	700
GIVING ALL [OCTOBER 12]	702
TEACHING ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES	705

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

STRUCTURE OF AN ‘END-TIME’ PROPHECY [OCTOBER 13]	705
BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS [OCTOBER 14].....	707
THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION [OCTOBER 15].....	710
SIGNS OF THE COMING KINGDOM [OCTOBER 16].....	713
THE UNKNOWN DAY AND HOUR [OCTOBER 17].....	715
SLEEPLESS SERVANTS [OCTOBER 18]	718
THE NECESSITY OF SAVING FAITH [OCTOBER 19]	720
OUR TALENTS AND THE FRUIT OF A LIVING FAITH [OCTOBER 20]	723
JUDGEMENT BETWEEN THE SHEEP AND GOATS [OCTOBER 21].....	726
PLOTTING BETRAYAL AND PLANNING BURIAL.....	728
THE PASSOVER PLOT [OCTOBER 22].....	728
MARY ANOINTS JESUS [OCTOBER 23]	731
JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS [OCTOBER 24].....	733
LAST PASSOVER.....	736
PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER MEAL [OCTOBER 25].....	736
WASHING THE DISCIPLES’ FEET (PART 1) [OCTOBER 26]	738
WASHING THE DISCIPLES’ FEET (PART 2) [OCTOBER 27]	741
IDENTIFICATION OF THE BETRAYER [OCTOBER 28]	744
DISSENSION AMONG THE DISCIPLES [OCTOBER 29]	746
INSTITUTION OF THE NEW COVENANT SUPPER [OCTOBER 30].....	749
TEACHING IN THE UPPER ROOM	752
PREDICTION OF THE DEPARTURE [OCTOBER 31].....	752
PREDICTION OF THE DENIAL [NOVEMBER 1].....	754
PREPARED PLACE [NOVEMBER 2].....	757
JESUS: THE WAY TO THE FATHER [NOVEMBER 3]	759
POWERFUL PRAYER [NOVEMBER 4].....	762
LOVE’S OBEDIENCE [NOVEMBER 5]	764
THE PROMISED COUNSELLOR [NOVEMBER 6].....	767
TRUE LOVE [NOVEMBER 7]	770
THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES [NOVEMBER 8]	772
LOVE EACH OTHER [NOVEMBER 9].....	775
THE WORLD HATES CHRISTIANS BECAUSE IT HATES CHRIST [NOVEMBER 10]	777
TESTIMONY TO CHRIST [NOVEMBER 11]	780
PENDING PERSECUTION [NOVEMBER 12].....	783
THE CONVICTING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT [NOVEMBER 13].....	785

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

THE COMMUNICATING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT [NOVEMBER 14]	788
GRIEF WILL TURN INTO JOY [NOVEMBER 15]	790
OVERCOMING A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER [NOVEMBER 16]	793
JESUS PRAYS FOR GLORY [NOVEMBER 17]	795
JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES' PRESERVATION [NOVEMBER 18]	798
JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES' HAPPINESS [NOVEMBER 19]	800
JESUS PRAYS FOR ALL BELIEVERS [NOVEMBER 20]	803
THE HALLEL HYMN OF HOPE [NOVEMBER 21]	805
GETHSEMANE	808
AGONIZING PRAYER [NOVEMBER 22]	808
SURRENDERING TO SATAN'S SWARM [NOVEMBER 23]	811
JEWISH AND ROMAN TRIALS	813
JEWISH TRIAL, PHASE 1: BEFORE ANNAS [NOVEMBER 24]	813
JEWISH TRIAL, PHASE 2: BEFORE CAIAPHAS [NOVEMBER 25]	816
PETER'S ADDITIONAL DENIALS OF JESUS [NOVEMBER 26]	818
JEWISH TRIAL, PHASE 3: BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN [NOVEMBER 27]	821
JUDAS COMMITS SUICIDE [NOVEMBER 28]	824
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 1: BEFORE PILATE [NOVEMBER 29]	826
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 1: JESUS, <i>THE</i> KING [NOVEMBER 30]	829
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 1: WHAT IS TRUTH? [DECEMBER 1]	831
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 2: BEFORE HEROD ANTIPAS [DECEMBER 2]	834
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 3: PILATE RELEASES A PRISONER [DECEMBER 3]	836
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 3: THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS [DECEMBER 4]	839
ROMAN TRIAL, PHASE 3: ALLOCATION OF RESPONSIBILITY [DECEMBER 5]	841
CRUCIFIXION	844
ROAD TO CALVARY [DECEMBER 6]	844
CRUCIFIED WITH CRIMINALS [DECEMBER 7]	847
THE SIGN ON THE CROSS [DECEMBER 8]	849
THE REPENTANT CRIMINAL [DECEMBER 9]	852
JESUS AND HIS MOTHER [DECEMBER 10]	855
THE DEATH OF JESUS [DECEMBER 11]	857
WITNESSES TO JESUS' DEATH [DECEMBER 12]	860
BURIAL	862
DEATH CERTIFICATE [DECEMBER 13]	862
JESUS' BODY PREPARED AND LAID TO REST [DECEMBER 14]	865

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus – A Contemporary Application

GRAVE WATCHERS [DECEMBER 15]	867
RESURRECTION	870
THE RESURRECTION [DECEMBER 16]	870
HE HAS RISEN! [DECEMBER 17]	873
THE WOMEN VISIT THE EMPTY TOMB [DECEMBER 18]	875
PETER AND JOHN VISIT THE EMPTY TOMB [DECEMBER 19]	878
POST RESURRECTION APPEARANCES	880
APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER WOMEN [DECEMBER 20]	881
GO AND TELL! [DECEMBER 21]	883
REPORT OF THE GUARDS [DECEMBER 22]	886
APPEARANCE ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS [DECEMBER 23]	888
JESUS APPEARS TO TEN OF THE APOSTLES [DECEMBER 24]	891
DOUBTING THOMAS [DECEMBER 25]	893
A NEW BEGINNING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE [DECEMBER 26]	896
JESUS PUBLICLY REINSTATES PETER [DECEMBER 27]	899
RE-COMMISSIONING THE DISCIPLES [DECEMBER 28]	901
AN APPEARANCE TO THE DISCIPLES [DECEMBER 29]	904
THE ASCENSION [DECEMBER 30]	906
THAT YOU MAY KNOW AND BELIEVE [DECEMBER 31]	909
INDEX OF SCRIPTURE PASSAGES	912

Daily Meditations on the Life of Jesus A Contemporary Application¹

Early Life of Jesus

The Pre-Existent Word (Part 1) – Absolutes of the Logos

[January 1]

(In Eternity and Time, Jn 1.1-2)

All four of the Gospels provide an account of the *life of Jesus*, and each opens by placing Jesus within his historical context. The Gospel of John, however, begins not at a later point in his life (e.g., at the time of his conception or at the beginning of his teaching ministry) but rather at the beginning. John sets the stage for the words and work of Jesus by presenting him first as the eternal God through whom all created things came into existence and then as the ultimate and complete revelation of God as the Word in a human nature (Heb 1.1-4; Col 1.15-20).

The Beginning – John starts his account at the point when everything created began—time and history, and the universe of space, matter and life. He takes us back to a point ‘before’ (it is necessary for us to use a temporal term because of our finite understanding) creation when God existed in eternity (Ps 90.2; Prov 8.23; 1 Cor 2.7). He wants us to understand that the Word was present at creation (Gen 1.1). However, the Word was not created before the rest of creation. He *was*, he did not become. There was never a time when the Word was not. He shares a continuous, timeless, existence with God and is therefore not part of the creation (i.e., not a created being). Rather, he is the one who created the physical realm (3) and creates a new spiritual reality (4).

The Word – When John calls Jesus the ‘Word’ he points to an attribute of God (i.e., wisdom), but he means more. He informs us that Jesus is the living communication or revelation of the God who communicates. The

¹ This series of daily meditations follows (in most cases) the structure of *The Harmony of the Gospels* (NIV), Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, NY: Harper and Row, 1988.

Word is the faithful and true (Jn 1.17; Jn 14.6) witness of the mind of God. This tells us that communication and self-revelation are an essential part of God's nature (i.e., it is *necessary* for God to communicate).

With God – The Word did not just exist in eternity—he was *with* God. This tells us that there are (at least) two persons existing eternally who comprise the divine nature—God (i.e., God the Father; see 2 Cor 13.14) and the Word (i.e., the Son, the second person of the Trinity). These two, however, do not exist independently. The Greek word translated ‘with’ is not the common word; and means literally “towards” and suggests “in the company of.” By his choice of word John tells us that there is a special face-to-face relationship between the Father and the Son. Since nothing can be before (Ex 20.3), or face-to-face with, God (except the true God) this means that the Word is fully God. He is co-existent with the Father—in essence, presence, and purpose. There is no disunity in the divine nature.

God was the Word – John leaves no doubt. He tells us explicitly that Jesus, the Word, is God. The Word is not *a* god; that would be polytheism and an abomination (Dt 6.4). Nor is he just endowed with divine attributes. The word order in the Greek is emphatic: “God was the Word.” This speaks of more than just a relationship such as when we say that “an apple is a fruit.” It speaks of identity, in which the Word is absolutely and fully God—in essence, attributes, and character. In just ten words (in English; eleven in Greek) John tells us that the Father and Jesus are separate persons but **one** God.

The Trinity (i.e., three persons in the divine nature) is not yet introduced to us by John. We learn of the Holy Spirit (the third person in the Trinity) later (see, 32-34). But in his opening words, John makes it clear that although God is *one*, he is not a single person. To Jews this would have been a staggering concept; to Gentiles foolishness. We are finite creatures and cannot fully grasp the concept of the Trinity. But we must not err on either side—by making the members of the Trinity nothing more than modes of God's existence or by thinking of Jesus as less than the Father.

He Was – John adds (2) another key point when he refers to the Word as ‘he’ and not as ‘it.’ The Word is a person, not a concept or attribute. This tells us that God has (is) personality and that Jesus is a distinct person in the divine nature.

At no time in the history of the written word has anyone ever before or since said so much with so few, and such simple, words. The opening two sentences of the Gospel of John teach very profound truths that are almost beyond our comprehension. But thankfully we can learn from these words that Jesus is:

- the communication and revelation of God—the *Word*
- eternal, never coming into existence (*was* rather than *became*)
- co-existent with the Father (with God in the *beginning*)
- a unique and separate *person* (he) from the Father
- co-equal with God the Father, who can stand in a face-to-face relationship *with* the Father.

The Pre-Existent Word (Part 2) – Attributes of the Logos

[January 2]

(In Eternity and Time, Jn 1.3, 4)

Augustine in the *City of God* (book 10, chapter 29) says that he often heard the holy old man Simplicianus, who was bishop of the Church in Milan, tell of a certain Platonic philosopher who said that “this passage [Jn 1.1-5] should be inscribed in letters of gold and set up in the most prominent place in every church.” We learn in this passage that Jesus is:

Creator – Through him all things were created (Col 1.16, 17). Nothing, that was created is excluded, including angels (both the sinless and fallen ones); the universe (time, space, matter and energy); animals and plants; and man. Only God himself is excluded (compare 1 Cor 15.25-28). It is clear from the parallel between Genesis 1.1-3, and John 1.1-5 that John is equating the Word (Jesus) with God. Jesus is the Son, the second person

in the Divine nature, but he is not less than the Father. The order in the Trinity is not temporal or causal, or one of superiority—it is logical.

Starting with matter, time, and chance (naturalism) men are unable to answer the eternal questions such as: Why does anything exist at all? Why are we here? What is right and wrong? Why do bad things happen? What happens to us at death? Yet for about the past 150 years men have challenged the fact that God, in Jesus, created all things and have instead believed the myth of evolution. They would rather live in painful ignorance than profess the truth.

We must start where Genesis and John start—first with God (in the beginning God/Word), then move to the fact of creation ... then we can present the law and sin ... and *then* we can offer salvation. It is a tragedy that so many in the Church compromise with the world and reject the explicit facts about God the creator. Their attempts to reach pagan unbelievers are severely hindered because they refuse to stand with Paul on the rock of truth (Acts 17.24) that presents Jesus first as the creator and lawgiver, and then as the saviour.

God – John seems to repeat himself in the second part of verse 3. But by recasting the message in the negative (“*not* one thing which became”) he focuses on some profound realities. Jesus is: 1) *Infinite*—because he is not part of the ‘something that came into existence,’ 2) *Eternal*—since everything other than God came into being with time (in the beginning), 3) *All Wise* (Prov 8.22-36)—because only a person with all wisdom can create perfectly (Gen 1.31), and 4) *All Powerful*—since nothing created came into existence without him. Whoever has these attributes must be equal to God (Heb 3.4). Therefore Jesus *is* God.

Life-Giver – Jesus is credited with having life in himself. This does not mean just that he is alive. Men and woman are alive, but man had life breathed into him and he became a living being. But John tells us that Jesus is self-existent—no one breathed life into him. He had life in himself. John tells us again that Jesus is truly God, for only God exists without *becoming*.

What kind of life does Jesus have in himself? The following dimensions, at least, can be considered: 1) *Existence*—God exists as the “I Am” (Ex 3.14), 2) *Eternal*—he has always existed (Ps 90.1, 2), 3) *Spiritual*—God is Spirit (Jn 4.24), 4) *Rational*—as a member in the Divine nature he communicates with the other persons in the Trinity (e.g., “Let us create ...”), wills to action, and formulated the order and design of the created cosmos, 5) *Divine*—a nature that is not shared with any part of the creation, and 6) *Human*—Jesus became a man and took upon himself a human nature.

Because he has life in himself, the implication is that he is a life-giver. Contrary to the popular teachings of evolution, that which has no life cannot give life; in other words, inanimate matter cannot spontaneously bring about life. Nor can derived life create life. We have derived life—we do not have life in ourselves—and thus cannot give life. Men will never be able to create life (either in the form of artificial intelligence or in a test tube).

Just as God gave a kind of life (physical) to the animals and another kind to man (Gen 1.27; Gen 2.7; Acts 17.25), so he grants eternal life in Heaven to everyone who believes in Jesus and repents of his sins.

Light-Giver – Throughout the Bible light is a symbol for God (Ex 3.2; Ps 76.4; Ps 89.15; Ps 104.2; 1 Tim 6.15, 16; Rev 4.5). He is the source of physical light (Gen 1.3; Rev 21.23) and spiritual light, in salvation from sin (Ps 118.27; Is 9.2; Mt 4.16, 17). As the light-giver, Jesus also gives the light of true wisdom and understanding (Ps 19.8; Ps 43.3; Ps 119.105) and quality to our lives in a renewed meaning and purpose (Ps 36.9; Ps 56.13).

We have barely scratched the surface of this part of John’s prologue and the profound concepts that are communicated in it. Without doubt, Simplicianus, was right—these letters should be inscribed in gold!

The Pre-Existent Word (Part 3) – Appearance of the

Logos [January 3]

(In Eternity and Time, Jn 1.5a)

The opening five verses of John's Gospel contain three themes that John develops later: life,² light,³ and darkness.⁴ We will consider the contrast between light and darkness today and the impotence of natural human intellectual abilities and spiritual darkness in our next meditation.

Living Light – We noticed previously that Jesus appeared on earth as the light-giver (Jn 1.4). In the Bible light is a symbol for God. As God the Creator, Jesus is the source of physical light; and as the Saviour, he is the source of spiritual light. He also is the source of light in the sense of true wisdom, and the provider of a renewed meaning and purpose for our lives. But the light is not just concepts or ideas. False religions present ideas and feelings as inner 'light'. But Christianity is different—it presents the light as a living person.

Sustained Shining – The light from Jesus 'shines' continuously. The form of the word used by John gives the idea of a present, continuing, reality. This sets up a contrast with the past tense ('was') used previously (4) when the Word was said to be the light of men. John expands on his previous statement to make sure that we don't misunderstand him. Since he is writing his Gospel after the death and resurrection of Jesus he wants us to know that the glory of Jesus continues to shine on the earth.

This teaches us that the Word is a *living* subsistence. He is the source of light, salvation and eternal life, for all mankind—past, present, and future. As the light shone in the person of Christ while he was on earth, it continues to shine today—through the Holy Spirit, the Church, and individual Christians (Mt 5.14-16; Eph 5.8) living out their calling to present the truth about Jesus by word and works. Those who have met

² Jn 3.15, 16, 36; Jn 4.14, 46; Jn 5.21, 24, 26, 39, 40; Jn 6.27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 53, 54, 63, 68; Jn 8.12; Jn 10.10, 11, 15, 17, 28; Jn 11.25; Jn 12.25, 50; Jn 14.6, 13; Jn 17.2, 3; Jn 20.31.

³ Jn 1.7-9; Jn 3.19-21; Jn 8.12; Jn 9.5; Jn 12.35, 36, 46.

⁴ Jn 3.19; Jn 11.9, 10 (indirectly); Jn 8.12; Jn 12.35, 46.

Jesus in salvation shine with a permanent afterglow. They reflect the light they receive from Jesus, much like Moses' face shone after he came down from the mountain after his visit with God (Ex 34.29-35).

Dispelling Darkness – What is the purpose and nature of light? Why do people ask us to turn on a light? Light's purpose is to dispel darkness. Light by its nature floods out darkness and makes itself known. Light can be stopped or hidden by solid objects, but not by darkness. Light overcomes darkness; darkness alone cannot overcome light.

When we compare Genesis 1.1-3, with John 1.1-5 we see that John connects the appearance of Jesus with the creation of physical light on the first day. In the verse we are addressing, John speaks of darkness as 'not understanding.' By personifying light and darkness we understand him to be referring to spiritual realities. Just as God dispelled the physical darkness with light, so he dispels spiritual darkness with light. The light of Jesus clearly reveals our sin and guilt.

Jesus' appearance on earth dispelled the darkness that has engulfed the earth since the time of Adam's first sin. This does not mean that God's light had never appeared on earth before—it had, for example, at Mt. Sinai in the Ten Commandments. But with the appearance of Jesus in human form, Light came into the world in a way never seen before.

As the image of God (Col 1.15) Jesus shone with the glory of God (Jn 1.14). As the Word of God (Jn 1.1; Mt 4.15-17) Jesus enlightened men's hearts and minds with eternal light. The shadows of the OT types and figures of the ceremonial economy were also dispelled (Col 2.16, 17; Heb 8.5; Heb 10.1), and we now have their full meaning revealed in Jesus. And at sunrise on the day of Jesus' resurrection the darkness of death was conquered forever.

Prior to the appearance of Jesus, God's light was seen only in the distance. There were sporadic flashes of 'lightning' at significant points in history through revelation and miracle. But with the appearance of Christ, the anointed one, the whole earth was flooded with the glorious

light of God. John summarizes the purpose of the Gospel by showing that Jesus, as the Light, came to dispel spiritual darkness and to reveal the glory of Christ.

When John says that the light “shines in the darkness” he is informing us that it is dark where man dwells. From birth he lives in the land of spiritual darkness. His conscience and will, since the Fall, are in darkness. The light of nature shines, but not brightly enough to dispel the darkness (Rom 1.19, 20). The appearance of the Word is needed to overcome the darkness. When we pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth” we tell God that we desire to see the Light shining in all spheres of life (family, government, arts, business, education, science, courts), both extensively and intensively.

The Pre-Existent Word (Part 4) – Antithesis of the Logos

[January 4]

(In Eternity and Time, Jn 1.5b)

In our previous meditation we considered the contrast between light and darkness. Today we will look specifically at the darkness. First we have to determine what the darkness is that John speaks of. Since he uses the word ‘understood’ he is probably not speaking of physical darkness. Although nature can be personified in poetry (e.g., Ps 19.1, 2, 4) John is not speaking of natural darkness; he is speaking of human intellectual and spiritual darkness.

Elsewhere John uses ‘darkness’ as the antithesis of three things:

- God (1 Jn 1.5),
- Spiritual truth (Jn 8.12; Jn 12.35, 46; 1 Jn 1.6, 8), and
- Moral integrity (Jn 3.19; 1 Jn 2.9, 11).

Every use of the word ‘darkness’ in John’s writings can be considered as the antithesis of the Logos—Jesus Christ. He is God (Jn 1.1, 2), as the God-man he reveals truth—a key attribute of God’s character (Jn 1.14; Jn 14.6), and he lived a perfect life without any sin (Jn 1.29; Jn 8.46; 1 Jn 1.7; 1 Jn 3.5).

Men from conception and birth exist in a state of rebellion against God. They do not want to retain their innate knowledge of God (Rom 1.21), they suppress truth (Rom 1.18), and they desire to do every kind of evil (Rom 1.28, 29). This is the darkness John is speaking about.

Because men exist (by nature) in intellectual and spiritual darkness, all human attempts to find light fail miserably. Darkness permeates all of their systems and every aspect of their existence, including:

- *Science* – The rational Designer is replaced with the myth of evolution that has purposeless chance acting through time on inanimate matter.
- *Politics* – The state is worshiped and believed to have responsibilities in every area of life as the benevolent provider of all that is good.
- *Economics* – Socialism aligned with the statist philosophy consumes the output of the productive to fuel the engine of social re-engineering.
- *Sociology* – Political correctness encourages any normal, or deviant, behaviour but not the presentation of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.
- *Law* – There are no moral absolutes—law is nothing more than a prediction of what judges will decide.
- *Psychology* – Personal responsibility is replaced with abdication; guilt is replaced with absolution.
- *Education* – Content is ‘neutral’ as long as it is based on materialistic naturalism; method is non-directive because there should be no coercion.
- *Religion* – Tolerance of syncretistic religions is encouraged, but religion must be kept out of public debate and have no practical influence.

All of man’s systems are mere imitations of God’s perfect order. The light of nature shines in the spiritual darkness, but it is not enough to dispel man’s dependence on his faulty systems (Rom 1.19, 20). Without the work of the Holy Spirit who enlightens the minds and changes the hearts of men and women, they will not receive the truth; so they remain in darkness and cannot understand the light.

The Greek word used in John 1.5 can be translated as ‘understand’ or ‘comprehend’. But it can also be translated as ‘found’ (Acts 25.25), ‘caught’ (Jn 8.3), ‘grasp’ (Eph 3.18), or ‘overtake’ (Jn 12.35). A possible translation for John 1.5b is: “and the darkness has not overcome it.” Darkness is impotent, passively, because it cannot comprehend the light. But it is also weak in an active way—its attempts at overpowering the light are useless.

Darkness therefore is no threat to the light. The darkness can never engulf, eclipse, or extinguish the light. The darkness has tried, and failed, many times. For example:

- Cain tried to purge the light when he killed Abel, but God gave Seth.
- Satan tried to snuff-out the light by tempting Christ, but Christ crushed him on the cross.
- The Council of Constance burned Hus, but Luther arose from the ashes.
- Henry VIII tried to suppress the light, but Tyndale’s Bibles were carried into England inside bales of cloth.
- Communism tried to obliterate Christianity in Russia for seventy years, but communism is quickly becoming an historical footnote.

This is a great encouragement to those who are walking in the light (i.e., those who are Christians). We can be confident that darkness will never overpower the light. So our purpose, in Christ, is to shine brighter and brighter like the stars on a Muskoka night (Dan 12.3; Php 2.15), until the morning star (Rev 22.16), the Sun/Son of Righteousness, arises. The light of the Bible, the Church, and Christ’s reign over the nations will grow brighter and brighter until that glorious day when Jesus returns from Heaven to be revealed in all the glory of his eternal and infinite light.

The Conception of Jesus (Part 1) [January 5] **(Nazareth, 5⁵ BC. Lk 1.26-38)**

⁵ Jesus was born about half a month before Herod died in late March or early April, 4 BC, therefore his conception occurred in 5 BC; see: [When was Jesus Born?](#)

The life of Jesus did not begin with his birth.

As God, Jesus' personality existed with a divine nature from all eternity. But as a man, there was a specific point when his human life began. This occurred when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary. We have all heard many times of the virgin birth. But it would be more appropriate to speak first of the virgin **conception**.

If Jesus was not a person until birth, what was the significance of the virgin conception? Why was it that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary at Jesus' conception? If human life does not begin until 24 weeks after conception or at birth, then why was it necessary for the Holy Spirit to be involved before one of these points?

On this subject Jonathan Edwards said: "To be the son of woman, is to receive being in both soul and body, in consequence of a conception in her womb ... It is agreeable to a law of nature, that where a perfect human body is conceived in the womb of a woman ... a human soul should come into being; and conception may as properly be the cause whence it is derived ... The soul being so much the principal part of man, a derivation of the soul by conception, is the chief thing implied in a man's being the son of a woman." (*Works* 2.509)

If life begins at a point other than conception, the Holy Spirit could have taken the product of conception of any woman and man, and at the point at which life supposedly begins he could have overshadowed that collection of cells and breathed into it the life of Jesus.

But the reality is that the Holy Spirit had to act at the moment of conception. A person comes into existence at that moment; and if naturally conceived, that person is immediately endowed with a sinful nature. In the case of Jesus, his pre-existent personality took on a human nature at conception and his spirit was in his human body while it was developing.

I know that for most people who are pro-abortion, this wouldn't be much

of an argument because they don't believe in Jesus. But a person who professes to be a Christian should believe that a person exists from the moment of conception.

Since life begins at conception, abortion cannot be acceptable to a Christian. No man (or woman) has the right to remove the life of another except in self-defense or for a capital crime.

Why are there still Christians who accept abortion as an alternative? If we really believe that abortion is the destruction of human being with a personality, then why are we not doing more to stop it? What can we do?

The Conception of Jesus (Part 2) [January 6] **(Nazareth, 5 BC. Lk 1.26-38)**

With the conception of his human nature, Jesus became man and yet continued to be God. He now has two natures, yet he is only one person. He is not a god possessing a human body. He is not two personalities in one body. He is one person with two natures—truly and fully God and at the same time truly and fully a man.

At the heart of Christianity are some profound miracles. The virgin conception and the resurrection of Christ are two of the most prominent. These defy explanation through ordinary means, but we can understand them. But the fact that Jesus has two natures not only defies explanation; it is also impossible for us to comprehend!

We can understand the idea of two natures, but only to a limited extent. For example, an insect can have the nature of a caterpillar or the nature of a butterfly at different times. But it is much more difficult for us to understand how Jesus can have both a human nature and a divine nature at the same time. Can you imagine being a man and a dog at the same time—not a man possessing a dog's body but being a man and a dog at the same time?

Why is it so important that we emphasize this truth about Jesus? Because,

if he is not God, then he is only a man. But no mere man can pay the debt of sin owed to God—the debt is infinite! If Jesus is not God, then there is no solution to the problem of sin. And, if he is not man, then a man has not paid the debt for sin. Only a man could pay man's debt. If Jesus is not man, then there is no solution to the problem of sin.

Men reject this doctrine. For example in a review of *The Myth of God Incarnate* we read: "Christian tradition holds that Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, who became God in human flesh. The seven theologians [authors of the essays in the book] consider this belief 'a mythological or poetic way of expressing [Jesus'] significance for us,' not literal truth. The old doctrine was formulated to express faith in Jesus within a Greco-Roman culture, the authors contend, but in modern times it just will not do." (*Time* 1977-08-15)

Jesus is the central point of contact for the supernatural with the creation. He is where God meets man. This presents the greatest challenge to our age—belief in the God-man! Men may believe in the supernatural and God. They may believe that a man named Jesus walked the earth 2000 years ago. But if they don't believe that Jesus is God and man, they believe essentially nothing.

Why do men reject either his divine nature or his human nature (or both)? Because, if they believe that he is truly God, then they have to reckon with his teachings and have to acknowledge that he has a right to demand obedience. They don't want Jesus as their Lord. And if they believe that he is truly man, then they have to reckon with his death on the cross and confess that they cannot solve the problem of sin themselves. They don't want Jesus as their saviour.

Jesus is both God and man, both Lord and Saviour. Every Person who comes to Jesus must deal with the pride that keeps him from believing that Jesus is both God and man. Pride does not want Jesus to be King. Pride does not want Jesus to be a sacrifice. Have we dealt with our pride and with the God-man, the Lord and Saviour of mankind?

The Announcement to Joseph [January 7] **(Nazareth, 5 BC. Mt 1.18-25)**

We cannot understand how God became man, but we can consider what the Holy Spirit teaches us about the announcement of the incarnation to Joseph:

Annulled Agreement (Mt 1.18-19) – At this time Joseph and Mary were engaged but not married. In Jewish custom, engagement was more formal than today. Couples who were pledged in marriage lived apart for a year to provide assurance that the bride was not pregnant through an unfaithful relationship.

Joseph probably did not discover Mary's pregnancy as she began to show. We can believe that Mary, full of faith in Gabriel's announcement and a morally upright woman, told Joseph that she was pregnant—immediately after the announcement that the Holy Spirit would come upon her (Lk 1.35). She did not worry about what shame might be associated with being thought pregnant by another man. She trusted God to work out all things (Lk 1.38).

Joseph appears to have had difficulty believing Mary's account, and he must have been devastated when he was told of her pregnancy. Nevertheless he thought about ending their marriage agreement quietly. Do not consider this a selfish act on Joseph's part. In his cultural context, as a righteous Jew, it would have been 'impossible' for him to marry a woman who was pregnant by another man. He showed his love and concern for Mary by proposing, in his mind, to end the marriage contract quietly. She would then have been treated as a single woman who had been promiscuous rather than as an adulteress who could have been stoned to death (Dt 22.23-24).

Angelic Appearance (Mt 1.20-21) – Before he could act on his idea, an angel appeared to him in a dream and convinced him that the pregnancy of Mary really was from the Holy Spirit. God worked to: 1) protect the honorable institution of marriage that he established in the Garden, 2)

save the reputation of the woman he had highly favoured (Lk 1.28), 3) ensure that Jesus was not considered the son of a promiscuous woman, and 4) provide for Jesus to be adopted into the kingly line of David (Lk 3.23).

God graciously comforted Joseph when he was distressed and perplexed through the dream. Its message informed Joseph of the following:

- *Connection* – Joseph is addressed as the ‘son of David’. The events of the conception of Mary’s child are connected with the kingly line of descent.
- *Comfort* – God’s people never need to fear the working out of God’s plan in their lives. God often reminds us with the words: “do not be afraid”.
- *Confirmation* – So Joseph is directed to proceed with his intended marriage to the woman he loves because what she said is true.
- *Conception* – The child in her womb is the result of a unique conception.
- *Child* – He is to name the child ‘Jesus’ (‘Yahweh is salvation’) because this child will be the agent of salvation—not from Israel’s enemies such as Rome or from dangers in nature such as famine, but from sin.
- *Covenant* – As saviour, the child is the promised Messiah who would mediate the new covenant (Jer 31.31-37).

Accomplished Announcement (Mt 1.22-23) – Most translations of this passage end the angel’s statement after verse 21. This is likely correct since Matthew refers to the fulfillment of prophecy many times (e.g., Mt 2.15, 17, 23; Mt 3.15; Mt 4.14; Mt 5.17; Mt 8.17; Mt 12.17; Mt 13.14, 35; Mt 21.4; Mt 27.9). In the original Greek there are no quotation marks as we have in English; so it is possible that the angel quoted from Isaiah (Is 7.14). In either case, Matthew’s account confirms:

- *Prophecy* – the incarnation was the direct fulfillment of a prophecy made over 600 years before—God controls all the events of history.
- *Purpose* – Matthew quotes from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT. This confirms that Isaiah’s purpose was to present a sign of a true virgin (Lk 1.34), not a “young woman”—as

found in some modern translations (e.g., NRSV).

- *Presence* – Jesus is Immanuel. This means that God is no longer known only in types and shadows. As God-incarnate, Jesus represents God's presence among us in an entirely new way.

Affectionate Acquiescence (24-25) – The dream confirmed Mary's account. Like her, Joseph did not concern himself with the misunderstanding and gossip that would arise from Mary's pregnancy, but acquiesced in the will of God. He broke tradition and immediately ended the betrothal in marriage. He did what was best for Mary and began to care for her as a husband. Contrary to the teachings of Jerome and the Roman Catholic Church, we believe that the Bible teaches that Joseph and Mary had other children together (Mt 13.55, 56). We do not accept the supposed 'perpetual virginity' of Mary. But Joseph did not exercise his marital rights until the holy child was born.

Let us, like Joseph, act in the will of God obediently and without delay as we receive Jesus as our lord and saviour.

Mary Visits Elizabeth [January 8] **(Judean Hills, 5 BC. Lk 1.39-45)**

While Paul was in prison in Caesarea for over two years (Acts 24.27), Luke, who had accompanied him to Judea, would have had an opportunity to do original research into the background for his gospel. He probably looked up Mary, and she told him of the events recorded here. This account provides a touching, human, moment from her life; but the Holy Spirit moved Luke to include this account in Scripture, not because of what it tells us about Mary but because of what it teaches about Jesus.

Seclusion – Shortly after the conception of Jesus, it appears that Mary went into seclusion, like her cousin Elizabeth had after her conception (Lk 1.24). Mary chose to leave Nazareth for a time and go to the home of Elizabeth in the hilly region south of Jerusalem, probably near Hebron, a town that had been designated for the priests (Josh 21.10, 11). It was

appropriate that Mary and Elizabeth be brought together by the Holy Spirit at this time:

- Mary would not have had to explain her virgin conception to the people in Nazareth, who would have been incredulous. Instead she had the support of an older woman who also had been the object of a miraculous conception (Lk 1.18) and would have believed her account.
- Elizabeth's mature support for Mary, a young woman, would have been helpful in the event that Mary began to have any doubts about her role. It serves as an analogy to the support mature Christians should provide to new Christians in whom the Holy Spirit has planted the seed of new life.
- The two women could rejoice together in the mysterious workings of God, even though they would not have yet fully understood that John would bring to an end one era (as the last Old Covenant prophet) and Jesus would begin another—the New Covenant.

Salvation – At Mary's greeting, John (he had been named; Lk 1.13) leaped in Elizabeth's womb. This was not an ordinary sensation a mother feels when her baby moves, nor was it like the jostling of Jacob and Esau in Rebecca (Gen 25.22), even though the Greek version of the OT uses the same word as Luke. John's leap was neither natural nor a sign of the conflict between two nations (Israel/Edom) representing good and evil. John's leap resulted from his being filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1.15); it was a sign of universal joy because salvation had come to the world (Is 35.6; Ps 98.8, 9; Ps 114.6).

Service – Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit for the prophetic task of proclaiming a blessing from God, since her husband was still mute (Lk 1.20). Her blessing was given in a loud voice, indicating that it was from God (Dt 5.22; 1 Ki 8.55; Jn 7.37; Rev 21.3). It consisted of two parts: a blessing on Mary herself, and a blessing on Jesus in the womb of Mary.

We are not to understand Mary's blessing to be in the future. Her blessing was not, for example, that she would become recognized as a

mediatrix between men and Jesus, as many Roman Catholics believe. Her blessing was in the call to service for God. She was blessed in that she was the vessel through whom the human nature of Jesus Christ came into the world.

The blessing Elizabeth pronounced on Jesus probably relates to his call to serve as Saviour (Mt 1.21; Ps 96.2), as well as in his exaltation as Sovereign.

Sovereign – Elizabeth’s own son, to be born in about three months, was a child of destiny. Yet, he would be overshadowed by the son of Mary. She did not envy Mary for being chosen to bring the Messiah into the world (the desire of every Jewish woman) or the role Mary’s son would play. Instead she rejoiced with Mary that the Messiah had arrived. She considers herself honoured that the mother of the Messiah would come to stay with her for the period of her seclusion. It was not that Elizabeth considered Mary to have special status in herself. During the Middle Ages a belief developed that gave Mary special status—she was viewed as being without sin. This belief is not correct. Mary was nothing more than a humble woman who was honoured by God by being commissioned to bear his son.

Notice that Elizabeth refers to the child in Mary’s womb as “my Lord.” She believed personally that Jesus was her Saviour and her Sovereign. Elizabeth refers to the Messiah as ‘Lord’ and appears to use the word in the same way that David uses it in Psalm 110.1. Elizabeth understood that the Son of David would be the eternal Sovereign.

Submission – Although the NIV and NKJV have Elizabeth calling Mary ‘blessed’ (45) for believing what the Lord, through the angel, had told her would be accomplished, the Greek uses a different word (from that used in 42) that can be translated as ‘happy’. Mary was not skeptical about what Gabriel had reported to her. Because she accepted his words as God’s, she could rejoice and be happy. This reminds us that, to the extent we believe and accept the word of God, we will be happy in the Lord. The single biggest failure in the Church today is that Christians

don't really believe what God says in his Word, and thus in general are not happy in the Lord.

Mary' Song of Joy [January 9]
(Judean Hills, 5 BC. Lk 1.46-56)

Mary offered up this prayer-psalm after she had been greeted by Elizabeth and had heard her words of blessing. It is a rich tapestry of OT quotations and allusions that stands as a masterpiece to God's grace. In it we learn of:

Praise (46, 47) – Mary refers to God at least 15 times in this Psalm and uses the following names and titles: LORD, God, Saviour, Mighty One. For Mary the name of God is holy (49) and worthy of all praise, blessing, and glory. When we pray “hallowed be your name,” we offer God the same praise. We are not suggesting that God's awesome splendour can be enhanced in any way. Rather we are reflecting his glory and asking him to make it known throughout the inhabited world. Mary shows us how we should pray. The focus of our prayers should be first on rendering praise to God. With God as the controlling context for our prayers we can consider three aspects of God's care: 1) his provision in our personal circumstances, 2) his universal providences, and 3) his particular promises for the Church.

Provision (47-49) – Mary knew the state of her own heart and confessed her need of God as her saviour. This corrects the mistaken belief that Mary was without any sin—for only a sinner needs a saviour. She rejoiced first in the spiritual provisions from God and then in the physical provisions. God sees the humble state of his servants and provides “every good and perfect gift” (James 1.17). The humble state of God's children is both subjective and objective. They have humble, repentant, hearts and are blessed accordingly (Mt 5.3-8). They also are in a low state in the eyes of the world because of rejection and ridicule for the sake of Christ (Mt 5.10-12).

It is true that Mary was blessed in a special way because she was given

the privilege of bringing the human nature of Jesus into the world. But there was nothing special in Mary that caused God to bless her—rather she became special because she was blessed. God’s blessing encompasses all the gifts he gives his children. Each person who has repented of his sins and received Jesus as his saviour, is blessed by God (Mt 5.3-10; Mt 25.34). No one of us, if we have been saved by Jesus, has any reason to complain. Instead we should be full of thanksgiving and praise for all the provisions that we have from God—in this life and stored up in eternity (Mt 6.20; Col 1.5; 2 Tim 4.8).

Providence (50-53) – Mary looks beyond herself to find additional reasons for praise. She acknowledges that God is Sovereign over the kings and nations of the earth. No president or prime minister, dictator or terrorist, works of his own accord. Each is under the superintending providence of God who works out all things for the good of his people (Rom 8.28). We can rely upon God. What he has done is what he will do. He has performed mighty deeds as he has ruled the world. He will do the same again every day.

We enjoy reading a story about a poor boy who wins the hand of the princess, or of a girl who is oppressed by her step-sisters and becomes the prince’s bride. This reversal of fortunes stirs our spirits. How much more should we rejoice when we see God’s mercy poured out on rebels who have asked for pardon and, in addition to being granted pardon, have been given status by the King? Mary reminds us that it does not matter what our station is in this life, if we fear God he will provide for us forever.

Promise (54-55) – God is faithful to his covenant promises even when we break his holy law. Over and over again the Bible tells us that God fulfilled the promises that he had made to Abraham, Israel, Moses, or David. Mary’s particular focus was on the promise of a redeemer that was made to her Jewish ancestors. She knew that the child conceived in her was the promised Messiah. Those promises are ours also: 1) because the promise to Abraham was a promise to all nations (Gen 22.18), and 2) because God promised our first parents Adam and Eve, in the midst of

the curse on the woman, that he would send a redeemer who would conquer sin and death (Gen 3.15).

Psalms (46, 56) – Note that this prayer-psalm is one of the few portions of the Bible written by a woman (see also, Judges 5.1-31). Did Mary spontaneously voice it right after Elizabeth greeted her, or did she compose it during the time she stayed with Elizabeth (until the birth of John)? We cannot determine which, but in either case the presence of the *Magnificat* in the Bible shows us how saturated our minds should be in the Bible, and especially the Psalms. Mary, as a young Jewish woman, would have had less formal training in the Scriptures than a typical Jewish male. Yet she shows a remarkable understanding of the teachings of the OT as she skillfully weaves this magnificent composition.

Rejoice with Mary in the character of God who: is the personal saviour (46, 47), blesses his people (48), and performs miracles (49); and who is: holy (49), merciful (50), powerful (51), just (51), sovereign (52), compassionate (53), and faithful (54, 55). Hallelujah!

The Genealogy of Jesus [January 10] **(Mt 1.1-17; Lk 3.23b-38)**

You might think that a list of names would not have much to tell us. But the Holy Spirit included all genealogies in the Bible for a teaching purpose. The genealogy of Jesus, in particular, can teach us a lot. From it we can learn of:

Accuracy – The ancient people from before the Flood until the time of Christ often kept complete records of their ancestors. Extensive ancient genealogical records are found in societies from the Middle East, Northern Europe and the Orient. It is amazing to consider that these records were handed down for over 4,000 years. In many societies the records were probably kept for the wrong reasons (e.g., ancestor worship), and in other societies the recorders could not have given a succinct reason for keeping the records. There are a number of evidences that this ancient practice was ultimately under the direction of God's

providence—for the purpose of demonstrating the origin of the Messiah:

- The ancient Jews, in particular, kept very accurate records.
- Separate records recorded by Matthew and Luke converge on Christ.
- Different manuscript traditions (e.g., Syriac, Greek, Hebrew) were preserved so that copying errors would not destroy the accurate record. (Compare Luke 3.35, 36, taken from the Greek, with Genesis 10.24 and Gen 11.12, 13, taken from the Hebrew.)
- Since Christ's day, genealogical records have not been kept. No Jew today could prove that he was descended from either Abraham or David. Jesus is the Messiah, not someone yet to come!

Ancestors – Jews reckon a person to be Jewish through the mother. Luke writes his account of the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Jesus' mother, Mary. It also appears that his genealogy provides the account of Mary's descent. Matthew, in contrast, writes from Joseph's perspective and seems to trace Joseph's lineage. If this interpretation is correct, then it reminds us that Jesus was qualified as the Messiah through Mary his blood relative and also through Joseph (since he was the oldest legal heir).

Adam – Luke's genealogy follows the line of descent back to Adam. Jesus is declared to be a son of Adam, a member of the human race. This proclaims the universal offer of salvation to all people—Jews and Gentiles (Lk 2.32).

Abraham – Matthew's account starts with Abraham. This reminds us that Jesus is the mediator of the covenant that would bring blessing to all nations on earth (Gen 12.3).

Adoption – Some scholars believe that both genealogical accounts trace the line of Joseph (Mt 1.14; Lk 3.23). If this is the case, Matthew's account gives the royal descent of Joseph, whereas Luke's account provides the natural descent. This interpretation could help explain the convergence/divergence that occurs around Shealtiel and Zerubbabel (Mt 1.12; Lk 3.27). Under this scenario Jesus obtains his position as the Messiah through adoption. In the ancient world adoption provided status

as absolutely as did biological descent. The adoption of Jesus into the line of David and Joseph validates our adoption into God's household through faith in Jesus Christ.

Accomplishment – God promised that David's kingdom would be perpetual (1 Ki 11.36; 2 Ki 8.19). In Jesus this promise is fulfilled in an unexpected way—the final king in David's line is an *eternal* king. Matthew's account focuses on the realization of this eternal kingdom. His Gospel is the only one that uses the phrase 'kingdom of heaven,' which he uses 32 times. To focus attention on the glory of the Messiah's kingdom he groups the genealogy into three sets of fourteen names: the first set leads from Abraham to the foundation of David's kingdom, the second set covers the decline of the kingdom to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the third set recounts the names of a kingdom in obscurity. With the birth of Christ, the kingdom bursts forth gloriously in its new, eternal form. To achieve his stylistic structure Matthew had to drop three names from the record of the kings. The missing names are the son (Ahaziah), grandson (Joash), and great-grandson (Amaziah) of wicked Athaliah who brought the idolatry of Ahab into the house of David. God punished this wickedness to the fourth generation (Ex 34.7). This serves as a witness to the purity of Christ's eternal kingdom in which no idolaters are permitted (Rev 22.15).

Aliens – The exclusion of idolaters from the Kingdom of Heaven does not mean that repentant sinners are forever shut out. In Matthew's account four women are mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah). Three of these women were adulteresses and two (Rahab, Ruth) were foreigners from excluded nations (Dt 7.1-3; Dt 23.3). The inclusion of these names teaches us that Jesus came to earth to bring sinners into his kingdom.

Anointed – These genealogies are not just a list of names. They focus all of history on Jesus *Christ* (the *anointed*; *Messiah*) and give us hope for eternity.

The Birth of Jesus [January 11]
(Nazareth, 4 BC. Lk 2.1-7)

We have reached, and passed, the year 2001. 2001 years from what?

Almost everywhere in the world business, schools, the military and so on, operate on the Gregorian Calendar which calculates all dates from the birth of Jesus. The world does not use the Jewish Calendar which dates everything from their calculation of when creation occurred (3761 BC.), nor does it use the Muslim calendar which dates everything from Mohammed's flight from Mecca on July 16th, 622.

At the centre of history is Jesus Christ. All of history before him, counted down to his first coming. This is the reason that all dates prior to his coming are rendered with BC., which means 'Before Christ'. Since then all dates have been rendered with AD, which means '*anno Domini*' (the Latin for 'in the year of the Lord').

If you ever get a chance to read historical anthropology or palaeontology articles, you will notice that many of them no longer refer to the past using the modifier BC. Instead, you will notice that they often use B.P., which means 'Before the Present'. In the thinking of modern 'scientists', Jesus is no longer the measure or the focal point of history. He is of no current consequence. What instead is the focal point? It is the present. Man—not just any man, but 'Modern Man'—becomes the measure of all things. All of time is measured relative to the present. Is this pride or not?

In Star Trek—the Next Generation dates are given in the captain's log as 'Star Date'. Yet when dates are used in the dialogue, reference is made to the 24th century. Even science fiction cannot get away from measuring time from the birth of Christ.

But B.P. will not win out, nor will 'Star Date'—even if they survive in the backwaters of the pagan materialistic culture. The Jewish calendar continues to survive in a ghetto, and the Moslem calendar is still kicking. But Jesus Christ the Lord of the Universe will not be relegated to

obsolescence. In spite of their rebellion against him, men every day and everywhere on earth will complete monetary transactions, send messages via satellite, or watch the news, while a reminder of Jesus' birth slaps them in the face.

Next time you write a letter, fill in a form, deposit a coin in a Coke machine or ... whatever, stop for a moment. Pause as you write down a date, or take time to look at the year inscribed on your coins. Think about what the year means. Think about why this particular year. Think about the year of the Lord.

Witnesses to the Birth of Jesus [January 12] **(Near Bethlehem, 4 BC. Lk 2.8-20)**

Angels and shepherds, the heavenly and the earthly, two extremes, two worlds, but a common response and one example for us.

The angels saw the birth of their Lord. They knew him in Heaven before he became a man. They were the heralds of his purpose for coming to earth. They announced his conception, and then they were the first witnesses to his birth.

A baby was born. His mother wrapped him in cloths and set him in a manger. The angels looked over Joseph's shoulder. They saw Jesus and were filled with wonder at the plan God was working out. Then what did they do? Their response was twofold: they went and told the world what they had seen, and they worshipped God.

They went out and found the first people they could tell. The doors in town were bolted shut, the shutters in the country hamlets were drawn tight, everyone was fast asleep. Almost everyone! On the hillside nearby were a few shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. The angels had to tell someone, anyone, about the most amazing birth. They found the shepherds awake, and they made their announcement.

They could not contain their amazement—it burst through. The heavens opened, and there appeared a great company of angels worshipping God.

Rarely in history has Heaven been opened to the eyes of men, but this was one time that Heaven could not be kept shut. It burst at the seams with the volume of the rejoicing.

The shepherds didn't waste any time. It isn't often that angels appear to men. They hurried to find Mary and Joseph and the baby. And they also looked at their Lord. Then what did they do? Their response was twofold: they also went and told the world what they had seen, and they worshipped God.

They hurried off just as the angels had done and found the first people they could. They spread the word about Jesus. And then they returned praising God for all the things they had heard and seen. The rational creatures of the universe are called to see Jesus—to look **at** him and to look **to** him. The angels saw, and they went out and told others what they had seen—and they worshipped. The shepherds saw, and they went out and told others what they had seen—and they worshipped.

The order of events is interesting for us to consider: see Jesus and believe, confess with the mouth to those nearby, and then worship. We also have seen Jesus, but what is our response? It saddens me when I see that the Church and most of us who call ourselves Christians do not have this spontaneous desire to rush out and tell others about him whom we have seen. It saddens me when I see so little in our 'worship' services which can be called 'praising and glorifying'.

Have you seen Jesus? Then there are two things you should do to follow the example given here: announce Jesus and praise God.

Circumcision of Jesus [January 13] **(Jerusalem, 4 BC. Lk 2.21)**

This is a simple verse, but one which is loaded with information about how God is fulfilling his Covenant. In it we find the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day as a sign that Jesus came to fulfil the law: to keep it completely in all its exhaustive detail—all aspects of the law, moral, civil,

and ceremonial. His circumcision as a child (like his Baptism as an adult) indicated that he was under the obligations of the Covenant which God made with his people: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” But it is only Jesus who has kept all the Covenant regulations. All the rest of us (whether or not we have the sign of the Covenant upon us through Baptism) break the Covenant.

Jesus came to keep the law so that he could become a perfect sacrifice. But why did God ask for a sacrifice? Actually, God didn’t want a sacrifice. He wanted obedience. But where there is disobedience—sin—his justice demands that there also be punishment.

Since any (all) sin is lethal, everyone deserves the punishment of eternal death. The result would have been the total extermination of the human race. But God is not only a God of justice, but also a God of love; so he planned that a person who had not sinned could act as a substitute for sinners and receive their punishment, and thus free them from eternal death. Jesus offered his perfect life as a perfect substitute for his own people.

This is why he was given the name Jesus. The Hebrew word *Joshua* is the same as the Greek name *Jesus*, and both mean *saviour*. The name Jesus is his personal name (in modern terms, his first name). As was often the practice in the Middle East (and especially in the Bible) the names that were given to people had significance beyond just being an identifier. As we are told by Matthew, he was named Jesus “because he will save his people from their sins.” (Mt 1.21)

Notice that he was given this name by the angel before he was **conceived**. With the invention of ultra-sound scanning of the uterus it is possible for parents to know the gender of their child and name him or her before birth. But have you ever heard of any of your friends naming a child before he or she was conceived!? Like Isaac, Jesus was announced by angels and was named before he was conceived. And like Isaac, he was the seed of the promise, the heir to the Covenant.

As the heir of the Covenant, he was circumcised on the eighth day. This was in keeping with the commands given to Abraham and Moses. But why the eighth day? Is it possible that this was typical of the new Sabbath which would come with the New Covenant Mediator—Jesus? The seventh day was the Old Covenant Sabbath. But it was on the eighth day that Jesus rose from the dead and removed (cut away) sin and death forever.

Today the New Covenant Sabbath is the Lord's Day. It is on the Lord's Day (Sunday) that you are called in a special way to turn to Jesus, the perfect law keeper, your saviour.

Visit of the Magi [January 14] **(Jerusalem & Bethlehem, 4 BC. Mt 2.1-12)**

Jesus was probably a few months old when the Magi began looking for him, although we are not told in the Bible what his age was at this time. We do know, however, that the Magi did not show up at the inn on the night of his birth—contrary to almost all popular portrayals of the 'Christmas' story.

We are told in the account in Matthew that the Magi saw his star appear when he was born and then followed the star from their homeland to Jerusalem to enquire about his birth. This journey would have taken at least two weeks, and possibly longer than a month. When they were directed to Bethlehem they followed the star until it stopped over the house (not the inn) where Jesus lived with his parents.

The Magi (Greek word for an astronomer/astrologer who interprets dreams) probably lived in the region of what today we call Iraq. They were likely aware of the Hebrew Scriptures and the specific prophecy in the book of Numbers that had been delivered by one of their own forefathers—Balaam. Balaam had been a famous fortune teller in that region. Other of his prophecies, beyond those given in the Bible, were recorded for his disciples. Recently some of these prophecies have been discovered in Aramaic texts found near the Jordan River.

Balaam had made a specific prophecy (under the direction of God) about a star which would come in the future out of Israel: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel ...” (Num 24.17). The Magi who probably lived in the same land as Balaam, were students of ancient writings, and they followed the same disciplines as did Balaam. They watched the sky and read from the events among the stars and planets. Although the celestial objects were given by God as signs for people on the earth (Gen 1.14) they are generally misread by people who believe that they control the ‘fates’.

When a new star appeared in the East, the Magi were led by God to interpret this sign as the fulfilment of the prophecy which Balaam had given. Various explanations for this star have been given. “Of all the explanations for the star, most scientists favour the ‘conjunction’ theory—a close pairing of planets that gives the appearance of a single bright star. Astronomers have zeroed in on the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and the Venus-Jupiter conjunction, both thought to have taken place at the time of Christ’s birth, as possible Star of Bethlehem candidates.” (Fred Schaff, “Continuum”, *Omni*, January 1992.) Others suggest the ‘star’ was a supernova which for a brief period would be brighter than the other stars, and then would gradually dim. Apparently, Chinese astronomers did record an exploding star about the time of the birth of Christ. But I believe, as the *Revell Bible Dictionary* says, that “Whatever the case, Matthew’s Gospel indicates that the guiding star was a *supernatural phenomenon, prompted by God.*” (Italics added.)

It seems that Jesus and his parents stayed in Bethlehem after his birth and did not return to Nazareth once the census had been completed. No reason for this is given, although since Joseph (and probably Mary) were from the tribe of Judah, they may have had relatives in Bethlehem, and may have been visiting with them. Whatever detained them, it was clearly by the providence of God that they stayed. And thus when the Magi (sometimes referred to as the ‘three kings’, although we do not know the exact number of them) arrived and they fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (Is 60.3)

The Magi/kings were looking for the Messiah/Christ who was born to be King of kings, and their king. Thus, the nations came to his light. And since that great event, Gentiles from all nations on earth have been streaming into Zion. You as a gentile, have come to Zion, to the City of the Great King. What do we offer as a gift to him? What he desires is our love and obedience. He delights to be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth.

Escape into Egypt [January 15] **(Bethlehem and Egypt, 4 BC. Mt 2.13-18)**

God's purposes stand firm. His plans cannot be diverted. His goals cannot be missed. He rules the universe. He rules over the nations of the earth. He is the supreme sovereign!

Thus, we are not to understand this passage as pointing to an event that was outside of God's plan. It was not that God overheard the plotting of Herod, was shocked and surprised, and then decided that Jesus had better be moved to a safer locale. The point of the quotation from Hosea (Hos 11.1) in Matthew 2.15 is to remind us that even the escape to Egypt was within the careful plan of God laid down before creation. Man is **not** controlling history. God is!

Herod proudly considered himself to be "King of the Jews." But he was hated by them. Even though he lavished great sums of money on the reconstruction of the Temple and married Mariamne, a daughter of a Jewish priest, the Jews could not tolerate an Edomite ruling over them. They also hated him for having wiped out the Hasmonean (Jewish) family who had ruled in Judea before him, and for his obeisance to Rome. And their hatred increased when he murdered his own children, born to him through Mariamne. He did everything he could, militarily, politically, economically, and criminally, to entrench his reign. Nothing was going to get in his way. Or so he thought!

Then the Magi came seeking the true King of the Jews. It was no surprise that Herod sought to destroy even that little one. He would do anything to preserve his throne and power. The slaughter of the infants was for the

sake of self—Jesus was a threat to his luxury and status. (I couldn't help noticing the similarity with our society. It does something similar with abortion. Thousands of little ones are slaughtered for the sake of self and the preservation of luxury and status.) Note the irony: the petty earthly king kills his subjects to protect his life and status. Christ in contrast, who is the true eternal king, gives up his own life and status to save the lives of his subjects.

This scene, unfolding on earth, reflects a raging battle in the spiritual realm. Herod, a vile man, was acting as a minion of Satan. The battle was between Satan and Christ. Satan tried again to snuff out the Messiah. He had tried with Cain's murder of Abel, with Esau's threat to Jacob, with Judah's sons dying childless, and with Athaliah's assassination of Judah's royal family. In each case, God intervened in a most interesting way and worked events to ensure that the line from Adam to the Messiah would not be broken. And in Bethlehem also, God was in control—Jesus was in Egypt! Herod the Proud was outwitted by the Magi and by God. Note a second irony: it was shortly after this slaughter of the children that Herod himself died. He could not keep death from coming. He could not protect his reign!

Friedrich Nietzsche writes on behalf of Satan and Herod: "For the old Gods came to an end long ago. And verily it was a good and joyful end of Gods! That came to pass when, by a God himself, the most ungodly word was uttered, the word: 'there is but one God! Thou shalt have no other gods before me' ... An old grim beard of a God, a jealous one, forgot himself thus. And then all the Gods laughed and shook on their chairs and cried: 'Is godliness not just that there are Gods, but no God?' Whoever hath ears let him hear. Thus spake Zarathustra ... Dead are all Gods; now we will that superman live." (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*)

In contrast, R. C. Sproul presents the Biblical balance: "The irony of humanism, which seeks the deification of man, is that it has its origin not in the creed of the ancient agnostic philosopher Protagoras, *Homo mensura* ('Man is the measure of all things'), but in the promise of a serpent, *Sicut erat dei* [you will be like God]. Humanism was not invented by man, but

by a snake who suggested that the quest for autonomy might be a good idea. The promise of the serpent was not fulfilled. Adam and Eve did not become gods. Autonomy was not found ... The quest for autonomy, however did not cease. It continues even to this day, east and west of Eden” (*If There’s a God Why are there Atheists?*)

The account of the escape into Egypt reminds us that no one—no matter how he sets up himself, no matter how much he entrenches his position, no matter what actions he takes—can thwart the plans of God.

Return to Nazareth [January 16] **(Egypt and Nazareth, 4 BC. Mt 2.19-23; Lk 2.39)**

Why is there more than one Gospel? When we read the Synoptic (from *synopsis*) Gospels we find that the three writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) give us very similar accounts of the life of Jesus. But when we look closely, we find that each writer adds a bit to Jesus’ history, and in total we have a more complete picture of his life on earth.

So it is with the entire Bible. Many parts present similar truths, and all parts add a bit more to our knowledge and understanding of God and how he acts in history. The similar parts in the legal, historical, prophetic, and poetic portions of the OT all add more information to the total revelation about God. If we only pay attention to one part of the Bible, we can become unbalanced in our understanding of God or in our application of his principles for life.

Thus the Bible, in its entirety, teaches us that there is often more than one side to any story and that we should not listen to only one side. If we do, we will probably be getting only part of the truth.

This principle is illustrated by the account of the return to Nazareth. In this account, written by Matthew, we have a practical example of how important it is for us to take into account all of the Bible. Matthew tells us that Jesus was taken to Nazareth by Joseph and Mary and that in this manner God fulfilled a number of the prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah 9.1 tells

us that “Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea” (that is Nazareth) would be blessed by the coming of the Messiah, and Isaiah 11.1 tells us that the Messiah would be the righteous Branch (the Hebrew word for branch is *nezer* in which you can hear a similar sound to ‘Nazarene’).

If you read the Bible selectively like most people did in Jesus’ day, and continue to do today, then you will miss the power of what Matthew is telling us. He is explaining how it was that the Messiah came from Nazareth to fulfil precisely the OT. The Jews, generally, didn’t understand this. With Nathaniel they asked: “Nazareth! can anything good come from there?” They did understand that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5.2 and Mt 2.4, 5) but they didn’t connect him with Egypt (Hosea 11.1 and Mt 2.13-18) or with Nazareth. They read selectively!

Too many people today claim to be NT Christians. What they are really saying is that they are not Whole Bible Christians. There are large numbers of Christians today who will tell you that we don’t have to observe the Law and that it certainly doesn’t apply to the civil government, because after all, it was given to the Jews and so doesn’t apply to us. Then there are others who will tell you that many of Paul’s instructions (for example, regarding women’s roles in the Church and home, or about sexual morality) are only intended for the situation in which they were written. They have value only as historical statements, and we don’t really have to observe them. Others will tell you that the Bible isn’t a science book and we can ignore it (especially Gen. chapters 1-11) when it contradicts the ‘facts’.

In this line of thinking, John Henry Newman said: “Experience proves surely that the Bible does not answer a purpose for which it was never intended. It may be accidentally the means of the conversion of individuals; but a book, after all, cannot make a stand against the wild living intellect of man.” (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*)

In contrast, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* says: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and

necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (I.VI)

We are taught by this example from Matthew, the importance of seeking to understand and apply every portion of the Bible to our lives. A Roman census, an Edomite murder threat, and a Nazarite carpenter all work together to bring to fulfilment the total promise of a son who would be from Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth. Listen to every side of a story before you come to a conclusion. Listen and apply all of Scripture in your life!

Jesus Presented at the Temple [January 17] **(Jerusalem, 4 BC. Lk 2.22-38)**

Here we see Jesus, who came to observe and keep the law perfectly, being presented in accordance with the requirements of the Ceremonial Law. But there is a surprise in store for his parents. At the temple they are met by two believers who were looking for their Messiah to come.

They were looking for the Messiah (Hebrew word for *anointed*), just as a believer today looks for the same person. They looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. We look back to the coming of Christ (Greek word for *anointed*). Both the believing Jews and Gentiles before the coming of Christ and the believing Jews and Gentiles after his coming look to the same person and the same events—his birth as the prophet/king and his death as our priest/sacrifice.

Believers before the coming of Jesus to earth, looked forward in expectation for their salvation. We look back in thankfulness for our salvation. One Lord, one Saviour, for all men—Jew and Gentile.

The Jews at this point in history had been waiting for a long time for their Messiah. They had not heard a word from a prophet of God for almost four hundred years. It seemed as if the heavens had gone silent. People may have been asking “where is this coming that was promised.” True religion

was being subjected to pressures from Greek culture, Roman rule, unbelief among the Jewish leaders and falsehood among the popular religious movements of the day.

But there were some, like Simeon and Anna, who were looking for the consolation and the redemption of Israel. They probably did not have a complete understanding of what they were waiting for. They may have been looking forward to the establishment of an earthly kingdom as did many of their neighbours and friends. But one thing stood out about their expectation: they really believed that God was faithful to his promises—his Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ, was coming!

Believers today are in somewhat similar circumstances. It has been a long time since the promise of the coming of Christ was given—almost 2000 years. “Where is this promised coming,” some say, “What is keeping him? Do you really believe that he is going to come?” In addition, true religion is being subjected to pressures from North American culture—too much government, unbelief among the leaders in the Church, and falsehood among many popular religious movements of our day. It is not a happy situation in which to be a believer waiting for our Messiah to come.

This is where we need to learn a lesson from the faith and patience of Simeon and Anna. They were faithful in their day. They were waiting with expectation. They looked forward to a better kingdom (the consolation of Israel).

Are you a Simeon or Anna waiting for the coming of your Lord? And, do you understand that you cannot put your hope in anything in this decaying universe? Are you looking forward to the establishment of a better kingdom? He will come!

Growth and Early Life of Jesus [January 18] **(Nazareth, 4 BC - 8 AD. Lk 2.40)**

There is a parallel to the first clause of this verse, “and the child grew and became strong”, in the identical words used by Luke to describe the

growth of John the Baptist (Lk 1.80). This points to a key theme which Luke communicates in his Gospel—the humanity of Jesus Christ. Luke shows more than any of the other Gospels that Jesus is truly a man—a humble man, a human like us. It is his Gospel which:

- alone sets Jesus in the context of world history (Lk 1.5; Lk 2.1-3; Lk 3.1)
- provides the most details about the birth of Jesus (a key step in the process of the humiliation of the Messiah) and about his mother
- is the only Synoptic Gospel to refer to Jesus as *saviour* (Lk 2.11)
- gives the direct humble genealogy, rather than the indirect royal genealogy (see, Matthew 1.1-17), of Jesus
- provides the only information we have about Jesus as a youth
- shows the universality of Christ's Kingdom (Lk 3.4-6; Lk 13.29)
- connects Jesus with Adam (Lk 3.38) and not just with Abraham or David (Mt 1.1)—a man for all men, not just for the Jews
- shows in a special way the tenderness and compassion of Jesus.

Luke wishes to demonstrate that Jesus is **the** man of men. He is with us in our weaknesses (e.g., a helpless infant, a man subject to physical needs and a man able to be tempted) and with us in our strengths (he grew and became strong just like his cousin).

As a child he **grew**—he wasn't created as an adult, as was Adam. He had to go through the stages of dependency that we all must go through. This was truly an act of humility for the one who in his divine nature created the universe. But it points to more than his act of humility—it provides a sign of his solidarity with us.

Thus, this verse confronts us with the humanity of Jesus. Yet, some in the early Greek Church (e.g., Marcion, Cyril, Eutyches) denied his true humanity. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 grappled with the human and divine natures of Christ and stated clearly that Jesus is truly God and truly man. It is this confession that we hold today: "Following the holy fathers we confess the Son our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same, and with one voice we all teach that he is perfect in deity, perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, with a rational soul and body, co-essential with the

Father according to his deity and co-essential with us according to his manhood, in all things like us, apart from sin.” (*Confession of Chalcedon*)

There are still cults today, such as Christian Science and Spiritualism (based on the ancient Gnostic heresy), which deny the humanity of Jesus. Those who hold to the Reformed confessions disavow these cults. Yet there are many today in these churches who deny indirectly the humanity of Christ, by undermining the humanity of **man**. They look with scorn on emotion (Jesus wept—do you think he ever laughed?), they disregard the creative talents God has given to men, they accept some form of mechanistic evolution, and they show little concern for the unborn which are being slaughtered by the thousands.

Jesus is a true man. But we must not forget that he didn’t grow up as any normal child. His growth was not identical to John’s or to yours and mine. His growth was under ideal conditions. He didn’t inherit or acquire personality or moral defects, and God overshadowed his life in an extraordinary way to ensure that he would be kept from sin and would mature into the one who could proclaim the kingdom with wisdom and a final authority.

A lesson that we can draw from this verse is that Jesus has gone before us. He has experienced life as a man in all of its difficulties. He truly knows what it is like to be a child subject to parental authority. He knows what teenagers go through as they grow from youth to adulthood. He knows the challenges of hard work and sleepless nights. He knows our struggles with temptation and what it means to face death. May we, like him grow and become strong.

Jesus’ First Passover in Jerusalem [January 19] (Jerusalem, 8 AD. Lk 2.41-50)

This passage shows us what kind of historian Luke is. He is not content just to give the **public** account of the life of Jesus. As a true biographer he goes into detail about the family, birth, and childhood of his subject, Jesus. Here he records an incident from the life of Jesus during his late boyhood

(at the age of twelve), when he went on his first annual pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem.

When a boy in Jewish society reached the age of thirteen he was considered to be a man. At that point he was expected to take his place in society and the synagogue. He was also expected to observe all of the Ceremonial Laws given to the Jews by Moses. As his thirteenth birthday approaches we find Jesus preparing to take his step into manhood, and we see him placing himself under complete obedience to the Ceremonial Law.

We should note that there were no ‘teenage’ years in Jewish society. A boy became a man, not a *teenager*. He was expected to take his place as a responsible adult, and to obey the Law. This says a lot about our society. We indulge teenagers and treat them as if they are big kids. We don’t expect much in the way of responsible behaviour (consider, for example, the concept of Juvenile Court), and we let them drift through years of rebellion and indifference. It would be wise for the Church and society to look at Jesus at the age of twelve speaking with the teachers in the temple and preparing to become a man.

In this passage we find the first recorded words of Jesus. These are given in response to his mother’s question and statement. Note that Jesus responds with a question. This is a technique that we see Jesus use a lot later during his public ministry. In his question, he refers to his Father’s house. By this he makes an indirect statement about his deity. It is appropriate that Luke follows verse 2.40, where he makes explicit reference to Jesus’ humanity, with Jesus’ own words where he reminds his parents, and us, of his divinity.

We are not told when Jesus came to a conscious realization of his dual nature and that he was in fact the one and only son of God, who was born of a virgin. We don’t know whether his mother told him of it, or if the Holy Spirit communicated it directly to him, or if in some way the veil over his divine nature was lifted temporarily. But we see here that by the time he was twelve he was conscious of who he was and what his mission was.

His statement reminds us that one of the reasons he came to this earth was to be in his Father's house. This obviously means that he was to attend worship services at the Temple and was to be attentive to the teaching provided there. But it means more than this. He came to be both **the** priest and **the** sacrifice. He came to earth to undertake the work of Salvation.

This provides us with an example. If we are brothers or sisters of Jesus then we also should have as one of our purposes in life to be in our Father's house. This means that we should serve the Father by worshipping him in the 'temple' among fellow Christians and that we should be attentive to the teaching. But it also means we should make the mission of the Kingdom one of our personal priorities.

This does not mean that we are to do nothing else but evangelize and witness. But it does mean that we are to live our lives so that in everything we do we can lead people to **the** priest and **the** sacrifice.

Our purpose in life is not to be that defined by Epicurus a Greek philosopher who lived from 341-270 BC.: "Pleasure is the beginning and the end of living happily ... It is impossible to live pleasurably without living wisely, well, and justly, and impossible to live wisely, well, and justly without living pleasurably." (*Diogenes Laertius*)

Rather, our purpose in life is to be that defined by the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: "What is man's primary purpose? Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." (Question 1)

Jesus' Growth to Adulthood [January 20] **(Nazareth, 8-32 AD. Lk 2.51-52; Lk 3.23a)**

The period of Jesus' life from the age of 12 until he was about 30 are called the *silent years*. We don't know much about what Jesus did during these years but we can determine from Luke 2.51-52 (and some other verses) a few things about Jesus' life during this period:

- **He lived in Nazareth** We have already noted that his return to Nazareth was a special fulfilment of Isaiah 9.1. But it had additional significance, since Jesus grew up in the despised territory of the Jews. This Jewish area was to the north of the Sea of Galilee and was separated from the rest of the Jewish lands by the area in which the Samaritans lived. To reach Nazareth from Jerusalem, one had to travel either through Samaria or go up the eastern side of the Jordan. The residents of Samaria were considered to be rural ‘hicks’, who were out of touch with the mainstream of Jewish political and religious life in Jerusalem. Jesus had no pretensions. He came to earth to live a humble life, to take the place of his people. We should learn from this that it is not our station in life that is important but how we live our life before God.
- **He was obedient to his parents** Although he came with the ultimate goal of serving God in the work of preaching the kingdom, he showed that he was humble, obedient and patient. As God he had ultimate authority, and even as a man he was invested with great authority. but during these years he showed his willingness to be subject to valid authority. Each of us may have authority in some areas of life, but we are all required to be subject to authorities that God has instituted in other areas in the civic realm: family, workplace, or church.
- **He worked as a carpenter** (see, Mark 6.3) When the Jews referred to Jesus as a carpenter, they did so with scorn. They were saying that he was only a ‘manual labourer’, whereas they were ‘professionals’ (merchants, scribes, lawyers and teachers). I am sure that Jesus approached every piece of work, whether making a yoke for oxen or a table for a widow, with care and diligence. His life reminds us that man was originally created to work with his hands; it shows us what makes work honourable—the attitude and diligence with which it is to be done and not the particular task at hand or the degree of compensation in worldly terms. We must avoid judging work by man’s standards and judge it by God’s standards.
- **He grew in wisdom** Although Jesus is God, this does not mean that his

divine nature was always visible while he was on earth. He went through the process of learning—from the ignorance of an infant to the knowledge of adulthood. He probably went to school just like any other Jewish boy. Undoubtedly he applied himself with more diligence than we do because he knew the importance of his mission. He was the epitome of the ‘Renaissance’ man who was skilled at a trade but who had also educated his mind to the highest degree in philosophy, the arts, and the sciences. Too many Christians shut off their minds once they acquire a basic working level of proficiency in a skill. Jesus is our example for how we should strive to grow in wisdom.

- **He grew in stature** He grew to be a mature, strong adult. But more importantly, his presence and bearing were that of a man. Jesus was not a wimp. He had goals and vision, and was a man of principle. He had stature. He could not be swayed by the winds of favouritism, current fad, peer pressure, or family whim. He shows clearly what is lacking in most of the so-called leadership in the Church and in Western culture. We have few **men** and lots of wimps.
- **He grew in favour with God and man** During these ‘silent’ years, he may not have had an active teaching ministry, but it is clear that his life was an example of obedience, diligence, wisdom, love, graciousness ... He was respected for his life, for **who** (not **what**) he was. He is the perfect example of who we should be like as we walk this life before God and man.

During this time Jesus was preparing to undertake his work as our eternal priest when he reached the official age of maturity (Num 4.47).

John: The Forerunner of The Messiah

John as Fulfilment of Hope [January 21]
(In the Judean Hill Country, 5 BC. Lk 1.5-15)

Minister – Zechariah and his wife were descended from Aaron in the tribe of Levi. Of course, Zechariah and Elizabeth were not sinless; but

they were sincere in their belief in God, trusting in the coming Messiah, and devout in their life of obedience (Dt 6.1-3). As a priest, Zechariah was set apart as a symbol of God's holiness and of God's holy people. To keep the priestly line pure, without mixture, he had married a Levite, symbolizing that Christians are to marry only in the Lord (1 Cor 7.39; 2 Cor 6.14). It is fitting that the prophetic spokesman who would announce the coming of the Messiah would be born to this couple who were set apart from the world.

Mercy – Elizabeth was barren, and both she and Zechariah were too old to have children naturally. God reaches down in mercy and picks as his instruments of mercy those who naturally have no power or ability. He chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1.27). The selection of this barren couple places John in a special class along with Isaac, Joseph, Samson, and Samuel. This tells us that something important is going to happen in God's redemptive plan. After 400 years of silence, the heavens have opened and God is going to work the 'impossible' (Gen 18.14; Mt 19.26). God does not perform miracles for no reason. He performs them to signal significant events, or to validate the ministry of key individuals. God's selection of this couple points to the significance of John and the events surrounding his ministry, but it also reminds us that God does the 'impossible' by selecting barren sinners for his kingdom. In God's mercy there is hope for the world.

Method – God revealed his plans for John in the temple. This is where he had chosen to make his name and glory known (1 Ki 9.3). These events probably took place on the Sabbath, since there was a crowd of assembled worshippers. Also, we note that the angel appeared at the time when incense and prayers were being offered up (Ps 141.2; Rev 5.8; Rev 8.3, 4). God honours his temple, his day, and the prayers of his people. So it is today. It is through the work of the Church (the living temple) and the preaching of the word on the Lord's Day (the Christian Sabbath), supported by the prayers of God's people, that Christ the Savior is announced.

Messenger – In this instance the 'preacher' was an angel from Heaven.

God uses many means for declaring his presence and will, including the heavens, small voices, a ball or tongues of fire, and dreams. At times he sends angels (*angelos* in Greek means messenger) to make announcements. Only two angels are mentioned by name in the Bible (Gabriel and Michael). It is possible that Gabriel, along with Michael, is an archangel, and among the highest rank. He may be one of the Seraphim (radiant ones) that may have a human form, but have six wings (Is 6.2). Gabriel appeared to Daniel (Dan 8.16; Dan 9.21) and also announced the birth of Jesus to Mary. Gabriel's announcement to Daniel relates to the coming of the Messiah (Christ) in the last days. His announcements about John and Jesus tell us that the prophecies are being fulfilled—the last days have arrived.

Message – Gabriel reassures Zechariah (who was gripped with fear) with the words “do not be afraid.” This is a common message from God, occurring over sixty times in the Bible (e.g., Gen 15.1; Jn 14.27). Those who are favored by God do not need to be afraid of his awesome majesty or of the radiance of his spiritual messengers. Instead, they can listen to his announcements with joy; for everything is under his control and their prayers are heard. Gabriel told Zechariah that his son was to be named John, which means ‘God is gracious.’ John signifies the grace of God that comes through salvation in Christ to those who seek God (Mal 1.9).

Marked – John was set apart by God for the great task of announcing the coming of the Messiah. To prepare him for his mission, he was marked in two ways: 1) he was filled with the Holy Spirit from (lit.) his mother's womb (he was double-born—born spiritually before he was born physically), and 2) he was a Nazarite (Num 6.1-12) who did not drink wine or any other fermented drink. He was a joy and a delight to his parents who had the honour of having a son who was great in the sight of the Lord. John's life, as well as his message, pointed to Christ. Jesus would also be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, and be a Nazarite.

John was the fulfillment of hope for his parents. The announcement of his birth also pointed to the fulfillment of hope for Israel and the nations

of the world. The announcement about John prepared the way for the Messiah.

John's Mission [January 22]
(In the Judean Hill Country, 5 BC. Lk 1.16-25)

We saw that the announcement of John's birth fulfilled the hope of his parents, and that he was marked as the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Lk 1.5-15). As we consider further the announcement of his birth, we note his:

Mission – John was to be given a multifold glorious task:

- 1) *Return* – John was sent to call back God's covenant people who had drifted from their spiritual heritage. As a nation they had been called back once before—from the Babylonian captivity where they were being punished for worshipping idols. God gave them a second chance to return to him through John's teaching. If they failed this time, and rejected God's son, they would be disowned as a nation (Mt 8.11, 12; Mt 21.18-22, 28-46; Mt 23.38; 1 Thess 2.14-16)—only a remnant of individual Jews would be saved throughout the NT age (Rom 9.27, 29; Rom 11.1-6).
- 2) *Repentance* – In the spirit and power of Elijah, John would fulfill Scripture (Mal 3.1; Mal 4.5-6). As a prophet like Elijah, with a purpose like Elijah, he was called to preach like Elijah and to be persecuted like Elijah (1 Ki 19.1-9; Mt 14.1-12). His message of repentance and personal reformation would challenge king and soldier, rabbi and shepherd, and clear away the legalism of the Pharisees. As 'Elijah' he would both announce the Messiah and prepare the way for him.
- 3) *Restoration* – In Heaven there is complete unity of purpose between the Father and the Son. It is their desire that all Christians will have the same unity (Jn 17.20-23). If we are truly living in Christ we will strive for this unity (Eph 4.3). John was sent to preach this message of unity and restore spiritual communion between the fathers and their children.

- 4) *Righteousness* – But there can be no real and lasting unity for those who are not living to please Christ. Removal of the enmity between God and man, and man and man, is found only among those who have turned from disobedience to the wisdom of the righteous—that is, among those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt 5.6).
- 5) *Readiness* – John was the morning-star of the reformation that prepared a people to meet the Lord. Those who have returned to their God, repented of their sins, been restored to family fellowship, and are striving to obey God are ready to meet the Anointed One.

Mark – Zechariah asked for a sign that would prove to him that what the angel said about John would come true. His request appears to be in accord with biblical practice (Gen 15.8; Judges 6.36; 2 Ki 20.8); and, at times God himself gives signs (Ex 3.12; Is 7.11; Mk 16.20). Why then is Zechariah punished (20) for asking for a sign? Because God does not approve of our asking for signs (Mt 16.4). Even though God tolerated these requests during the period of his unfolding revelation, Jesus said: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (Jn 20.29). Zechariah should have believed that God could provide him and Elizabeth with a son in their old age because he had ample evidence in the OT (from Sarah to Hannah).

By striking Zechariah deaf (Lk 1.62), God indicates that we are not to ask for miraculous signs. Rather, we should be like Mary who did not ask for a sign but humbly accepted the angel’s explanation (Lk 1.38), even when faced with a miracle that had never been heard of before.

God opened the final era of redemptive history with a sign. He sent his messenger to silence a priest in the Temple. This indicates that the era of the Aaronic priesthood and sacrificial system was at an end—to be replaced by a greater priesthood (Heb 7.1-28; Heb 8.1-13), and the greatest sacrifice—Christ.

Miracle – As he had promised, God worked a miracle: Elizabeth became pregnant, even while too old to bear children and while disgraced with barrenness in the eyes of her neighbors (25). This is God’s way; he

works the ‘impossible’ and removes disgrace. This miracle was a foreshadow of greater miracles to come: First, the miracle of the virgin conception of the Son of God to remove disgrace from his enslaved people. Second, the miracle of the gift of salvation, through the death of Jesus on the cross, to remove our disgrace in sin. And third, the miracle of God’s conquering death forever, through the resurrection, to remove ultimately the disgrace of decay from the created realm (Rom 8.21).

Messiah – The events recorded here are rooted in history. They occurred in a real country, in real time, to real people. This tells us that the arrival of the Messiah would not be a mystical vision lost in the mists of ancient myth, but would be documented by credible eye-witnesses (Lk 1.2). Their record tells us that Herod was king of Judea (Lk 1.5). This means that an Edomite, a usurper, was on the throne in the kingdom of David. The scepter had temporarily departed from Judah (Gen 49.10). But it was time now for the Messiah, David’s son, to come as the true King of the Jews (Lk 23.38); to live, die, and arise gloriously and thereby to dethrone Satan.

John’s Birth [January 23] (In the Judean Hill Country, 5 BC. Lk 1.57-66)

Childbirth – God showed how great his mercy is by providing a son for Zechariah and Elizabeth. By fulfilling his promise to this couple, who were beyond human hope, God directs our attention to the promise of another birth that was about to be fulfilled. The Messiah was first promised 4,000 years before these events (Gen 3.15). Now, God was about to show the real greatness of his mercy by sending his Son, the saviour of the world.

At the birth of a child, neighbours and relatives assemble to celebrate with the parents. At John’s extra-ordinary birth there was a greater degree of celebration than usual. But we must not stop with the celebration over a mere human. We must look forward three months to the birth of the God-man. At his birth the entire host of Heaven rejoiced (Lk 2.13).

Circumcision – On the eighth day (Lev 12.3) after John's birth Zechariah and Elizabeth brought him to be circumcised. We are reminded of their obedience as they place their child under the sign of the Covenant. Scrupulous obedience to God's Law is not something that people like to hear about today. They claim that such a requirement is legalistic and contrary to the 'law of love.' But, instead, we see in this observance an example of the general principle that when parents keep the 'least' commands (Mt 5.19) in the Law, they set an example for their covenant children and can trust that the Lord's hand will be on them (66).

Called – When God gave Abram the covenant-sign of circumcision he also gave him a new name—Abraham (Gen 17.5). Jewish parents followed this example and announced the name of their son, at the time of circumcision. The friends attending the circumcision expected that one of their customs would also apply—the naming of the first-born son after the father. However, Zechariah and Elizabeth followed the instruction of the angel (Lk 1.13) and called their son *John*, which is derived from the Hebrew for 'Jehovah is gracious.' It is significant that we see God overruling the traditions of men (Mk 7.8), while making a powerful statement about his work of redemption through grace. The sign of the covenant—Baptism—is placed on covenant children, as it was on John. When, in God's grace, the child is born-again (Jn 3.3) he is given a new name (Rev 3.12).

Completion – The angel had told Zechariah that he would be unable to speak until the day that the foretold events were completed (Lk 1.20). This promise was fulfilled despite the lack of belief on Zechariah's part. In the ancient world people scoffed at Noah's prophecy about a flood that would cover the world; and they laughed at the prophecy that God would send his Son into the world. Today, the scoffers are still with us. They ridicule the idea that God will judge the world by his Son. Let us understand the completion of the prophecy to Zechariah and pay attention. It teaches us not to despise the promises of God. If we do, we will be silenced; not for nine months—but forever (Rom 3.19).

Curiosity – The neighbours and relatives were astonished at the change of practice. It was strange to them that John was not named after his father. But the miraculous restoration of Zechariah’s speech and hearing (they had to make signs to him to ask the child’s name, 63) confirmed that their practice was not essential and that the child’s God-given name was *John*.

Both the naming of the child and the miraculous sign filled the people with awe, and the events that happened that day were talked about throughout the hill country near Jerusalem (i.e., near Bethlehem). Three months later there would be another child born in the same region who would not be named after his human father, but rather would be given the name Jesus, announced by an angel (Mt 1.21). The events around the birth of this child would also fill the people with awe, and his birth would become the talk of the whole region (Lk 2.17, 18). John, even in his birth, prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah (Lk 1.76; Lk 3.3). His birth directs us to Jesus.

Confirmation – These events confirmed that John was an unusual child, and they raised questions about his future. Many people probably were asking, even at this early stage, if he was the Messiah, the Prophet, or Elijah who was to come (Jn 1.19-24). It is possible that the memory of these events led the people of Jerusalem to go out to the wild regions of the Jordan to hear his preaching and to be baptized by him (Mt 3.5, 6). It is also quite likely that when Luke did his research in preparation for writing his gospel account he spoke with people who, reflecting back on the events surrounding the birth of John, were able to confirm that “the Lord’s hand was with him.”

John’s birth points to the Messiah and prepares the way for his coming. It also assures us that God cares for his own. Even from their infancy, God is preparing his children, called by his name, for their work in his kingdom.

Zechariah's Psalm [January 24]
(In the Judean Hill Country, 5 BC. Lk 1.67-80)

The Psalms were often written to commemorate deliverances from physical or spiritual danger, and to pour out thankfulness for God's mercies. For many centuries the Holy Spirit had not empowered men to compose new Psalms. Now, on the eve of the greatest act of redemptive history, God breaks about 400 years of silence, opens the mouth of a deaf-mute, and breathes into him a prophetic utterance that anticipates a great victory. This Psalm is no mere human composition; it is the work of the Holy Spirit (67) who teaches us to reflect on the marvel of God's salvation:

Redeemer (68-70) – As we review God's work of redemption we can cry with Zechariah: "Blessed be God, praise him!" We have the advantage of the complete revelation of God. We have the eye-witness accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Bible. We know with certainty that Christ abolished the curse of sin and death on the Cross. Zechariah had nothing more than what appeared to be obscure prophecies. But without seeing with the physical eye, he saw with the spiritual eye of faith. To him, the words of the ancient prophecies were more real than what we might watch on a live news broadcast. He knew the promises from the first one given in the midst of a curse in the Garden (Gen 3.15) to the last one that promised the messenger (Mal 4.5, 6). Zechariah trusted these promises so fully that he treated them as completed (68, 69) thirty years before they would be fulfilled, and even months before the miraculous incarnation of Jesus Christ had actually taken place.

The kingly redeemer from the line of David has come (Ps 132.17). He has shown his power, like a wild ox rushing with thrusting horns (Ps 92.10). He has come to redeem his people. He has come to redeem us, if we trust him. Why do we not trust the promises of God as Zechariah did?

Rescue (71-74) – The salvation that Jesus provides rescues us from our enemies. The historical context implies that Zechariah was thinking of a

rescue from Roman oppression. He was likely hoping that the Messiah would lead his people to freedom, like Moses led the Israelites from Egypt. But just as the rescue from Egypt, as a figure, points to salvation from sin; so the rescue mentioned in this Psalm can be thought of in a spiritual sense.

God the Father has enacted an eternal, holy covenant of grace with the Son. This covenant has been re-stated with human mediators (i.e., Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David). Because God remembers his covenant (Lev 26.42) he not only protects his people from earthly enemies as they travel through this life (Ps 91.1-16), but also delivers them from Satan and sin (Mt 6.13), the consequences of sin, and death (Ps 23.4; 1 Cor 15.54, 55).

Righteousness (74-75) – The reason that God rescues us is not so that we can live another day in sin (Rom 6.1, 2). The reason is so that we can serve God without abject fear, in holiness and righteousness. We do not serve to be saved. We have been saved to serve (Eph 2.10). We must live out our lives on this earth, before the Holy God, offering service to him out of thankful obeisance and reverential love.

Ready (76-77) – Zechariah changes the focus of his Psalm at this point, from the work of the Messiah to the *herald* of the Messiah. He clearly understood the message of Gabriel (Lk 1.15-17) about John. He knew that God's time had arrived and that his son would be a prophet to prepare the way an to make ready a people for coming of the Messiah (Is 40.3, 4; Mal 3.1). It is no different today. A herald must still go out to prepare the way for Christ. Gospel preachers (Rom 10.14-15) call people to repent of their sins and present to them the way of salvation through the forgiveness of sin.

Rising (78-79) – When the gospel is preached, and believed, a light shines into hearts of darkness. People who have lived with no hope or joy, ruled by 'chance', as products of chaos, wake-up to the glory of God's light. Over and over again, the Holy Spirit takes people from a path of despair and disaster and turns their lives around. A junkie becomes a joyous worshiper, a pan-handler becomes a deacon, a wanton

wastrel bows in prayer, a ‘self-realized’ materialist becomes a servant of Christ, a proud anti-theist studies his Bible. The Light of Truth leads people from death to life, from wandering to purposeful direction, from greed to selfless service. This is the result of the Gospel John was born to preach. Men seek for signs of God’s power. If they looked, they would see them in God’s mercy in the miracle of salvation!

Reason (80) – John’s parents were beyond normal child-bearing age at his birth. It is possible that he was orphaned, and entrusted to the community of Essenes near the Dead Sea. There he prepared for his mission. Though the son of a priest, he never served in the Temple. But as the herald of the New Covenant he shows us how all believers are to serve God as priests (1 Pt 2.9) by giving the reason for the hope they have in Christ (1 Pt 3.15).

John’s Ministry [January 25]

(Judean Desert at the Jordan, 28 AD. Mt 3.1-6; Mk 1.1-6; Lk 3.1-6)

Context – The Gospel writers place John’s ministry into both an historical and a Biblical context. By naming the civil and religious rulers at the time John began his ministry, Luke reminds us that the Jews were subject to the pagan government of the Romans and that it was time for the Messiah to come to establish his eternal kingdom. He also informs us that there were two corrupt high priests. The Romans had deposed Annas and replaced him with his son-in-law, Caiaphas. The Jews recognized both men as high priest, rather than just one as God required. It was time for the Messiah to come and cleanse his Church.

Luke dates the arrival of the Messiah’s messenger from the beginning of the reign of the Roman emperor (Tiberius Caesar). Thus, the arrival of the King of kings was established relative to the reign of an earthly monarch. But Christ would gain the supremacy over earthly thrones (Ps 110.1). Now, every memorable event, the induction of all rulers, and every economic transaction, are dated from the birth of the eternal King.

The arrival of John was also placed in its Biblical context. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the writers blended two OT passages (Mal 3.1; Is 40.3-5) to declare John to be the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecies. The choice of the passage from Isaiah is significant. Isaiah wrote about God's plans to smooth the way for his exiled people by using a contemporary metaphor. In the ancient world servants would prepare the road before a king traveled along it. John prepared the way for Jesus in two ways: he prepared the people's hearts (Lk 1.17) for the arrival of the King, and he showed them the way, through Jesus, to return to God from exile in sin.

John appeared in clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt; and his food was locusts and wild honey. We are told these things so that we can place John in the correct historical-biblical context—as a prophet (Zech 13.4) and as the final OT prophet (Lk 16.16) who came in the spirit of Elijah (2 Kings 1.8) to announce the arrival of the Messiah (Lk 7.24-28).

Cleansing – In this context, and in those days, John came proclaiming, as a herald, the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. The response of his hearers was sealed with baptism. Ceremonial washing was practiced by the Jews (Jn 2.6) and was applied to new converts, but John's use of it as a sign for the cancellation of the debt of sin was an innovation. His use of baptism pointed to the coming cleansing of the nations that would be provided by the Messiah (Is 52.15; Num 8.7). This is why we are told that 'everyone' went out to John to confess his or her sins and be baptized; and why Luke, a Gentile writing to Gentiles, includes the prophecy: "all mankind [will] see God's salvation." (Lk 3.6) The Gospel writers are using hyperbole to point to the universal application of Christ's life, teaching, and death on the cross, to all nations (Lk 2.31, 32; Mt 28.18-20).

Conversion – John announced the arrival of the universal kingdom that was foretold in the OT (Dan 2.34, 35). Admission to this kingdom would not be through human lineage or natural birth, but through eternal lineage (Jn 1.13) and spiritual birth (Jn 3.3). The Jews thought that as

descendants of Abraham they would automatically be granted entrance into Messiah's kingdom. John, however, made it clear—admission to the kingdom requires a change of mind and heart through conversion that results in repentance.

Covenant – The reason John gave for calling the people to repentance was that the “kingdom of heaven is near.” Heaven's rule was about to be extended directly to the earth as the Messiah began his work of subduing his enemies and establishing his universal reign.

John's message about the kingdom was not a surprise; it was a prevailing theme of OT prophecy. The people were expecting God's kingdom to appear and were waiting for him to save them from the oppressive weight of foreign rulers. But the kingdom came in an unexpected way; in a new covenant administration that requires repentance and heart-obedience (Jer 31.33, 34; Mt 5.27-30). This change of heart results in a true righteousness that must surpass a mere outward religious observance (Mt 5.20).

We are in the last days, the era of the New Covenant that was initiated with the arrival of the one whom John announced and that will reach its glorious climax with his second coming. Luke omits the line: “the glory of the Lord will be revealed” (Is 40.5). This may be because at the commencement of Jesus' ministry it was not yet time for him to reveal his glory. His glory would be shown later; for example, in Cana (Jn 2.11), at the transfiguration (Lk 9.31), and at the ascension (Lk 24.26). We expect the glory of Jesus to be revealed fully on the last day when he returns to earth to establish the final phase of his eternal reign (Col 3.4). The Kingdom of Heaven is near!

John's Message [January 26]

(Judean Desert at the Jordan, 28 AD. Mt 3.7-10; Lk 3.7-14)

John's message was simple: “If you do not repent of your sins you will be sent to Hell. If you really have repented of your sins, your works will provide evidence of the change in your heart.” We can consider his

message under two headings:

Coming Wrath – All people know that they must be prepared to face the wrath of God that will be fully revealed on the Day of Judgment. John asks, sarcastically, those who came out to see him: “Why are you fleeing from God’s wrath?” He knew that if they did not have Christ as their saviour they depended on false hopes to get through that Day—mere religion, their own works, or a supposed birthright. John speaks to each of these false hopes.

First, John rebuked any who came to him for baptism thinking that by just going through a religious ritual they could appease God’s wrath. Matthew tells us that among those who were baptized by John were those who were scrupulously pious (the Pharisees) and also those who made religion into a philosophical or intellectual exercise (the Sadducees). Neither approach to religion pleases God. Only a change of heart through conversion (belief in Jesus and repentance) is the religion that God accepts.

Second, he told them to produce fruit that was consistent with repentance. This means that their own ‘fruit’ (works) was not of a proper type or quality to be sufficient to please God. Since their fruit-tree produced only bad fruit, it was going to be cut down. Jesus also teaches that the Jews (as a nation) had their chance to receive himself as the Messiah while he was on earth. If they rejected him they would no longer be considered the people of God. Instead they would be cut down and the Kingdom given to the Gentiles who would produce fruit (Mt 8.11, 12; Mt 21.33-46).

Third, he warned them not to delude themselves with the belief that their natural descent from Abraham provided them with citizenship papers for the Kingdom of Heaven. God could raise up new spiritual descendants of Abraham. He would do this when he brought the Gentiles with ‘stony’ hearts into his kingdom by renewing their hearts.

John’s message also warns us. Our religious observances (e.g.,

attendance at worship or participating in the Lord's Supper), our 'good' works and our membership in the Church are only dust if we have not believed in Jesus as our saviour and repented of our sins. If we are like many of those who went to John, we need to flee from the coming wrath (Zeph 1.14-16).

Convincing Works – John was a 'Hell-fire' preacher and it had results. Many of his hearers asked for instruction in the way of life. Once they had been baptized for repentance they were taught how to live in a way that was consistent with their repentance. This sequence foreshadows the fuller model that would be revealed by the Messiah (Mt 28.19, 20).

John taught that works must follow true repentance. The Bible never teaches that we can be saved by our works, but it consistently teaches that our works will show if we are saved. By a person's works we become convinced that a spirit of eternal life is present (Mt 7.15-20; James 2.17).

All three of the examples that John gives for how to show true repentance deal with money or possessions. This does not mean that controlling other types of sins is excluded from the fruits of repentance (compare Gal 5.19-26). Rather, it is clear that we *all* are prone to sin in the area of possessions and need instruction about how to use them rightly. It is especially so in this materialistic age where 'success' is measured by the size of our house, the brand of car we drive, or the number of mechanical or electronic devices we have. John's challenge to our attitude about possessions can be summed up in three words: generous (Lk 3.11), honest (13), and content (14). True spirituality is practical spirituality.

John indirectly teaches two additional lessons (but not about revolution, pacifism, or socialism; as some suggest): 1) God requires personal obedience in whatever role he has placed us. This is why John guides the tax collectors and soldiers to righteous behaviour but does not tell them to leave their jobs. 2) God can save anyone, not just those who are religious. The tax collectors were notorious for their dishonesty, and

soldiers were known for extortion. Yet, by God's grace, sinners like them can also repent of their sins and come into the kingdom (Mt 3.2).

John presented the Gospel in simple terms: mankind has sinned and cannot please God without true repentance that is made evident by good works. If you are truly sorry (repentant) for your sins you will work hard at overcoming them and will try to replace each sin with a good work that pleases God.

John—Not the Messiah [January 27]

(Judean Desert at the Jordan, 28 AD. Mt 3.11-12; Mk 1.7-8; Lk 3.15-18)

The last portion of John's message is a response to those who thought that he might be the Messiah (Christ). Because prophets had not been heard or seen in Israel for hundreds of years, when John appeared as a prophet with many disciples following him, people began to wonder who he was. There arose a general sense of anticipation (Lk 3.15) among the people that something important was about to happen. But John made it clear that he was not the Messiah; the one he came to announce, who would be greater than himself, was the Messiah. John, like all true prophets preached Christ, and did not claim for himself honor that was not his. False prophets and cult leaders claim to be anointed (Mt 24.24); but John showed, in three ways, that he was nothing compared with the Christ (Jn 3.27-30):

Sandals – John placed himself below even a slave when compared with the Messiah. Hebrew slaves were not expected to undo the sandal-straps of their masters. John didn't consider himself worthy even to perform this task for the Messiah. It is sad to see many teachers/preachers in the Church who rather than being humble servants of Christ (Mt 20.26, 27) expect people to cater to them as if they were multi-billionaires. We need to be humbled by John's attitude. He was given the honor of announcing Jesus Christ to the world. If he considered himself so unworthy that he couldn't even untie shoe laces, should we not be more humble than we are?

Spirit – John baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Spirit (Acts 1.5). Pastors have the privilege of administering the sign of the Covenant and admitting believers, and their children, into the visible Church. Yet, as John’s contrast reminds us, water baptism is an outward sign that does not, of itself, confer grace. The powerful work of dispensing the grace of eternal life is the sole prerogative of Christ, through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

John appears to refer to fire as the sign of baptism with the Spirit (Mt 3.11), as an anticipation of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-4). But he probably also uses this symbol as a reference to tell us that God was present in the Messiah. Fire accompanied many of the theophanic appearances of God in the OT economy (e.g., Gen 15.17; Ex 3.2; Ex 13.21; 2 Chron 5.14; Ezk 1.4); so it validated Jesus as the Son of God. Fire is also a symbol of God’s judgment (Gen 3.24) and the purification of the world from sin (2 Pt 3.7). John’s reference points to the Jesus as the judge of the earth (Acts 17.31).

Sifting – John extends the theme of judgment with his next contrast—he came empty-handed; the Messiah would come with a winnowing fork (or shovel). Farmers used this implement to toss grain into the air. The grain fell to the ground, while the chaff was blown by the wind to the edge of the threshing floor. The chaff was later gathered and burned. This is a symbol for the final day of judgment in which the wheat (saints) will be gathered into God’s barn (Heaven) and separated from the chaff (reprobate sinners) that will be burned in Hell-fire (Mal 4.1).

A threshing floor often consisted of a large flat rock on an elevated site where the wind would blow strongly to clear away the chaff. It is noteworthy that the Temple was built on Araunah’s threshing floor where the sword of the angel ceased executing judgment (2 Sam 24.16). It may be that the choice of this site serves as a symbol for the visible Church. If so, the Church is Christ’s threshing floor on which he separates mankind (Mt 16.18-19). There is a day of judgment coming when the threshing floor will be purged, and the wheat and chaff shall be separated forever.

We must not lose sight of the fact that John announced the coming of the Messiah in terms of salvation (Lk 3.6) and in terms of eternal judgment.

We are told that John exhorted the people and preached continually (per the Greek verb tense) the good news of salvation to them. But, other than his announcement of the Messiah, we are told very little about the contents of his sermons. He was a preacher of righteousness and of judgment like Isaiah or Jeremiah, but little of his message is recorded. This is consistent with his position as the forerunner of the Messiah. It was no longer necessary to hear the voice of a mere man when the living Word was now on the earth. As John himself would say later: “He must become greater; I must become less.” (Jn 3.30)

We consider it disappointing when God calls home ‘prematurely’ a great teacher such as a Gillespie, McCheyne, or Bahnsen. What then should we think about the loss of this humble preacher—John. He likely spent only a single year preaching before he was confined to a jail cell for two years. But his life and early death should be an encouragement for us. Once he had finished his role as the Messiah’s messenger he was taken into glory.

John and the Word Incarnate [January 28] **(Judean Desert at the Jordan, Spring 29 AD. Jn 1.6-18)**

John, in this part of his Gospel presents seven contrasts—most between John the Baptist (representing the OT prophets) and Jesus the greatest prophet— that essentially cover the complete spectrum of Biblical doctrine:

Creator vs Creature – John emphasized the deity of Jesus, the Word (Jn 1.1-5). Now, with the words “There (be)came a man...” he emphasizes the difference between the Messiah and John. Jesus has a human nature and is a man (1 Tim 2.5) but he is more than a mere man; he is the God-man. While Jesus *was* John the Baptist *became*. John may be reinforcing the creator/creature distinction that is taught in Genesis 1.1-31.

Light vs Light Bearer – John 1.1 reminds us of the opening words of Genesis. In the same way, John may be reminding us that light (Gen 1.2) can exist without a light-bearer (Gen 1.14). The lights (sun, moon, and stars) were created to act as markers between light and darkness. So in the spiritual realm, John was sent to mark the true light and to direct men out of the darkness of sin and eternal judgment to the true light.

Without the light-energy that God created, the universe would be in total darkness. In the same way, without the light of his word, the world would be in total intellectual and spiritual darkness (Jn 3.18-21). Without God's verbal revelation man would be ignorant of his place and meaning in God's created order and without hope for salvation from sin. Man cannot develop a cohesive philosophy about anything (existence, causation, or purpose) starting with man or nature; all of his attempts result in futility (Rom 1.21).

Knowing vs Acknowledging – All people know that God is the creator through the revelation of nature. But because they are in spiritual darkness they suppress that truth and refuse to 'know' (acknowledge) it (Rom 1.18-21). As a result, they reject Jesus who created the cosmos (Jn 1.10). The Jews accepted John as a prophet (Mk 11.32). But when he pointed them to the Messiah promised in the Scriptures, they rejected him as the revelation sent by God (Is 53.1). John may be using irony (11). He does not say that the Jews did not *know* who Jesus was, rather that they would not receive him. They acknowledged John, but refused to acknowledge Jesus.

Spiritual vs Natural Birth – Even though the Jews collectively rejected the Messiah, all is not hopeless. There is a way of bringing light into the darkness—every individual who receives Jesus is born again (Jn 3.3). We are born again by believing the verbal revelation from God about Jesus and believing that he is the living revelation of the character of God in human form (14). John tells us, as Jesus taught Nicodemus (Jn 3.1-14), that spiritual birth is not the result of a natural process but the result of a divine process; and is truly a miracle. God acts immediately,

through the Holy Spirit, to bring to life a spiritually dead person and adopts him into his household.

Invisible vs Visible – God’s essential nature cannot be seen directly by anyone other than God himself (Jn 1.18; Jn 6.46) since he is spirit (Jn 4.24; 1 Tim 1.17), and the light of his visible glory would immediately blind any person (1 Tim 6.16) without a miraculous intervention on God’s part (such as with Moses, Isaiah or in the Tabernacle). Yet, men can see God clearly, in Jesus. Through the incarnation⁶ God, in Jesus, dwelt temporarily on earth, and continues to be visible to the saints in Heaven. It is a mistake to think that when men look at Jesus they see only a man. They see God revealing his nature. John names grace and truth as attributes that summarize the revelation of God in Jesus, rather than the splendor of miracles. He does this to show the purpose of the Word—to give us the revelation of salvation.

Greater vs Lesser – Jesus was born after John the Baptist, and his ministry began about a year later. Yet John says that Jesus was before him. He speaks of Jesus’ pre-existence and superiority, thus reinforcing the message of the Gospel of John—Jesus is both eternal and God (Jn 1.1-2). John was a great prophet (Mt 11.11) and the equal of Moses and Elijah, but he was only a messenger sent to announce the greatest prophet, the living Word, Jesus.

Grace vs Law – Not only is Jesus superior to John, but also to Moses (Heb 3.1-6), the revered prophet of the Jews. Moses could only announce God’s requirements (the Law) and provide ‘grace’ in the OT ceremonial figures. Jesus taught the true application of God’s Law (Mt 5-7) and, as the fullness of God (Col 1.19), was able to keep the Law perfectly and overcome its curse. So he is able to dispense grace upon grace. God’s favour toward his people comes as one blessing after another, like waves washing upon the shore: the blessing of salvation (Titus 2.11), removal of the curse and terror of punishment under the Law (Rom 5.20, 21), and his eternal love (2 Jn 3).

⁶ God did not just take on human form; he became a true man—“the Word *became* flesh.” Jesus added a human nature to his divine nature (Phil 2.5-8).

Baptism and Temptation

Jesus' Baptism by John [January 29]

(Bethany, east of Jordan River, Spring 29 AD. Mt 3.13-17; Mk 1.9-11; Lk 3.21-22)

Jesus began his public ministry with an ‘explosion’ as Heaven was ‘torn open’. In this ‘explosion’ he was anointed (baptized) as were the prophets, priests, and kings who preceded him. But his anointing was unique because it consisted of two parts and used different elements. He was baptized with **water** and with the **Spirit**.

Oil was the common single element used for anointing throughout the years. Why then was Jesus anointed with both water and the Spirit? I think that these two elements were used in the baptism to provide the following contrasts:

- **Identity and Innocence**—Jesus came to earth to identify himself with those who needed cleansing from sin. He showed his identification with us by taking on himself a sign of cleansing. His baptism with water identified him as among those who were recognized by John as being morally prepared for the kingdom. John’s baptism presupposed repentance (Mt 3.7, 8) Jesus identified himself with man’s sin and failure (2 Cor 5.21). But by doing this, he did not take part in the sin which was signified by the cleansing.

To show his unique and complete innocence he was also baptized by the Holy Spirit coming in the form of a dove—the sign of gentleness, purity, and guilelessness (see, Mt 10.16). Is it any wonder that the world uses the dove as its symbol of peace? It was the sign of peace for Noah and here for Christ.

- **Completion vs Commencement**—Jesus came to “fulfil all righteousness.” He came to earth to obey the law in its entirety so that he could bring to an end the era of types and shadows—he was their

substance. His baptism with water accompanied by the voice of blessing from Heaven was an indication that the former sign of the covenant (circumcision) was completed and that a new sign was commencing (water baptism). The old anointing rites that used oil as the sign of initiation seem also to be at end with the substitution of water. These changes seems to indicate that baptism symbolises at least two things: cleansing (a replacement for the cutting away of circumcision) and initiation.

His anointing by the Holy Spirit also showed the completion of the old era, the era of the prophets. John was the last of the prophets in the OT model. Jesus brought in the new prophetic age, in which he is the supreme prophet. The Holy Spirit came to equip Jesus for his prophetic office (compare, Judges 3.10; Judges 6.34; Judges 11.29; Judges 14.6, 19; 1 Sam 16.13) and to announce the commencement of Christ's public ministry (Jn 1.31; Acts 1.21-22; Acts 10.37-38). The Holy Spirit replaced the oil of anointing.

Jesus walked on the edge between two worlds as the God-man. His baptism provides us with three lessons. It:

- 1) **Demonstrates that salvation is the work of the Trinity**—At the baptism we find the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father speaks and commissions, the Son is baptized and sent, and the Holy Spirit endows and empowers as he descends on the Son. This shows that the Father planned the work of salvation, the Son carried it out, and the Holy Spirit worked to bring it to completion. So like Jesus, we are baptized in the Triune God—in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- 2) **Reminds us of our need for both confession and conversion**—We cannot come to God unless we have been washed from our sins—through confession. But we cannot come to God in confession unless the Spirit draws us forward—through conversion.
- 3) **Provides an example to his followers**—We, like Jesus, need to have

the sign of the covenant placed upon us. We are to identify ourselves with the people of God who have repented of their sins and have been made innocent in Christ.

4)

A Voice from Heaven [January 30]

(Bethany, east of the Jordan River, Spring 29 AD. Mt 3.16-17; Mk 1.10-11; Lk 3.21-22)

As Jesus came up from the water, he was praying. He was communicating with his Father, and his Father answered him in an extraordinary way. He spoke not through the written word or through an inner voice, but in a voice from Heaven which all present could hear.

It is a rare and special event when a voice comes from Heaven, the abode of God. For a voice from Heaven **is** the voice of God. In the OT God's voice came from Heaven at very significant points in the history of redemption; for example, at creation (Gen 1.3, 6, etc.), when the Ten Commandments were given on Mt Sinai (Ex 19.19; Dt 4.33, 36), or at the commissioning of a great prophet like Ezekiel (Ezk 1.25, 28; Ezk 2.1, 2).

But this time the voice from Heaven told the people that a greater than Moses and a greater than Ezekiel was in their midst. It told of one who was the God-man. It came to communicate to **us** an unfathomable mystery, the mystery of the Trinity. Until this time the tri-unity of God was revealed only in dark shadows. There are only a few hints in the OT of the nature of the Godhead. But on this day, beside the Jordan, Heaven was opened and the Trinity shone forth, with the voice of God the Father, with the bodily presence of God the Son, and with the blessing of God the Holy Spirit poured out on the Son. We now say with the *Athanasian Creed*: "And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal."

In this manifestation of the Trinity, the relationship among the persons of

the Trinity was communicated more fully than ever before. The Godhead was revealed to us as being a relationship of

- family connection and kinship,
- a nature similar to that which we find between a father and a son,
- love, mutual respect and admiration,
- unity of purpose and mission,
- authority, subordination and commission, and
- obedience, with the purpose of pleasing another.

This voice also came as a multifold sign to the Son:

- It told him that his prayer had been heard.
- It announced that his work had officially begun.
- It promised that his work and service would be blessed by the Spirit.
- It was a fulfilment of prophecy (e.g., Ps 2.7, 8; Is 42.1).

Someday a voice from Heaven will ring out one last time over this earth. It will call out to those who have placed their hope in Jesus. It will be the voice of the father saying: “well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”

This voice will communicate to us an unfathomable mystery. It will tell of a relationship between us and God, of a family connection. It will tell us that he is pleased to become forever our father, and it will tell us that we will be forever the brothers and sisters of Jesus his son.

This voice will also be to us a sign—a sign that our prayers have been heard, that one phase of our work has ended and another has begun, that we will be eternally blessed, and that all the promises of Scripture will be fulfilled completely for us. Praise God!

Jesus’ Temptation in the Desert [January 31]
(Judea, Winter 30 AD. Mt 4.1-11; Mk 1.12-13; Lk 4.1-13)

God himself does not tempt anyone. This is what the Bible teaches. He does, however, lead us into the way of temptation to test the sincerity of our faith in him. This is why we are to pray the words: “Lead us not into temptation.”

But when temptation does come your way, remember that this is not unique to your situation. Everyone of us is led into temptation, and so was Jesus. We are told that the Holy Spirit himself led Jesus into the Judean desert to be tempted by the Devil.

Have you seen pictures of this desert? The pictures show how lonely a place it is. But the pictures cannot give us a true indication of the experience of Jesus. The night sounds of the lions and jackals that inhabited that place are almost gone. The desert is a safer place today. Again, we cannot grasp his experience fully. A healthy stranger today who was left in the Judean desert could walk to safety in less than eight hours from almost any remote spot.

We cannot really understand the situation of Jesus because nothing near the severity of his temptation has faced us. Do not misread these verses. He was not tempted just three times. He was tempted by Satan himself, the great Tempter, for 40 days! The temptations of which we read are only the last three. Again, we cannot understand what it was like, for Jesus had had nothing to eat for 40 days. You and I have never gone without food for that long. Add this to the loneliness—the fearful sounds at night and the constant harassment by the devil. Here you have a grim picture.

While in this state, Jesus was tempted with the three great temptations. One addressed his hunger, another his fear, and a third his loneliness. Succumbing to the first temptation would provide pleasure, the second power and the third, popularity—he could take a shortcut to world dominion, avoiding the cross, by worshipping Satan rather than God.

The temptations came in the form of questions. This is the same technique that Satan used with our first parents. And this is how he continues to tempt us today. He challenges our belief system and faith by asking

questions. He does not doubt the truthfulness of the things he asks. He knows they are true. He wants us to doubt them: “Did God really say ...”, “If you are a Christian ...”

Notice how Jesus responded! In each instance he quoted from the Bible. And notice that it is from the Old Testament, from the Law books given through Moses, that he quoted (all of Jesus’ quotations are from Deuteronomy). How many Christians today would run to the OT Mosaic law to fight temptation? OT? Moses? Law? What relevance do they have for the Christian living in the NT age of grace? Jesus tells us. The Law is the vaccination against temptation. It is the Moral Law of God that shows us what sin is, it is the Law which reminds us to obey, and it is the Law which challenges us to obey. Christ defeated Satan with a weapon that is at every Christian’s disposal—the Word, the Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6.17). Every true Christian (Jew or Gentile) lives on the words that come from the mouth of God.

Jesus showed in this temptation experience what kind of Messiah he really is. He went to this temptation to demonstrate that sin can be defeated. His forty days in the desert remind us of Israel’s forty years in the desert, which God tells us was a test of their obedience (compare Dt 8.1-5). The Israelites were given food from Heaven, their clothes did not wear out and they had the company of a vast multitude. They really did not have any needs, yet they failed the test and sinned often against God.

Jesus, in contrast, did not use his eternal powers to satisfy his own needs or to win a large following. He struggled patiently with temptation and he resisted it to the end. The failure of mankind in the desert has become the triumph of the new man—in the desert. He demonstrated that he was qualified to be our saviour and model.

We can have confidence that we can overcome temptation through Jesus’ help (Heb 2.18; Heb 4.14-16). He has faced real temptation and has conquered temptation and sin, and so can we!

The Witness of John—to Himself [February 1]
(Bethany, east of the Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.19-28)

The Jews of Jerusalem (probably the Sanhedrin) sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. In their opinion he was an unauthorized teacher. This is typical of the Church hierarchy in every age—they feel threatened by ‘unauthorized’ teachers and persecute or harass anyone proclaiming the truth, whom they have not authorized through **their** system of initiation. Well-documented examples include the persecution of the Lollards sent out by Wycliffe and the imprisonment of John Bunyan for preaching without a licence from the established Church of England.

But John was quick to confess that he wasn’t really a teacher in their model. His answers are a string of denials. He gives the Jews no positive statement to put in their report about who he was. Notice the sharpness and the curtness of his responses. He told them that he wasn’t the Christ, Elijah returned from the dead as the Jews were expecting, or the prophet who was to come in the likeness of Moses (Dt 18.15, 18). He said that he was just a voice, not the Word.

The rabbis of that day were primarily concerned with setting out rules for men to follow (compare Luke 11.46) and not with helping them find salvation. John wasn’t a teacher in this sense; so his answer was correct. His primary purpose was not to teach ethics but to point men to Jesus; secondarily, to call them to repentance; and then, thirdly, to point out the way of righteousness.

Is it possible that this provides a lesson in balance for us? Should we follow this example in our discussions with those who do not know Jesus? Should we start with all the exact conditions of the law? Or should we point them to Jesus, call them to repentance for their sin, and, only then, educate them in the details of holiness? It seems to take time and gentle persuasion for an ex-pagan to gain a Biblical perspective and come to understand all that God expects of him. We may be too harsh on new-born Christians if we expect them to have an immediate full-orbed understanding of all aspects of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, Sabbath

keeping, Reformed worship, etc.

Even as John tells the Jews what he was not, there is irony in his words. For Jesus tells us what he really was. He tells us that John came in the spirit of Elijah to fulfil the prophecy of Malachi 4.5 (compare Lk 1.17) and that he was not *just* a prophet, but more than a prophet (Lk 7.26).

Today there are some ministers who would want you to consider them to be a ‘Christ’ or ‘Prophet’ or ‘Moses’. They want to be considered as the ones anointed to be great spokesmen for God. The life of John provides a lesson here. John does not take any of these titles to himself. He does not usurp the place of Jesus who is the Christ and the great Prophet like Moses. Instead, John humbly points sinners to Jesus. Notice that he says that he was unworthy to unlace/untie the sandals of Jesus. This was a job the rabbis, the teachers of the law, gave only to their servants. John tells us that he was less than even a servant of the rabbis. Where is John’s attitude in the Church today?

This lesson doesn’t apply only to the leaders of the Church—it also applies to everyone who sits in the pews. It tells each of us what he should be like. We live in a desert—the great desert of materialistic humanism. We are not anointed as prophets. And yet, just like John, we can be voices calling in the desert, setting forth the way and calling people to the Lord. The imagery of Isaiah quoted by John shows one preparing a roadway by clearing away the obstacles. This should be our devotion in life—clearing away the obstacles of tradition, legalism, inconsistency, and parochialism which keep people from being directed to Jesus.

The Witness of John—to Jesus the *Lamb of God* [February 2] (Bethany, east of the Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.29)

The next day, after John had denied that he was the Christ or Elijah, or the Prophet (like Moses) who was to come, he saw Jesus coming toward him and said to those who were with him at the river: “Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

This expression of John is one that has been used a lot in sermons, hymns, and Christian writings over the centuries. It will often be heard at communion or in sermons preached during the period called Easter. I am sure that whenever preachers or writers use this expression, they use it thinking that they and we know what it means. But do they, and do we?

Considering how often it is used today outside of the Bible, it is surprising to discover that this expression occurs only twice in the Bible: here (in verse 29) and in verse 36 where John (the following day) refers to Christ who was passing by. The expression ‘lamb of God’ does not appear in the OT; so we cannot turn there for an explanation. Nor, apparently, is it found in any other Jewish writing known to scholars.

It is true that Paul refers to Christ as “our Passover lamb” (1 Cor 5.7), and that Peter refers to him as a lamb without defect (1 Pt 1.19), and also that the Revelation tells us that John saw the Lamb in Heaven. But John the Baptist alone, in the Biblical record, refers to Jesus as the ‘lamb of God’.

Other expressions are used far more frequently in the Bible to refer to Jesus. These include: Son of God, Lord, Messiah, Son of Man. We can find the meaning of these expressions by comparing Scripture with Scripture. But we have no direct usages with which to compare John’s words. So then, what does ‘lamb of God’ mean? What did John want to tell those who were listening to him (and to tell us) when he used these words?

He could have been thinking of a lamb led to slaughter (e.g., Is 53.7 or Jer 11.19), but in this context there is nothing to indicate that the lamb was to be a sacrificial lamb to **take away sin**. The image in Isaiah is of a helpless animal being led away for shearing or for any kind of slaughter (not ceremonial or sacrificial). The image of a sheep is also used in the Isaiah passage to refer to those who went astray in sin (Is 53.6). So, we must be careful not to impose meaning on a passage which is not clearly there.

John could have been alluding to the experience of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22.1-24). Isaac asked about the missing lamb for the sacrifice.

Abraham replied (prophetically) that God himself would provide the lamb. This account teaches a total consecration and obedience, and may hint at the divine initiative in providing a substitute. But again, there is nothing in the context which speaks of a covering or removal of sin. And the lamb of God of whom John spoke was to **take away sin**.

Could John be telling us that Jesus was to be the Passover lamb? Possibly. But would John have understood this from the OT, since the Passover lamb was not sacrificed to **take away sin** as were some of the sacrifices in the Levitical system. In the OT, the Passover lamb seems to have been a sign or token of covering or protection, but not of the removal of sin.

Possibly he was thinking of a cleansing- or trespass-offering which could be a lamb (e.g., Lev 14.10, 24). This is certainly a strong possibility, but again the direct indication of removal of sin (as in the case of the scapegoat) is not given in the context.

Where the image of a lamb taking away sin comes from is not clear. There is no clear OT example, nor is it clear that John had a single OT example in mind. This leads me to think that John was speaking as a true prophet. He gave **new** revelation from Heaven. He was telling his hearers, and showing us, that Jesus was the culmination of many different symbols used in the OT. John's revelation was of a composite image, evoking memories of several OT passages: the Messiah would be a perfect lamb without blemish and with no guilt of his own, who would be led to the slaughter to be a substitute for us (as the ram was for Isaac). This slaughter was to take place at the Passover, but it would do more than protect us from God's wrath—it would actually remove sin forever.

The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would come to set up an earthly kingdom and redeem them from foreign control. What a strange announcement of their Messiah this must have seemed: "Behold the lamb of God." But Jesus came for a different purpose—he came to be a special sacrifice and to redeem the world from the dominion of sin, and thereby to set up an eternal kingdom. On the Lord's Day, the memorial of the resurrection, let us behold Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away our sin!

The Witness of John—to Jesus [February 3]
(Bethany, east of the Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.29-34)

John saw Jesus coming toward him and announced (like a herald before a king) the presence of the anointed one. But before Jesus could take up his throne, he first had to be anointed as a perfect sacrificial lamb, without blemish and with no guilt of his own. John in his pronouncement indicated that this ‘lamb’ would be led to the slaughter to be a substitute for us (as the ram was for Isaac). This slaughter would take place at the time of the Passover, but it would do more than protect us from God’s wrath—it would actually remove sin forever.

John then spoke of the greatness of the one who was approaching, saying that he surpassed him because he was before him. Jesus was born after John, and his ministry began after John’s. How then could Jesus, who came **after** John, be **before** him? The word ‘before’ can have a temporal meaning (i.e., before in time) and can refer to an order of precedence (i.e., one above another). It is not immediately clear which John means here. Notice that John uses an expression similar to that which Jesus himself used later in his ministry (Jn 8.58). Even so, with the use of the word ‘surpass’, it seems that John is speaking of the importance of Jesus rather than of his eternal nature.

John says that he did not know Jesus. What does he mean? It is likely, although they were probably cousins, that John did not know Jesus personally before this time. It is also likely that John wasn’t entirely sure that Jesus was the **only** one who was to come (the prophet, priest and king). There seemed to be doubt in his mind even after his own ministry had drawn to an end (Lk 7.19). But there does not seem to be any doubt in his mind that Jesus was to be the promised saviour—the ‘son of God’, ‘God with us’. He tells his hearers that it was the sign from Heaven that had convinced him of this. He knew who Jesus was because he had seen the Spirit (as a dove) come from Heaven and descend on Jesus. This special sign had authenticated Jesus’ ministry.

We are 2,000 years removed from this event, but on the reliable account of an eye witness we are expected to listen to him and look to the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. Look to Jesus, your only saviour!

John also gives the reason for his baptism: “that he might be revealed to Israel.” John’s Baptism is called a ‘baptism of repentance’ (Luke 3.3) since he called for repentance from those who came to hear his preaching. But he himself emphasizes the objective aspect of his baptism (the revelation of Jesus) over the subjective aspect (repentance on the part of his hearers). This declaration of John provides guidance for us.

Much is said today about what is considered to be politically correct language and behaviour (e.g., Christless ‘prayer’, acceptance of homosexuality as ‘normal’ and the minimization of gender distinctions). According to our pluralistic culture, religion (at least Christianity!) is to be kept behind closed doors and is not to be brought into business, schools, politics, science, or entertainment. Religion is to be a subjective personal experience. Sadly, the modern evangelical Church has swallowed this lure and is now being reeled in by paganism. It has accepted the ‘party line’ and agrees that Jesus has not been crowned Lord of the nations.

There is no question that Christianity has a subjective aspect to it. You personally must be born again. Without this you are not a Christian. But Christianity is more than the personal experience of scattered believers. It is the proclamation that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and that at his name **every** knee must bow. John’s comment about his baptism teaches us that the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world should be among our primary objectives as one of his congregations.

Beginning of Jesus’ Public Ministry

Jesus’ First Disciples (Part 1) [February 4] **(Bethany, east of Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.35-39)**

For a second time John announced the coming of the Lamb of God. This time, two of his own disciples heard the announcement and began to

follow Jesus. Think how you would feel in a situation like this, if you had been a teacher building a following and suddenly some of your followers went off after another teacher. John displayed a good example of that spirit of humility which should be displayed in all of us (Phil 2.3, 4), for he could say: “he must become greater; I must become less.” (Jn 3.30) He shows us what true greatness really is—it is the ability to put aside our own selfish desires in order to point people to the Saviour.

There is no indication that Jesus personally called these disciples. This account is not speaking of the calling of the Apostles (e.g., Mk 1.16-20) because that event occurred after John was put into prison (Mk 1.14), although it is probably not a coincidence that these first disciples happen to be included among those who later became Apostles, since they show their willingness to accept the Messiah upon first encounter. Was this the way it was for you on your first encounter with Jesus—a willingness to accept him as the anointed king?

It appears that these disciples followed Jesus of their own desire. They believed immediately that he was the Messiah when he was displayed to them by the proclamation of John. We should consider how hard and cold so many are who attend evangelical churches for years, who hear the same proclamation “Look, the Lamb of God,” and yet go on following worldly teachers. Make sure that this hardness is not found in your heart when you hear Jesus proclaimed to you today!

The word ‘follow’ in the Greek is in a tense which means a complete and total following. It wasn’t as if they walked along with Jesus for a little while, to return to John later. They went over completely to Jesus, committing themselves to him. Notice also that they called Jesus ‘Rabbi’, which to the Jewish mind meant more than just a *teacher*. To us, a teacher is just one from whom we can learn something and then forget the person who taught us. But a Rabbi was much more. An equivalent concept, popular in the late 20th century, was embodied in the term *guru*. We need to learn from the example of these disciples and follow Jesus, not just to learn a few more theological facts but to learn to live like him. Jesus should become our ‘guru’, and we should become totally committed to his

teaching and way of life.

Jesus turned and asked the two disciples of John what they wanted. They asked him where he was *staying*. This seems to be a funny question to ask. But they were asking more than where he was going to sleep for the night. They were probably enquiring about the location of his school. They wanted to attach themselves to his academy. His academy today is the Church. Disciples of Jesus today have a similar obligation to ask “where are you staying” and to seek out the congregation which is most faithful in teaching everything he has commanded.

Jesus responded to their request by saying ‘Come and you will see’. He probably wasn’t just telling them that they would see the house in which he would sleep. Jesus often used expressions like this to refer to spiritual sight. He may have intended this statement to have a double meaning. The second meaning could be something like: ‘come with me, follow me, and you will be given insight into spiritual things.’ Whether or not he actually meant the statement that way, this is in fact what happened. The disciples went with him about 10:00 a.m. (by Roman reckoning, or possibly 4:00 p.m. by Jewish reckoning) and then spent the remainder of the day, and probably much of the night, learning spiritual truths from him. It was the next day, after having listened to the teaching of Jesus, that Andrew went in search of his brother. It is Jesus alone who can give us the spiritual sight that we need!

Jesus’ First Disciples (Part 2) [February 5] **(Bethany, east of Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.40-42)**

Andrew was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who followed Jesus after John had declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God. The Apostle John (the one who wrote this account) was probably the other disciple. These two spent an evening learning from Jesus and discovering that he was the Messiah promised to Israel. The next morning the first thing that Andrew did was find his brother Simon and tell him that they had found the Messiah (Christ). Then he brought Simon to Jesus. This account provides us with an example of how we should begin in our personal

proclamation of Jesus Christ. The mission field for everyone of us should begin with our own relatives, then it should extend to our neighbours and surrounding community, and **then** to the ends of the earth.

John tells us that Andrew went in search of Simon **Peter**. When he wrote the Gospel he was looking back a number of years and referred to Simon by the name which would be familiar to his readers. In the historical account Simon had not yet been named Peter, but this was the name by which he was known to the Church. His new name had become so intimately associated with him that he was probably not well known as Simon, and John had to clarify the account by telling his readers who this Simon was.

What's in a name? Not much, according to Juliet standing at the garden window and speaking of Romeo. But this is not how God sees it. A name is more than just a label for a person. It is more than an arbitrary number like a Social Insurance Number. A name summarizes the essence of the person. God himself shows the importance of his own name when he speaks to Moses out of the burning bush and reveals himself by his special name—Jehovah. He also tells us how important his name is when he says that we are not to misuse his name (Ex 20.7).

But it is not just the name of God that is important. The names of his people are also important. He showed this when he gave Abram, Sarai and Jacob their new names. These names were given in special circumstances. In Abraham's case it was when the covenant of circumcision was given (Gen 17.1-14), and in Israel's case his name was given to him when he wrestled with God (Gen 32.22-32). A new relationship, a new life, a new name!

Jesus put himself in the place of the covenant making God when he continued this tradition by giving Simon a new name. He also indicated that the calling of the first disciples was a significant event in the history of redemption—as significant as the calling of Abraham.

It is worthy of note that the name which Jesus gave to Simon was Cephas

(in the Aramaic), or Peter (in the Greek). You have probably heard that this name means ‘rock’. Jesus knew the character of Peter, or at least what it would become. He knew him to be a rock. Is there irony in this? During Christ’s ministry on earth, Peter seems to be, among the disciples, the one who is the least like a rock. His apparent impulsiveness and unstable character, and his denial of Jesus, are anything but rock-like. Yet it was Peter who made the profound confession that Jesus was the Christ, and he is the one who became a pillar of the Jerusalem Church. Jesus knew what he was going to do with Peter. The naming of Peter teaches us that we should not judge a person (especially a fellow believer) exclusively by his **present** character.

Just like Peter, each believer will be given a new name: “To him who overcomes ... I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” (Rev 2.17) Each of us has been brought into a new relationship and given a new life, and given a new name. Just like Simon, God is perfecting his work within each one of us, to make us *Peters* in his Church. So each of us must continue to work together and accept the fact that the character of our brothers and sisters will not be perfect (but is *being* perfected) until we all reach glory.

The Calling of Philip and Nathaniel [February 6] **(Bethany, east of Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.43-46)**

Have you heard the latest Newfie joke? No, I am not going to tell a joke here. But my question makes a point by way of comparison. If you’d lived in Judea in 30 AD. you might have heard jokes like “How many Galileans does it take to grind grain?” Those living in Galilee in Jesus’ day were thought of like many in Canada today think of those from Newfoundland, or Americans think of those from the Appalachians or Ozarks (hillbillies) or some in the Scottish lowlands think of people from the Hebrides.

The Jews in the south looked down on those from the north and despised the province of fishermen and sheep farmers with the distinct accent (Mt 26.73). The ‘cultural elite’ of the south couldn’t imagine that anything of significance could come out of the ‘Newfoundland’ of Israel.

This is probably one reason for why Nathaniel says: “Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” [Note the irony: Nathaniel himself was a Galilean, and yet Jesus declared him to be ‘good’ (Jn 1.47)]. He may have been conditioned by years of rivalry among the various settlements in Galilee. He probably also expected that the Messiah would come from Judea (Bethlehem of David) and was surprised to hear that he was from the north.

The surprise of Nathaniel provides us with at least two lessons:

- 1) We must not try to force-fit the work of God into a box of our own mental model and traditions. Too often the Church, especially the Presbyterian and Reformed wing, thinks that it has the final answers on how God must act in history. We may be missing out on opportunities to witness and to have an impact on our culture because we are not open to the reality that God works in diverse, and often unexpected, ways (Is 55.8-11; Heb 1.1).
- 2) We must examine the ways in which we have been influenced to accept the traditions of our church context. Nathaniel may have absorbed the popular view of his peers, which despised the Galileans. Have we in similar fashion absorbed a false view? For example: What is our attitude to those who don’t come from the same background as us? How ready are we to help those in need who have suffered the effects of their sin—like AIDS?

Nathaniel’s reaction is recorded in the context of Jesus calling two additional disciples. On the way north to Galilee Jesus found Philip. I don’t think that this means that he stumbled onto him in an accidental meeting. Rather, it seems more likely that this was a deliberate and personal action from Jesus, just as later Philip went and found Nathaniel (45). It seems that Philip was not a total stranger to Jesus, for the family of Jesus appears to have been known to Philip and Nathaniel since Philip refers to Jesus as from Nazareth, and as the son of Joseph (45) as if to identify which particular Jesus (a fairly common name in its Hebrew form

‘Joshua’) he was speaking of.

Joseph of course was the legal father of Jesus, and it is quite likely that he was known to those in Bethsaida. The two villages were about 30 km apart (about the distance across Metropolitan Toronto) and undoubtedly had some communication with each other. Joseph may have travelled to Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee to carry on trade, and Jesus may have gone with him during the years of his youth.

Whether or not Jesus was known personally to Philip and Nathaniel, it appears that this is the first instance during the earthly ministry of Jesus where he fulfils the prophecy of Ezekiel: “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep ...” (Ezk 34.11)

Philip in turn went and found Nathaniel. This is the second example of evangelism beginning at home with a relative (compare 2.41). It provides a lesson for us. We, as parents, must ensure that we are adequately encouraging our children to come to believe in Jesus, and all of us must be presenting Jesus to those in our families who do not know Christ. Jesus took the initiative, and so did Philip. So also should we.

And notice how Philip presented Christ (the Messiah). He didn’t try to convince Nathaniel by argument. Philip’s response to Nathaniel’s question was a simple statement: “Come and see.” This should be a key to our way of leading our relatives and friends to Jesus. We should tell them: “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law [the Prophet], and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And then we should invite them to come and see.

Where would you take your relatives and friends to see Jesus? You can’t take them to meet him in body, as he is currently in Heaven. But your life should be a signpost to unbelievers, pointing them to Christ. Can they come and see Jesus living in us and in the body of believers in our congregation?

The Introduction of Nathaniel to Jesus (Part 1) [February 7]
(Bethany, east of Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.47-49)

Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching and said: “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” This is Jesus’ testimony to a **man**—a man like Job who was righteous, or like David who was dear to the heart of God, or like Enoch who walked with God. But the words of Jesus must not be misunderstood. He is not saying that Nathaniel was without sin; rather, he is saying that Nathaniel had a principle of eternal life indwelling him. He had been possessed by the Holy Spirit and was a true believer.

Why does Jesus use the adjective ‘true’? If he had just said ‘Israelite’ this would have added nothing. Almost everyone around him was an Israelite. He used the word ‘true’ because he was speaking of the heart of Nathaniel out of which proceeded the faith by which he believed in the one and only God and in his one and only son the Messiah, who was to save Israel. Paul tells us that not all those who are descended from Israel are Israelites (Rom 9.6). So Nathaniel was more than just an outward Jew, with the sign of circumcision. He was a true Jew.

Does the adjective ‘true’ apply to us? I know that today there are very few people who go to church just for appearance’s sake. But I also know that we live in an age of tremendous shallowness. Without doubt there are some (possibly many) of the people who make their plodding way to their pew every Sunday who in their hearts are nothing more than false Christians. Why anyone would put on such a pretence I cannot understand, but I have to accept it as a fact. There are probably hypocrites and ‘pharisees’ in every assembly of believers—and, possibly, even in our congregation. Our personal prayer should be that each one of us would be a true Israelite.

How can you be known to God as a true Israelite? It is not purely by showing up in this place of assembly on Sunday mornings. It is by being seen by God under your ‘fig tree’ day by day. The fig tree provided a quiet, shady spot. It was there that people in the middle east often went for their time of quiet reflection and religious meditation. Today, some would

call this time ‘private devotions’ or ‘quiet time’. It is here that true religion **begins**—behind the closed door, meeting with God in a time of prayer and Bible reading. It is not public religion, but private, which must come first. But it is not here that true religion **ends**! True religion goes out to find Jesus and to follow him, just as Nathaniel did.

Notice that when Nathaniel first approached Jesus there may have been some doubt about whom he was coming to see. He doesn’t seem to be even a little surprised when Jesus referred to him as being without falsehood. There was no false humility on his part. He knew that he was a true believer and accepted the words that he was ‘faultless’ as a true statement of his standing before God. He just wanted to know how Jesus knew his standing. To this point, he approached Jesus as he would have any man.

But Jesus, without giving a direct answer, shows Nathaniel that he wasn’t dealing with a mere man. Jesus doesn’t tell him that he could read the hearts of men. Rather, he tells him that he had seen him in prayer. This could not have been discerned by mere human knowledge. The divine nature shows through. Here was one who could not be described by mere human terms.

At this, Nathaniel changes his attitude to Jesus. The very fact that he now addresses Jesus as Rabbi (Teacher) indicates a new respect. Those who were teachers in the first century Jewish context were those who, it was believed, had special authority and insight from God. They were the ones who, it was expected, proclaimed truth and were to be heeded. Nathaniel’s new respect for Jesus is shown further by his declaration that Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel.

It is interesting that these words were used at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as a public confession by a disciple. Although John had declared him to be the lamb of God and Peter called him the Messiah when he spoke to his brother, Nathaniel’s words appear to be the first public confession from a heart of belief. There is an unexpected irony in his words. Very similar words are used among the last public statements about

Jesus before his death. Pilate questioned him with respect to the term ‘son of God’ (Lk 22.70), and the ones passing by the cross mocked him with these words (Mt 27.40). And to compound the abuse, above his cross were the words ‘King of the Jews’ (Israel). From Nathaniel’s confession from the heart, to the words of scorn as he faces the infinite weight of God’s wrath against sin, Jesus is the Son of God, the King!

Nathaniel acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, the King. So must each one of us. It is from the secret room of prayer that we must come forth to make a public confession of who Jesus is. We must do this now, or we will be forced to make it before his judgment throne (Phil 2.10, 11). I hope that, for you, true religion does not end in secret. I hope that you will come forward and acknowledge Jesus as your own King!

The Introduction of Nathaniel to Jesus (Part 2) [February 8] **(Bethany, east of Jordan, Winter 30 AD. Jn 1.50-51)**

Jesus spoke to Nathaniel about his belief that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel. His confession resulted from Jesus’ seeing him under the fig tree. Nathaniel knew that Jesus probably did not see him with physical eyes, as his tree of meditation was likely hidden from the searching eyes of strangers. Nathaniel realized that it was by an extraordinary sight that Jesus had seen him. He knew that he had just been a witness of a ‘minor’ miracle. In similar manner, Jesus sees you today. His all-seeing eyes see all that you do. To what extent do his eyes see you in private worship and meditation under your ‘fig tree’? How often do they find you there? Does the knowledge of Jesus’ all-seeing eyes encourage you to believe in him?

But if Nathaniel thought that this sight was something amazing, Jesus assures him that he would see even greater things. This also can be your assurance.

What did Nathaniel see that was greater? He saw many great miracles as he accompanied Jesus during his ministry, beginning with the changing of the water into wine (see the next meditation). He saw greater things in the

death of Jesus on the cross, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension, and the growth of the church through the Mediterranean world. Finally, he saw the greatest things of all as he was ushered into Heaven by angels at his death.

Notice that the NIV footnote says that the word ‘you’ in the Greek is in the plural. Jesus is speaking in general to those present with Nathaniel and to all those who believe that he is the Son of God, the King of the Jews. Is Jesus speaking directly to you with these words? **You** yourself **will** see even greater things. You weren’t present to witness the ministry of Jesus or his resurrection. But if you are a believer, you will see him. And even now there are great things for you to see.

Jesus says that Heaven will be opened and the angels will be seen ascending and descending. Have you seen Heaven opened and the angels going up and down? Think about this question before you answer. Jesus saw Nathaniel with non-physical sight, and so he is probably referring to non-physical sight when he says that you also will see. Are you among the spiritual seed of Jacob (Gen 28.14), the true Israel? If so, then the promise of the stairway to Heaven that Jacob saw in his dream (Gen 28.12), is for you. With the eye of faith have you seen Heaven opened and the angels going up and down?

Consider some of the ways in which you can see Heaven opened today:

- **Prayer**—Prayer offered in the name of Jesus is a messenger (angel = messenger) which ascends to Heaven. Do you pray the prayer of faith which trusts God in all things? If so, Heaven is open to you.
- **Preaching**—A preacher is given, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a message from God to our souls. A true preacher is considered to be an angel of God (compare Rev 2.1) descending on Christ. Do you see Heaven opened when you listen to the preached word?
- **Purification**—When a person comes to believe in Jesus and repent of his sins, he is purified. His sins are washed away. His selfish pride is

brought into subjection to Jesus. He is given a new power to resist sin. And he begins to serve the Eternal King rather than a perishing creature. Among the angels there is rejoicing when Heaven is opened to receive a sinner. When was the last time you saw Heaven opened and shared in the joy of seeing a person become a Christian?

- **Passing**—Heaven is opened when a true believer dies. If his faith is strong, as he approaches death he looks forward to being with Jesus. In our anti-spiritual culture we don't hear as much about this kind of experience as was heard of in the times of the Puritans. But if you witness the passing of a man of faith, you will see Heaven opened and you will see the angels coming and going on the Son of Man as they carry the spirit of the believer into Heaven.

Heaven has been opened for us by the **Son of Man**. Heaven was closed to us by the **man**, Adam, and has been opened again by the Son of Man, Jesus, the Last Adam. In the Hebrew, *adam* is the word for man as well as being the name of the first man. Jesus can be understood as calling himself the Son of **Adam**. Jesus uses the self-designation Son of Man more than any other, I believe, to remind us that he is the promised seed of the woman who was to come to crush the head of Satan, and then to take his place as the one of whom Daniel speaks (Dan 7.13), who is given all authority, glory and sovereign power over all the nations of the earth, and whom all peoples worship.

Stephen saw Heaven open as he was dying. He looked through the eye of faith. Do you see beyond this life into eternity? A major failure of men today is to be so caught up with the here-and-now and to miss the there-and- then. Heaven is open now! Will it be open to you when you die?

Jesus' First Miracle: Water Becomes Wine [February 9] (Cana in Galilee, Winter 30 AD. Jn 2.1-11)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was probably assisting at a week-long wedding feast of one of her relatives. We can infer this since she 'was there' and had authority over the servants. Jesus and his disciples were invited to this

wedding. And, as we are told, it was on the very day that he came that they ran out of wine. This was no coincidence. It was planned by God to be the first event by which Jesus would demonstrate that he was the Messiah.

Jesus had not yet performed any miracles (11); so why did Mary approach him looking for a solution to the problem? It is possible that she believed he would have an answer since he had demonstrated wisdom over the years (Lk 2.52) and since she knew he was special because of the words of the angel (which she had treasured in her heart) and because of the miracle of her conception. She knew he was the Messiah and may have expected that one who was greater than Abraham, Moses, Elijah and David could solve this ‘simple’ problem.

Social convention held that one should not run out of wine at a wedding feast, and it permitted those invited to the feast to file a law suit against the host for failure to show hospitality. It is possible that Mary thought that Jesus would find a means of resolving the problem, or that he would speak wise words (as Solomon did about the prostitute’s baby) which would satisfy the guests and resolve the problem. Jesus did not do what she expected—he did more!

He turned to her and addressed her politely as ‘woman’ (there is nothing harsh about this word in the Greek (compare Mt 15.28; Lk 13.12; Jn 4.21; etc.). The NIV adds ‘dear’ to soften the apparent harshness of the English word. In his choice of this word there is profound significance:

- He did not address her as mother. This shows that he was no longer subject to her authority (compare Lk 2.51) but was now subject directly to a higher authority.
- It also shows that he was proclaiming that he was now the ‘son of Man’ (compare Jn 1.51), not just Mary’s son. He was now appearing as the seed of the woman (of Mary in one sense, but of Eve in another) and was now standing in the place of Adam. Here was the new Adam.

Since he showed that he was the Messiah, why then did he say that his time had not yet come? Because his primary purpose in coming to earth was to go to the cross and provide payment to God for sin, **not** to act as a

judge on earth (at this time), or to resolve problems and perform miracles, or even to teach the correct interpretation of the law. These were incidental aspects of his road to the cross. His time did not come during much of his ministry (compare Jn 7.6, 8, 30; Jn 8.20). His time finally came in the last week of his life (compare Jn 12.23, 27; Jn 13.1; Jn 16.32; Jn 17.1). With these words he was not speaking of his revelation of himself to Israel but of his purchasing redemption from sin.

So then why did he perform the miracle? The answer lies in three areas:

- To begin his progressive revelation of his identity—not to meet the need of the moment. The steward did not know where the wine had come from (Jn 2.9, 11) but his disciples did, and they put their faith in him.
- To declare himself as the promised final ‘sceptre’ of the wine prophecy of Jacob (Gen 49.11-12). Jesus is the true vine (Jn 15.1).
- To offer a sign that he would strip away the generations of tradition that had been imposed on the Church by the elders and replace it with the fresh energy of the Gospel. He used the water jars of the Jewish ceremonial rites of purification (compare Mk 7.1-4) and turned them into the source of a new-age wine. The old wine of Israel had failed, the wine of the new covenant had come—a better wine, a better washing (Gen 49.11), a better covenant, an eternal Jubilee.

We can apply this parable in action to our own situation:

- The servants were to bring only water. Jesus transformed that into the best wine. The duty is ours to obey with our faith and talents (to fill the jars with water); it is God’s to turn our obedience (the water) into wine. Repent and live in obedience!
- The best wine was kept for last. This is how God works. This life is like water compared to the wine of an eternity with Christ. Don’t miss out on the wine of Heaven by seeking only the water of this world!
- It teaches us that Jesus will take the common and make it special. With you and me he can take the mundane and turn it into the glorious—sin riddled bodies will be transformed into spiritual bodies. Hope in glory!
- There were great jars full to the brim with wine. There will be no shortage of wine (Gen 49.11) at the wedding supper of the lamb

(compare Mt 22.1-14; Rev 19.9). “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’.”

First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover [February 10] **(Jerusalem, Spring 30 AD. Jn 2.12-17)**

After turning the water into wine, Jesus stayed for a few days in Capernaum and then went down to Jerusalem for the Passover. He went down since all Jewish males were expected to go, if physically possible, to celebrate the Passover in the Temple where God made his presence known (Dt 16.16).

Since many of these men would have to travel from distant cities, it was common that they would carry money and buy their sacrificial offerings once they had arrived in Jerusalem. This is the reason that the merchants were selling cattle, sheep and doves, and changing money in the Temple courts. They were able to ‘justify’ their actions by the need. But the reality is that they were there not to help the pilgrims but to make money.

When Jesus arrived he made a whip and drove them from the Temple court, saying: “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” There are likely a number of reasons why he took this action. Each has a lesson for us:

- **They were selling their wares in the outer court**, the place in the Temple where Gentiles were allowed to enter. Jesus was unhappy that the place of prayer for the nations was being taken from them. How could they pray with all this going on? What kind of witness were the Jews to the true God? This reminds us that we must not let our agendas for what we think the Church should be get in the way of its outreach to the world. Many in the Church view it only as a place to meet their needs, in their ways, rather than also as a place where unbelievers can come to meet God.
- **They were adulterating the worship of God.** They were turning the House of Prayer into a market, which may have included the gossip and entertainment of the world. And today, Jesus says the same thing to the Church: “How dare you turn the place of worship into a market (a place

for worldly entertainment)?” The worship of God is to be interesting, but it is not to follow the entertainment practices of the world. Just because God does not judge the Church today for its false practices in the same way that Jesus did here does not mean that he is happy with the practices which have been introduced. There will be some very unhappy people when God arises in judgment over his Church.

- **The merchants were making their material gain more important than proper worship.** We should ask ourselves seriously if we prevent people from coming to worship God by the example of our striving for a ‘better lifestyle’ or for ‘personal peace and affluence’.

How effective was this cleansing of the Temple? From a human perspective, not very! This was the first time Jesus cleared out the merchants and their wares from the Temple, but it was not the last. In less than three years we see him back in the Temple (Mt 21.12-17) taking the very same action.

We who pride ourselves in being Reformed in doctrine, worship, and discipline need to learn a lesson from this. Just like in the Temple, wrong practices and motives can creep into the life of the Church very quickly. One of the principles of the great Reformation was that the Church must be reformed and always reforming. The Church will never be perfect while on this earth. But this offers us no excuse for not taking the responsibility to be continually making sure that all that goes on in the Church, or in the name of the Church, will bring glory to Christ.

This is not just a message to the ‘evangelical’ churches, but is also one to our own. It is important for us, in this congregation, to look regularly at every practice that we have and assess it against Scripture. If our practices cannot be supported by direct warrant from God, or if we are failing to practice what he has required, then we should change our practices. If we don’t, Jesus will make a whip and cast us out of his Church.

Jesus performed this cleansing because a zeal for God’s house consumed him (Ps 69.9). Does zeal for doing things in a Biblically-right manner consume us? How willing would we be to stand for truth in a situation like

this? Do we have this kind of passion for what we believe to be true? Too quickly we say things like: “But you can’t change this, it has been done this way for too long,” or “What difference does it make—we can’t have much impact when we are such a small congregation?” or “That isn’t how it’s done around here.”

What we need is more believers who are willing to fight for what they believe is Biblical, even to the point of upsetting the complacent Christians of our day. Randal Terry founder of Operation Rescue is an example of this spirit of zeal. We may not agree with his means, but we cannot deny that he is consumed with zeal for the cause of life. What would it take to see some of us consumed with a zeal like Jesus displayed? Who will show real zeal for the work of Christ and his Church?

The Jews Demand a Sign [February 11] **(Jerusalem, Spring 30 AD. Jn 2.18-22)**

The Jewish leaders realized that what Jesus had done in cleansing the Temple was a messianic action. So they did not claim that his actions were wrong. They knew that he had in fact done the right thing, whether or not they liked it. They also knew that the outer court of the Temple was not a place for the merchants to make money, but instead was to be kept as a place of prayer for the Gentiles. Rather than question him about the rightness of his action, they wanted to know who had given him the authority to do it. With their messianic expectations, they realized that God could and would provide signs and do miracles when the Messiah had come. So if a person such as Jesus was acting as if he were the Messiah, then they expected him to prove that he was the Messiah (compare 1 Cor 1.22). This is why they asked for a sign.

I don’t think that we should read into their question anything more than curiosity and an honest request. In this verse, the NIV may have over translated the Greek word for ‘asked’ by using the word ‘demanded’. Jesus had not yet challenged the position of the Jewish leaders or accused anyone of being a hypocrite. At this point the Jews in Jerusalem were unaware of who he was and were seriously wondering by what authority

he had performed this messianic action, and if he just might be the Messiah.

What they did not know was that just prior to this he had turned water into wine to provide a sign of his authority. This miracle showed that he had power over the elements of nature. But, more importantly, it was a sign with respect to his authority over the Church. It was a sign that he would strip away the generations of tradition imposed on the Church by the elders and would replace it with the fresh energy of the Gospel. In the cleansing of the Temple, he again demonstrated his authority over the Church.

Jesus didn't have to give anyone a sign. But since they asked, he agreed to give one. But notice the nature of this sign—it is a **future** sign, similar to the signs given to Moses (Ex 3.12) and Ahaz (Is 7.14). This is a peculiar way in which to give a sign. What people want is a sign **now**. Are you like some people who are reported to say: "If God shows me now by a sign that he is there, I will believe in him." You are not to tempt God. You have in the Bible many signs projected and fulfilled. Do you believe them?

The sign he gave was: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." As he gave the sign he may have been pointing to his own body, but the Jews missed this. They assumed that he was referring to the physical temple around them and did not realize that he was speaking of his body. They were blinded by their preconceived notions of reality. They thought it was absurd that any one would claim that he could build in three days what had taken over forty six years to build (this rebuilding project was started by Herod the Great before Jesus was born and was on-going almost to the time the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD).

There is irony in this—the very person who spoke these words was the same one who created the entire universe in six days. He certainly could build the Temple in three! But it was the temple of his body of which he spoke. We can derive a number of lessons from this sign:

- It is very unwise for us to assume that we know how God is going to work out his plans and to express concern when he acts in ways that we are not willing to accept because of our preconceptions. I find this to be

a key problem for many in churches which claim a Reformation heritage. They are excited about their origins, but they are not open to the possibility that their church structures and traditions could be in need of reform just as they were in Jesus' day.

- Those who claim to have the correct interpretation of prophecies about the future (especially about the millennium, the judgment, the resurrection, and the future life) had better be **very** careful about how they settle in. Everyone, including Jesus' disciples, misunderstood him. How is he misunderstood by men today, including us?
- This is a sign to those who hear and is a call to believe in what Jesus says about himself. If you are not a total sceptic, then you will see that at the beginning of his ministry, three years in advance of his death, he predicted his resurrection. This is clear evidence to the fact that the rest of what he says is worthy of serious consideration and acceptance.

It is sad to see that at the end of Jesus' life the crowds mock him with his very own words and repeat them as a charge to accuse him while he is on the cross (Mt 26.60, 61; Mt 27.40; Mk 14.56-59; Mk 15.29). It is amazing how they could remember these words but miss his words about sin and repentance and the need for belief in him. But his disciples came to believe (compare Jn 14.26), and so should we.

Early Believers [February 12] **(Jerusalem, Spring 30 AD. Jn 2.23-25)**

John tells us that during the Passover feast Jesus performed miracles. But he does not tell us what they were. Thus it is clear that all of his miracles are not recorded in the Bible. In fact, John tells us later that there were many other things that Jesus did that he had not written about in his account of the life of Jesus (Jn 20.30). From this we can derive three lessons for ourselves:

- We must not limit our understanding of Jesus' power. He is the one who created the entire universe and everything in it (Col 1.16) and certainly cannot be limited in his power to the 36 miracles recorded in Scripture (24 healings, nine controlling nature, and three raisings of the dead).

- Miracles were used primarily by Jesus as a sign to the Jews that he was the Messiah and only secondarily to provide assistance to those he helped (Jn 10.25, 38; Jn 14.11). Miracles themselves are not essential. We are not to expect miracles, especially this kind (i.e., healing miracles) today, since the Messiah has already come and has shown himself to be the one he says he is (Mt 12.39).
- We must remember that the Gospels provide all that we **need** to know about Jesus for faith and life. The Gospels are not to be understood as a biography of Jesus. They are given so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through him have life (Jn 20.31).

John says that many believed in Jesus because of the miracles. This is not a wrong reason for believing in him, but it is not the **best** reason. It is better to believe without having seen (Jn 20.29) and because of his words alone (Jn 14.11). He is truth personified, and we should believe the truth. We are not to look for evidences but are to accept his words in the Bible as truth.

Note that John says that **many** believed, in contrast with an earlier statement indicating that men did not believe (Jn 1.10). This shows that although some people will not believe the message of salvation, many will. Jesus began here to fill Heaven with a multitude that no one can number. At times we may despair at the apparent ineffectiveness of the Church and of the Gospel. But we must not! Jesus is building his Church, and many will be saved!

John says that they believed in his **name** (compare Jn 1.12). This means that they believed in **him**. In the Bible, a name often stands in the place of the person. This is why it is so wrong to misuse God's name (Ex 20.7). It is not just his name that is being blasphemed, it is also his very person. Do you hold sacred his name and believe in it? Do you believe in his person (as God-man), his holy life's work, his death and resurrection, and his visible return?

You do!? But will he entrust himself to you? Why would he not entrust himself to those early believers? What does John mean? It seems that Jesus knew that men, even true believers, could be fickle. Peter proved this later

when he denied Jesus, even after he had confessed truly and had spoken with great passion about being ready to go to death for the cause of the kingdom. You know your own heart. How willing are you to speak out for Jesus?

His hesitation to entrust himself to them shows that the motives of the early believers were probably tinged with much selfishness. They wanted physical healing and eternal salvation. They were believers, but their hearts and minds had not yet been educated to be useful as servants in Gospel-proclamation. They were ‘Heaven bound’ but not yet ‘Heaven profound’.

The training of the disciples took three years of careful preparation. The early Church applied this discipline in its catechumen classes. Young Christians are often very excited and quick to speak about their salvation experience, and they have a lot of energy and exuberance. As a result, some leaders in the Church often rush to give them opportunities to teach. But Paul says that we are not to bring them into teaching and leadership positions too quickly (1 Tim 5.22). Although there must be a balance in this. In the Presbyterian and Reformed churches there may be a tendency to hold back opportunities for service from the people far too long. This can quickly turn excited new Christians into ‘dead’ pew-fillers.

Jesus does not need the witness of any man today. The Bible (his word) alone can act as a testimony to him, and many are saved through reading it. This is one of the reasons why the Bible societies put such an emphasis on getting the Bible into people’s hands. But even though he does not need man’s testimony, he desires it today. Jesus has chosen to build his Church through the testimony of men. He uses this testimony to bring men to salvation and to educate them in the foundations of the truth.

Are you interested in Jesus **only** for personal salvation, or have you matured to be of service? Does Jesus entrust his testimony of himself to you?

Nicodemus Meets Jesus

Nicodemus Comes for an Interview with Jesus (Part 1)

[February 13]

(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.1-2a)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council (Sanhedrin); yet, surprisingly, he was interested in learning more about Jesus and appears to have become a believer (Jn 19.39). Some people make statements such as: “Not many scientists, or philosophers, or ... (substitute almost any group) ... believe in Jesus.” But what does this statement say? It appears that the majority of people (at least 90% of the population of the world at present, and at least 75% of the population of most countries) do not believe in Jesus. Therefore, most people do not believe. But the fact that so many educated, or uneducated, groups of people do not believe in Jesus does not prove a thing, other than that John’s words about Jesus are true (Jn 1.5, 10).

It is interesting that not all of the Pharisees were against Jesus. By the grace of God, some did believe. The Pharisees of all people may have had the farthest distance to travel when they came to believe. A blatant sinner such as a prostitute, drunkard, cocaine addict, homosexual, or murderer may find it easier to come to believe in Jesus than a person who is outwardly quite moral. Those who are involved in the most wicked sins are often aware that they are sinners and are breaking the law of God. They may be more willing to come to Jesus than a ‘pharisee’ because they have given up on their own righteousness. Charles Colson, who came to believe through his prison experience, tells of many who in their desperate state were open to salvation provided by Christ. It is the self-righteous of the world who are far from seeing their need of Christ or of repentance and faith in Jesus.

A Pharisee was one who practised all the outward aspects of the law carefully. But often his heart was not right with God. However, do not dismiss all Pharisees as unbelievers. There were probably some over the years from the time of Ezra to that of Christ who, with honest sincerity, were looking for the coming of the Messiah and were truly repentant of their sins before God and were therefore Christians. But in general, the

Pharisees were only interested in outward rites and were not interested in religion of the heart. I fear that today there are many in the Church who are following in the footsteps of the majority of the Pharisees. You find them in every denomination—Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Dutch Reformed, United Church, Anglican, and among Presbyterian.

The modern ‘pharisees’ are not necessarily as strict about their outward adherence to the law of God (for example, they may not care about keeping the fourth commandment), but they are just as sincere in their (false) belief that their outward life before God will be sufficient to bring them safely through the Judgment Day and make them right with God.

The reality is that there is no heart-religion in a pharisee. Heart religion is what God is looking for. He is looking for a heart that has been turned from stone to flesh. God is looking for hearts that are full of love to him. Jonathan Edwards, in his work *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, asks: “Who will deny that true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively acting’s of the *inclination* and *will* of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the *heart*?”

A key challenge of this meditation is for us to examine our hearts and to make sure that we are not functional pharisees. We will not be in Heaven if we go through this life assuming that our outward walk will pass the final test of the great Judgment Day conducted by the holy Judge.

Notice that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He may have come at that time to talk privately with Jesus, who during the day was surrounded by crowds. But it is more likely that he came at night because he was timid. (He **did** speak up in the Sanhedrin, Jn 7.50-52, but is it not recorded that he spoke in defense of Jesus at his trial.) I think that this may point to the biggest failing with most Christians. They are timid about coming to Jesus in the daylight and before the watching world. I don’t mean that they are afraid to let people know that they go to Church. But they are afraid of being seen truly in the company of Jesus.

When a fellow Christian asks them questions like: “What has God been

teaching you lately?”, “How did you grow spiritually today?”, or “How are you growing closer to Jesus?”, they squirm. In addition, there is a hesitation on the part of many Christians (myself included!) to speak at all times as a member of Jesus’ household. It is far easier to ‘come to Jesus by night’ than to challenge an unbeliever who is blaspheming God or committing other open sins. There is a tendency to ‘come to Jesus by night’ by skirting around moral issues, e.g., mentioning the social unsuitableness of certain actions or the personal consequences which may result, instead of speaking out about the holiness of God and his law, and the absolutes of God’s Law which make actions ultimately right or wrong. Let us pray that each one of us will be ‘daytime Christians’!

Nicodemus Comes for an Interview with Jesus (Part 2)

[February 14]

(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.1-2, 10)

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as *teacher*. First, he called him Rabbi (teacher) and then he confessed him to be a teacher from God. In turn, the great Teacher referred to Nicodemus as a teacher. In the midst of their dialogue about the most important teaching of all (the new birth), a great contrast is set before us: between the teachings of men and those of God, the doctrines of men and the doctrines of God, and the ‘light’ of men and that of God (e.g., Mt 15.9).

The confession of Nicodemus makes it clear that he had an appreciation for who Jesus really was—**the** teacher sent from God. As we have noted previously, Jesus did not come to earth specifically to perform miracles so that he could provide temporal advantages to the recipients. His miracles were performed as signs which pointed to who he was. We can see from the words of Nicodemus that Jesus had demonstrated that he was the promised Messiah who was to be the great prophet (Dt 18.15; Jn 6.14) who would explain all things (Jn 4.25). Nicodemus understood this to be the purpose of Jesus’ coming to earth, and he did not go to Jesus for temporal healing. He knew that Jesus was the teacher from God. In this, he had a profound understanding. Let us be like Nicodemus and accept Jesus as **the** teacher.

But if a person is referred to as a teacher, you may ask: “What does he teach?” So what does Jesus teach? Why is he **the** teacher? How does he differ from other teachers and from other ‘prophets’ who have arisen at many points in history? What is the great contrast that is set up in the dialogue with Nicodemus? Jesus is a unique teacher for the following reasons:

Message – The message of Jesus is like no other before or after it. The message comes across clearly as being absolutely unique. All other religions on earth have man, man’s worth, and man’s works as the focus of their message, and place man at the centre of their plans for ‘salvation’. But the Bible, as Jesus’ message—from “In the beginning ...” to “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”—is totally different. The theme is not man, but God—God’s worth and God’s works!

All other religions and philosophies, and science based on these views, have nothing more than relative ‘truth’. What today is ‘true’ may tomorrow be nothing more than a myth. In contrast, the message of Jesus is (to quote Dr. Francis Schaeffer) ‘true truth’. The truth of the Bible is not that of:

- Plato – the love of the ‘vision of truth’ or ‘Beauty is truth’
- Bacon – ultimate truth can be derived by reason **or** revelation
- Hegel – truth cannot be known unless it is known in its entirety
- Dewey – truth is proximate, determined by fact interacting with inquiry
- Empiricists – truth is conformity of ideas with perception of the senses
- Modern sceptics – truth is unknowable, to be sought but never found

The truth of Jesus is not just facts, such as the fact of the events of 1066, 1215, 1688, or 1867. The Bible is *fact*, but it is much more. Truth is ultimately based on God and his character, and is final, unchangeable, perfect and eternal. God is truth (Jn 16.13; 1 Jn 5.6). Yet this truth is knowable by proximate, changeable, defective, finite creatures (men). To know Jesus is to know truth. To read the Bible is to read truth. Read it!

Method – His method was not like that of other teachers. He was

masterful with the probing question. He did this better than Socrates (after whom this method is named). In the use of stories and parables he has no rival. Most ‘teachers’ (religious and secular) today seem to believe that effective learning is based on the Medieval Scholastic model—where an expert stands in front of passive learners and communicates knowledge. Jesus used questions, dialogue, problem setting, stories, imagery, sensory language, concrete examples, points of contact, and energy like no other teacher before or since. Emulate his example!

Measure – He taught with an authority that astounded his hearers (Mk 1.22, 27). Other teachers speak at best with a delegated authority. But the author of truth, the author of Scripture—the only God—could do nothing less than speak on his own absolute authority, and his words are not suggestions or good advice. They are moral absolutes. To ignore his authority is to court eternal condemnation. What other teacher has this authority? Hear him!

Means – The teaching of Jesus is like none other because of the application supplied by the Holy Spirit (Jn 16.8-15). All sincere teachers desire to have their students internalize their teachings and to apply what they have learned. What other teacher can claim the provision of the Holy Spirit beyond measure? We need the Holy Spirit to apply the teachings of the master. Ask for the Holy Spirit!

Who is your teacher? Is it Jesus? You can have no better.

Nicodemus and the New Birth (Part 1) [February 15] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.3-10)**

Jesus skips the formalities of an academic setting with Nicodemus and moves quickly to deal with an important point—the new birth. He tells him that he is telling the truth. Why would he say this? And why does he need to repeat this point? He says: *amen, amen* (Greek), or *truly, truly*, or *verily verily* (KJV), or *most assuredly* (NKJV), or *I tell you the truth* (NIV). Why this emphasis on his words which will follow? Clearly it is not because the truthfulness of Jesus’ words could ever be questioned.

In the previous meditation I pointed out that one aspect of Jesus' uniqueness as a teacher was the absolute truthfulness of his message. Here, it is as if Jesus uses this expression to set up a distinction between his teachings and those of the Pharisees. Their teaching is presented as truth, but his teaching is *true truth*.

The use of the repeated word 'truth' may be a form of the Hebrew way of speaking. When a Hebrew speaker or writer wanted to emphasize a point (a form of the superlative) he would often repeat the word he wished to emphasize. Where we would use an adjective, a Hebrew writer or speaker would often repeat his word. For example in Ex 21.12 the Hebrew says 'to die he must die', repeating the word *die*. English translations (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV) give the sense as 'he shall surely be put to death'. Or in Exodus 22.5 'to repay he must repay' is translated as 'he must [surely] make restitution'.

Jesus is warning Nicodemus that what he is going to say is of extraordinary importance. What can be more important than the subject of the new birth? No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (or 'reborn from above'). Jesus' use of *see* in this instance means to enter or experience the kingdom (see, v5), not just to have a vision of it. He is speaking of becoming a subject of the realm of God and experiencing the power of the kingdom.

But what does *born again* mean? These words do not appear in the OT (the closest parallels seem to be in passages such as Jer 31.31-34; Ezk 36.26-27; Joel 2.28-32). What Jesus says does not seem to be clear to Nicodemus who asks: "How can this be?" or more precisely "How can a man be born when he is old?" What Jesus says would not be clear to us either if we did not have the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to make it clear.

Nicodemus considered purely in physical terms what Jesus said. It seems that he did not understand (at this point) what Jesus was saying, because he was unwilling to let himself believe the full implication of its message. If he believed, he would have to become like a new born child and learn a

new teaching from a new teacher. So he put up a false front to avoid having to face the reality of what was being said by the great Teacher. Not liking the direction of the conversation, he chose to misunderstand so that he did not have to apply the message to himself. He was much like homosexuals, evolutionists and others today who **choose** (Rom 1.18-23) to misunderstand the Bible so that they can think that the Bible does not have moral implications for their lives, and so try to excuse themselves.

So Jesus goes on to explain that the new birth comes with “water and the Spirit.” This at first does not seem to make his teaching any clearer, and in fact needs some explanation. So he explains his figure of speech by contrasting physical birth as being of one kind (flesh gives birth to flesh) and spiritual birth as being of a different kind (from the Holy Spirit).

Jesus is not speaking to mystify. Rather, he is speaking to enlighten and teach. He uses figures of speech to **clarify**, and make concrete, difficult concepts. Jesus expected to be understood by Nicodemus (see verse 10), just as he expected to be understood when he used a similar figure of speech later in reference to bread and wine as being his body and blood. His figures of speech are clear. But at times men choose to misunderstand them rather than accept them.

The contrast which Jesus sets up between physical and spiritual birth is, by the way, clear evidence against the Theory of Evolution. Since *kind* gives birth to *kind* (compare Gen 1.21, 24), there can be no evolution from the lesser to the greater. One cannot expect a sinful man to evolve somehow into a spiritual man (even though both are **men**), any more than one can expect a lemur-like creature to evolve into a man. The new birth is the creation a new **kind** of man, in the same way that the creation of Adam brought into existence a uniquely new **kind** of creation, totally distinct from the animals.

Jesus seems to be referring to baptism when he mentions being born of water. In the next meditation we will look at the meaning of the new birth coming with water and the Spirit. For now, think about the meeting of Nicodemus with the Teacher. What did Jesus feel must be communicated?

The truth about the new birth! You know what Jesus means when he says: “You must be born again (7).” Without the new birth you will not see the Kingdom of Heaven!

Nicodemus and the New Birth (Part 2) [February 16] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.3-10)**

In speaking of the new birth, Jesus sets up a contrast between being born of flesh and being born of the Spirit. He says that the spiritual birth comes with Spirit and water, whereas physical birth comes with flesh and blood. It is here that Jesus clarifies for Nicodemus his point about the new birth. He is speaking of **spiritual** birth, not **physical** birth.

The new birth comes with “water and the Spirit.” This is probably a reference to the baptism of repentance as taught by John the Baptist, since at this point in Jesus’ ministry he had not initiated any other form of baptism. A Pharisee such as Nicodemus would have known of various Jewish washings (‘baptisms’); but he would have also been aware of John’s baptism, as all the people in Jerusalem had gone out to John at the Jordan (Mark 1.5). Water baptism for the Christian continues to be a symbol of repentance and entry into the experience of living with, for, and through God, as a subject in his kingdom. It is a sign of spiritual cleansing from sin and of starting life over (a new birth) in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is probably speaking of the miracle of starting all over again, just like God did after the Flood and will do again when he restores creation after the Judgment Day (2 Pt 3.13). The lesser miracle (being born again physically) is hard for us to understand. But the greater miracle—a complete reworking of character, the making of a completely new person—is really impossible for us to understand. Yet, most people seem to take conversion for granted. They seem to think it is something common and not extraordinary, and a process over which any person has control and can bring about on his own under his own power. They claim that by the power of their own wills they can bring about this change of character.

The new birth is radical. It is not achieved through human effort and works

(e.g., law-keeping by a Pharisee like Nicodemus, or ‘good works’ performed by us). It is not a person just vowing to be better, or even of actually improving himself. It is the creation of a new *person* by God. The new birth is not brought about by more law-keeping but by the very power of God.

Upon conversion a person is re-created. His personality becomes substantially different, and yet at the same time his new personality is fully concordant with his previous one. His knowledge and unique personality traits are the same as they were before. Yet he is a different person. We can intellectually understand what it means to be born with a new body, but the idea of becoming a new *person* is so far from our experience that we cannot fully understand how it comes about or what it really means.

This is why Jesus provides an analogy between the wind and the work of the Holy Spirit. We don’t know where the wind starts from and where it ends. But we certainly can hear it and see its impact. In a similar way we cannot understand the work of conversion in the new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit, but we can see its impact as a sinner is brought to salvation.

The metaphor used by Jesus is developed around a play on words. In Greek (and Hebrew) the word for *wind* and for *spirit* is one word. It is as if Jesus says: “The Spirit breathes where he pleases.” And this is the ultimate truth about the new birth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. It is a sovereign work, where and when he chooses.

Jesus says that **we** are not to be surprised at the need for a new spiritual birth. The Kingdom of Heaven is a spiritual kingdom, and those in it must be born spiritually (i.e., of the Spirit). This does **not** mean that Heaven is (or will be) filled only with spirits. Paul in 1 Cor 15.35-49 makes it clear that the glorified body in Heaven is a true physical body. And don’t forget that Jesus has a physical body which exists now in Heaven. So also a number of saints (Gen 5.24; 2 Kings 2.11; Mt 27.52, 53) already have their physical glorified bodies as tokens for us of the promised resurrection.

Nicodemus still does not seem to understand; so Jesus rebukes him, a teacher of Israel, for being unable to discern. He has revealed his meaning to the simple but has hidden it from the worldly wise. But he has not hidden the message from us, any more than the message was ‘hidden’ from Nicodemus. The message is very clear—the only way into the kingdom (Heaven) is to be born again. Jesus addresses this lesson to Nicodemus, but when he says: “You must be born again” (7), he uses the plural form of *you*. This makes it very clear that his instruction applies not only to Nicodemus but to all mankind—to you and me. We are all under the *must*. There is no other way!

Are you guilty of choosing to misinterpret this lesson so that you can think that you do not have to believe? Don’t think this way, for you **must** be born again!

Witnesses to Jesus as the Truth [February 17] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.11-12)**

Jesus alerts Nicodemus to the fact that what he is about to say is of great importance by prefacing his remarks with the words: “I tell you the truth.” But this time (compare 3) he turns from the truth of the **message** (about the new birth) to the truthfulness of the **messenger**. He emphasizes his own truth-fullness. Not only is what he says *true truth*, but he **is** Truth (Jn 14.6).

He presents himself as a reliable witness who can speak and testify to what he knows and has seen (13). Nothing can be more reliable than a witness who knows exactly what has happened and who has seen it with his own eyes. There is no appeal to circumstantial evidence or second-hand knowledge. This is why he uses the word *we* to confirm his reliability. But how does this confirm his reliability? Why does he use it? Whom is he including?

Here it is not the *royal-we*. The context won’t support this since he refers to himself in the first person a few words before and again immediately following in verse 12. Nor is he including his disciples. They were probably with him (John recorded what he had heard in the interview) and

probably could have spoken about their experience of the new birth, but they are not mentioned as being present. Nor is he speaking generically: “a person (like a teacher) speaks about what he knows and what he has seen and learned.”

To understand what Jesus is saying it is necessary to look at the near context, at similar teachings of John, and at the larger context of the Hebrew Scriptures. The immediate context points back to the Holy Spirit (8) and forward to the Father (17). It is Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father who speak and testify that Jesus is the Truth. The whole Trinity joins in witnessing that Jesus is the Truth (compare also Jn 8.13-18 and 1 Jn 5.6-9). The greater context of Scripture teaches that a solitary witness is not sufficient to validate truth in a criminal proceeding (Dt 17.16; Dt 19.15). Jesus in effect says: “My truthfulness is on trial, and I will bring three witnesses to it: myself, the Holy Spirit and the Father.”

In saying *we*, Jesus equates himself with God. For a Pharisee, such as Nicodemus, this would be a far greater challenge than the teaching of the new Birth. Jesus was either speaking a great blasphemy or he is the Truth!

The Jews, especially the Pharisees, as a class rejected Jesus. They would not accept him as their saviour, nor as their Lord. It is no different today. Most people continue to reject the testimony of Jesus, of the Apostles, and of modern Christians. Even though the Apostles knew the Truth and had seen him, their account is rejected as a myth by most men. Men did not believe the witness of the Messiah who was in their midst. Now they reject the eye-witness account (in the Bible) of the Apostles. Is it any wonder that men reject the evidence of the new birth given by Christians today?

This rejection does not surprise Jesus, but it saddens him (Mt 23.37). He is not surprised that men won't believe spiritual/heavenly things, since they show that they cannot believe earthly things (12). What are these earthly things that are not believed? In this context, he refers to flesh giving birth to flesh (6) and the origin and destination of the wind (8).

Do you find this strange? Why does Jesus use the word *believe* instead of

understand? After all, men at that time didn't have our 'advanced' science; so how could they understand such things as the origin of the species or the nature of weather currents? But the problem is not really one of understanding, it is one of **belief**! Jesus does not rebuke Nicodemus for a faulty view of science or misunderstanding nature. Jesus teaches that in spite of their supposed science, the Jews did not believe in the one behind nature.

The words he spoke to Nicodemus he speaks just as powerfully to our 'scientific' age. Men today think that they have all the answers. They think that their theories of evolution (there are many conflicting ones!) explain how "flesh gives birth to flesh," and they think that with their models they can explain how the currents of air produce the winds. To them Jesus says: "But still you people do not accept our testimony."

As men learn more about God's creation, they move farther from him. Yet, science should lead us to God (Job 40.15-24; Job 41.1-34; Ps 8.1, 3; Ps 19.1-6). The problem is not one of knowledge; it is one of belief. Men won't believe in God when they see his amazing works in the natural realm. So why will they believe in his work in the supernatural realm. The irony is that people will believe in the supernatural, except when it comes to what God teaches.

What do you believe about God's work in creation and in governing the natural events? But more importantly what do you believe about his work in the heavenly and spiritual realm, especially in the new birth?

A Lesson on Descending and Ascending [February 18] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.13-15)**

In Isaiah (Is 14.12-13) we read that the Morning Star (Lucifer?) wanted to ascend into Heaven and raise his throne on the sacred mountain above the stars (angels? saints?) of God. Sinful men, like their father the Devil, want to ascend into Heaven on their own terms to displace God.

Adam wanted to be like God and know the difference between good and

evil. He tried to put himself in God's place. Later men built a high tower at Babel to reach to Heaven and challenge God's authority. The rich young ruler wanted to earn his way to Heaven with his observance of the works of the law and so displace God's work of grace. Nietzsche declared God dead so that he could set up man as Superman. Marx declared Heaven as nothing more than an opiate so that he could set up heaven on earth in a communist 'utopia'. And Carl Sagan, in the introduction to Stephen Hawking's book *A Brief History of Time* declares God useless: "This is a book about God ... or perhaps about the absence of God ... [and about] a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a creator to do."

The self-deception of man is amazing. He will believe and do anything to suppress the fact that there is a God in Heaven. He will believe and do anything in his attempt to move God from control over his life. And he will believe and do anything to ignore the **only** one who came down from Heaven—the only one who can tell us reliably about the cause and consequences of sin, about the solution (the cross) to the problem of sin, and about the reality of the new birth. No one else has gone, or can go, into Heaven to find out about these things and report them to us.

It is the Son of Man, the Son of *Adam*, the Last Adam, who brings the message. No mere man or angel can. Why not? Isn't the message just words? Couldn't it be brought by a prophet or an angel? The message is not just words! The message and the messenger are one. Jesus is the living Word—message **and** messenger. Man poisoned by sin can't be trusted as a messenger. The angels are not human and can't come as the living message. Only Jesus (the God-man) can be both messenger and message.

His words to Nicodemus give the first recorded reference to his awareness of his pre-existence in Heaven before his incarnation, and his first recorded prophecy about his crucifixion. In these is irony: he is speaking to a Jewish teacher of the law, a member of the Sanhedrin, one who would be aware that his statements were both blasphemous and accursed, if not true. But they are true. He **can** tell us about the heavenly and the spiritual things.

In contrast, an earthly teacher like Nicodemus can't help us. No man can give us the answers we need for dealing with the problem of sin. Men are of the earth, earthly (1 Cor 15.47; Jn 8.38). They cannot raise themselves up to the heights of Heaven (Prov 30.4) to find the answers. Only Jesus is of Heaven (heavenly) and is able to bring the message. His authority, information source, and message are all unique. This is the reason why he can speak as one with authority—not like the teachers of the Law (e.g., Nicodemus). He knows everything, accurately, about which he speaks.

Not only are his authority, information source, and message unique. His purpose is. Notice that he tells us of his purpose—to be lifted up. With this image he refers to his death on the cross. Moses lifted up the serpent (Num 21.4-9) to present a vicarious substitute for those dying from the curse brought by the serpents. So Jesus himself (the Last Adam) was lifted up as a sacrifice on the cross to provide a substitute for those dying from the curse brought by the first Adam (a stepchild of the Serpent).

The application of the substitute could be obtained by looking at the raised serpent. The Jews understood that there was no power in the serpent to cure them and that they were to look beyond the serpent to God. In the apocryphal book *Wisdom* the author recounts the events of Num 21.4-9 and says: “For he that turned to it was not healed by that which he saw, but by the saviour of men.” (Wisdom 16.7, Douay Version)

Jesus says that he must be lifted up—must! This was the only way God had of redeeming man (see also, Jn 12.32). God would not have subjected his son to torture if there had been any other way to pay the debt of sin. It had to be the one who came down from Heaven who would be lifted up again to Heaven, first on the cross and then on the clouds. This reminds us of the seriousness of sin and the importance of what he did for us.

Do you want to be lifted up to Heaven? The only way is to believe in the one lifted up as a sacrifice. Like the wandering Jews you must look to what was lifted up to obtain the benefits of the sacrifice. But you don't need to look beyond the cross to God. Jesus is the instrument of salvation and the saviour.

Jesus' Teaching on the Love of God [February 19] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.16)**

We now come to one of the best known verses in the Bible. I have been trying to move through the narrative account of Jesus' life a passage, or at least a few verses, at a time. But occasionally we need to pause and think about some of the key verses. John 3.16 is certainly one on which we should pause and reflect in detail to see God's purpose in redemption.

Don't pass over these words because they are so familiar. Grasp their deep meaning. First, what does it mean for God to 'so love' the world?

It speaks of the **measure** of a love that crosses a greater distance than any we can imagine. God vs man. Creator vs creature. Infinite vs finite. All knowing and wise vs ignorant. Holy vs sinful. There is not a thing that we can do to cross this gulf. Can you, a man, become God? Can you, a creature, cease to be created? Can you escape your finiteness? Can you purge your ignorance and know all? Can you wash away your sin? Consider the chasm! Can you cross it? Be humbled!

A chasm that can't be crossed is not the end of the message, else there would be nothing but despair, hopelessness, helplessness. The abyss can be crossed! But don't **you** try to cross it, starting from this side. Greater men than you and I will ever be have tried and have failed.

In the late 1400s, a monk named Martin Luther tried very hard to cross the valley of death. He wrote of that attempt: "I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work." By God's grace he came to see the foolishness of trying to earn his way to Heaven. God showed him that he could not cross from Hell to Heaven on his own.

Scripture starts with God (Gen 1.1). All meaning and motion must start

with God. To start anywhere else is futile. To start with man is foolish! The starting point, the **mover**, must be God: “For *God* so loved ...” The mover is God. Thank God that he took the initiative.

From God to man. Not from man to God. It must begin with God. The crossing must begin on his side. What is the **means** of crossing the gulf? John the Apostle tells us. It was *love* which crossed the infinite chasm. God is love. It was God who loved. He loved first. He took the initiative in love. The source of the incarnation, the appearance of Jesus as a man in human nature, is the great love of God.

But is it just love? No, it is not. It is *so* love. Jesus did not say: “Since God loved the world, therefore ...” He said: “For, or since, God *so* loved ...” It is important that you understand this.

By God’s grace, love has not been entirely wiped out by the sin of Adam. Men and women continue to love. But a mother’s love for her child is not *so* love. It might cost her a few nights’ sleep or even many days of tears. But *so* love is far more costly. The distance between God and man is infinite. The love needed to cross it must also be infinite.

The means of crossing the chasm has been provided by God. At infinite cost, he sent his one and only son, truly God and truly man, to die an undeserved death. This is *so* love. Infinite love, infinitely costly love.

Why did God cross the gulf? Because he is love. But that isn’t a complete answer. God is not love in the abstract. Love must have an object and be practical. When we say that “God is love,” we imply that in his nature there are persons who love one another. Love is not like knowledge that can exist in one person without reference to another. Love is sharing with another, caring for another, doing for another.

Why did God cross the chasm? Because he loved the world. The object of his love is external to himself. The **motive** for his crossing the chasm was to show his love for the world—mankind from every walk of life, every language group, and every nation on earth (Rev 5.9; Rev 7.9).

Jesus Christ did not come into this world to save righteous Jews. He came to die on the cross as a substitute for sinners from every nation. This was to fulfil the promise made to Abraham which said that one of his descendants would bring a great blessing to all nations. Jesus is the saviour of the world. Not of the natural descendants of Abraham only, and not of the Jew only. Christianity is the religion of the world. “For God so loved the *world*.” Don’t ridicule if you don’t understand. But come to understand. Look into the infinite and believe!

Jesus’ Relationship with the Father [February 20] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.16)**

Every child in Sunday School learns John 3.16. There is nothing complex about it. You don’t have to be a scholar to understand it. Here the Bible speaks of a **very** valuable gift that God gave to men. Men as enemies of God deserve Hell. But instead of cursing all mankind, God gave a saviour.

Yet the meaning of this verse is very profound, especially the words: “He [God] gave his one and only son.” (NIV) This clause speaks of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, the uniqueness of the Son, the infinite value of the gift which God gave to rebellious sinners, and what you must believe concerning God the Father and Jesus.

John tells us that in the Godhead there is one who is the Father and one who is the Son. Just as we expect that attributes of a father will be displayed in a son among mankind, so we should not be surprised to find this in the Godhead. For example: the Father is infinite, so is the Son; the Father is eternal, so is the Son; the Father knows all and is all wise, so is the Son; the Father is the truth, so is Jesus—he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The Son, Jesus Christ, is truly God, as much as is God the Father. He is not God the Father, but he is God. He is not a created god or a second-class member of the Godhead. In every respect he is God, equal in power and glory with the Father.

Why then is he a son? It is impossible for us to come to a complete understanding of the nature of God. But from what he tells us in the Bible we can derive some reasons why Jesus is a son. He is a son because:

- God has chosen an earthly relationship as a model to communicate to us the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son.
- Jesus has placed himself in a relationship of submission, like an earthly son to a father.
- The Father and Jesus are in a relationship of love—like the best relationship between an earthly father and a son.
- Jesus is the heir of all that the father has.

Many of us memorized this verse with the words *only begotten*. The NIV translators choose to translate this verse using *one and only*. The Greek word that underlies the translation is used nine times in the NT. In the NIV it is translated as *only* or *one and only*. In the NKJV it is sometimes translated the same way (Lk 7.12; Lk 8.42; Lk 9.38), but not in the five occurrences in John's writings (all refer to Jesus) or in Heb 11.17.

In case you think that the translation *one and only*, in John 3.16, is some form of innovation of a modern scholar consider William Tyndale's translation of the NT, which was published around 1530: "For God so loveth the world, that he hath given his only son, that none that believe in him, should perish: but should have everlasting life."

Jesus Christ is the one and only son of God. This does not mean that God does not have other sons. He does. But these sons are his by adoption, not by eternal sonship and nature. Jesus as a Son stands in a unique relationship with the father. His being the one and only son means that he:

- Has the right innately to call himself the Son of God. If you recall he did this among the Jews of his day and they became very upset. They understood that this right could only be given to one who is God.
- Has been given all the inheritance rights. He is the one to whom the whole universe belongs.
- Is unique. He is with God. He has stood face-to-face before God from all eternity.

- Is the one with whom there is no comparison. He is the well-pleasing one and the beloved.

God gave his son. To what end? To what purpose? To live and to die. To live a life of obedience. Jesus Christ obeyed the law of God exactly, completely, fully, absolutely. Not one defect, slip, or mishap ... no trespass, no iniquity, no sin. He came to live, to obey, and to be a perfect sacrifice. And he came to die, to repay God the Father for the debt of our sin.

What love! What mercy! God gave his Son, his One and only son, so that we could become adopted into his household and be sons and daughters of the Great King. What is your response to this great offer of privilege?

Jesus Promises Eternal Life through Belief *in Him* [February 21]

(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.15-16)

Many of your neighbours, if asked, would tell you that it really doesn't matter what you believe since, as many will claim, the here-and-now is all there is to life. Even most who believe in a hereafter will claim that the only thing that matters is that you have led a good life or that you have searched for truth. With these ideas they are fooling themselves into eternal death. Doing religious acts as required by Islam, or searching for truth and enlightenment as in Hinduism, will melt in the furnace of Hell.

What you **believe** matters more than anything else! But you must not believe in works. You must not believe in faith. Belief must not be placed in intellectual effort, or in an abstract faith. These will get you no nearer Heaven than you are now. Your belief must be in a person—in **him**.

Christianity is belief in a person. This person is not a myth, a moral idea, a creation of some pious thinker, or a mystery. Two thousand years ago this person, Jesus Christ, walked into history and was baptized at the edge of the river Jordan. Do you know this Jesus? Do you believe in him? A real person, a real man—the God-man—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christianity is belief in a person. Who is this person? Do you know him? Do you believe in him? What excuse do you give today? Do you say: “I’m not bad enough to need salvation.” “I don’t need your answers.” “I don’t even have any questions.” “I’m able to take care of myself, thanks—and, anyway, God wouldn’t be so cruel as to cast me into Hell.”

Are you a *whoever*? Did John say that all those who are Jews would be saved. Did he say that all those who go to church, or those who were born on July 1st, or those who were born with one blue eye and one green eye would be saved? Of course not! Yet these are almost as good as the 1001 excuses which you will hear concerning why people won’t believe. You **yourself** must believe. I cannot believe for you. Your mother and father cannot believe for you. The person sitting in the pew next to you cannot believe for you. Only you can believe in him. Do you believe in him?

The Bible is clear. It says *whoever will*. That means anyone who wills. That means you, if you will believe in Jesus!

You must believe in him. You must believe that he is the one who came down from Heaven to be born, to walk the dusty road to the Jordan, and then three years later to walk again as he headed toward the cross. You must believe that his flesh was torn with barbs and whips and nails, that he died and his body was laid in a tomb, that three days later he arose, and that he walked the dusty roads again as he travelled toward Emmaus.

Heaven is not reached by abstract belief, but only by belief in him. Salvation is not obtained by works of obedience but by belief in him. Every one is not saved, but whoever believes in him is. You must believe because:

- You do not want to perish. You should believe out of a fear of what lies on the other side of a life of unbelief. You should believe because you do not want to spend forever in Hell.
- You want to have eternal life. You should want to experience the resurrection of your body into glory. You should want to live forever in Heaven with Jesus and all those who have believed.

Simply, you should believe because you want to have eternal life!

Eternal life—what is it? Verses 15 and 16 are the first verses in which Jesus mentions eternal life in his teaching. He may have had Dan 12.2 in mind when he taught this (just as he seems to have taken his self-designation *Son of Man* from Daniel). But what does he mean by eternal life? Other references in the OT may help us understand his teaching: (Psalm 16.11 ‘eternal pleasures at your right hand’, Psalm 21.6 ‘eternal blessings’, Isaiah 45.17 ‘everlasting salvation’, and Isaiah 51.11 ‘everlasting joy’).

Everlasting life is **not** just eternal existence, but *life* eternal! A very high quality of life in fellowship with God. It is not just quantity (i.e., forever) that Jesus is speaking of, but the quality. It is not just endless existence, but abundant, overflowing life. We are walking dead, but there is LIFE!

There is one event which I can tell you without any doubt, hesitation, or question will go down in the records of Heaven as the most significant event in history. You know what this event is, although you may have chosen to ignore the significance of this event for yourself. What is this event? John tells us in the third chapter of his account of the life of Jesus. He says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his *one and only* son, that whoever believes **in him** shall never perish but have **eternal life**.”

Unbelief: A Present Condemnation [February 22] **(Jerusalem, Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.17-21)**

We considered in the previous meditation the importance of our having a proper belief if we are to obtain eternal life. And we noted that the only belief that will bring us through death and into Heaven is belief **in him**—Jesus Christ.

But to believe in Jesus is the last thing that people think is the most important thing they must do. If they think at all about eternity or Heaven, they base their world-and-life view on their understanding of the love of God and assume that God will not cast them into Hell. “After all,” they

say, “God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world.” Men in general, if they believe anything about the next life, believe that God will take all ‘decent’ folk into Heaven.

But there is a serious flaw in their belief system. The belief-system of sinful men is like that of a man who has a metre-stick that is 10 cm short. He goes around measuring everything by his standard and assumes that all his measurements are okay. His belief is placed in his own ruler and not in the standard metre in Paris. So it is with sinners—they place their belief in the wrong system. They believe in their *own* views about how God should work, rather than in what he actually says they must believe in.

What God does say is that “whoever does not believe [in Jesus] stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only son.” Use the standard measure of God to define true belief!

Notice that if you do not believe in Jesus, you are already condemned—not “will be condemned.” Your judgment is not pending, if you do not believe in Jesus. It has already been declared; it is a present reality. The verdict has already been stated: GUILTY! The verdict is that you are in darkness and you are evil (19). The only way to escape the verdict (and the subsequent eternal punishment) is to believe in him.

The Day of Judgment will not bring about your condemnation if you stay in unbelief. Rather, it will be the *public* declaration of the fact that you were condemned in this life, because you refused to believe in Jesus. On that Day, Jesus will say: “Depart from me, you who **are** cursed ...” (Mt 25.41).

Jesus tells us the reason that men will not believe in him. It is because they love darkness instead of light. The teaching of Paul in Romans 1.18-32 is very similar. Men choose to, and want to, do evil. This is a startling statement. Men *think* that they want to do good. But both Jesus and Paul tell us that men don’t want to do good. They want to do evil.

Men and women do ‘good’ not to please God but for self-preservation, ego

gratification, potential reward, or for some other selfish reason. Their very ‘good’ is evil. There is no thought of doing anything for God’s glory. This is why they are condemned and why God gives them over to all kinds of depravity, darkness, and destruction (Rom 1.24, 26, 28).

Note that men choose to continue doing evil. They “**will** not come into the light.” Even though the Bible is very clear that God’s sovereignty extends to declaring one man evil and another righteous (see, Rom 9.14-18, for example), the Bible is also very clear that men are responsible for their continuing depravity. The Biblical balance is one that is difficult for us to maintain. Do not make the mistake of going to one extreme or the other—on the one side is fatalism; on the other, is ‘free will’. God is sovereign, but men are not puppets. They are responsible creatures. Men are not morally free, but they are held accountable for every one of their actions.

The reason they will not come to the light through belief in Jesus is because they don’t want their deeds exposed. Exposed to whom? Other men or God? Evil men don’t care if their evil is known by other men, as long as it doesn’t result in an uncomfortable situation. For example, they don’t care if people know about their thievery as long as they are able to stay free, and they boast of their sexual conquests, so long as their spouse doesn’t find out. Ultimately, it is not exposure to men that concerns them but, rather, exposure to God.

Do you see irony in this? Men love evil, and they love to do evil; but they don’t want to be seen by God as being evil. Why not? Because in their inner hearts they really do know what God commands and what he requires. But they will not admit that they must be subject to him. Paul tells us (Rom 1.18) that they suppress this knowledge as deeply as possible, even removing this knowledge from their conscious minds. And so they are condemned!

In contrast, whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned but is saved from sin. But this belief must be more than intellectual acknowledgement of the person of Jesus. It must be living by the Truth—living for Jesus and by Jesus. Live by the Truth! Believe in Jesus!

John Superseded by Jesus

John's Second Testimony About Jesus (Part 1) [February 23] **(West of the Jordan, Late Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.22-30)**

Jesus with his disciples (see, John 4.2) was baptizing in the Judean countryside (approximately where the Dead Sea caves are located today), and John was continuing to baptize nearby. Jesus has just presented himself as the great Teacher (Prophet). Now Jesus provides an accompanying sign—the washing of repentance—and shows that, like John, he is a prophet who came to declare repentance from sin. Thus John's words at this point have added significance, as he tells the Jews that Jesus is the greater Prophet.

For context, we are told that an argument arose between a Jew and John's disciples over ceremonial washing. Jews in this area (Qumran) were very interested in the 'right' way to baptize. Things don't change, do they? There is still a lot of discussion, maybe too much, today over the 'right' way to baptize. To make the form of baptism a distinctive may be to put an emphasis in the wrong place. Let's make sure our main focus is not on the form of baptism, but on what baptism really means.

The people used this argument as an opportunity to compare John with Jesus; and thus, said that 'everyone' was going to Jesus, implying that Jesus was performing the baptisms 'right'. The people had two wrong ideas: 1) not everyone had gone over to Jesus (23), and 2) the baptism of Jesus was likely the **same** Baptism as John's, rather than the baptism which would be instituted later to signify covenant admission to the Church.

This gave John an opportunity to testify again about the one to whom he had previously testified, (see, Jn 1.7, 29-34) and to show what kind of prophet John really was (Mt 11.11), and how godly he was. John's testimony about the Messiah is important for us both in its message and in its example:

- **A man can receive only what is given to him** John was probably quite aware of the miracles associated with his own birth. He was thus especially prepared to accept God's hand in providence. He knew, truly, that his mission and every ability that he had was a gift from God. Everyone of us needs to learn how to put aside pride like John did, and truly confess that all of our temporal abilities, and our salvation, are gifts from God. Let us display the true humility of John.
- **I am not the Christ** Compare this confession with that of all the modern false Messiahs (e.g., Jim Jones, Moon, Koresh). But also compare it with the inclinations of man's natural heart. Man's own heart, if not touched by the Holy Spirit, leads him to think that he is a messiah—either with a great mission (e.g., to establish peace in the Middle East or on the Korean Peninsula, or to find a cure for AIDS) or with the ability to save himself from every form of earthly depravity. John, in contrast, displays the true understanding that we all must have. We all need to confess that we cannot save ourselves. We need to turn to Jesus who alone can save from sin, and who alone can save the whole person.
- **The Bride belongs to the bridegroom** John used the illustration of marriage to make his case. This message was used by the great prophets of the OT (Is 54.5; Is 62.4, 5; Jer 3.20; Ezk 16.8; Hos 2.19, 20) and later by the NT prophets (2 Cor 11.2; Eph 5.32) to signify the relationship between God and those he was calling to repentance. Also, it seems that during the Passover the Song of Solomon was read. The Passover had been held (Jn 2.13) just prior to these events. John's use of this imagery in the context of the prophetic references to God as the bride indicate that John believed that Jesus was God—the bridegroom. They also show in John an attitude of full submission. There is no envy on his part, but complete joy (29).

Our attitude should be like that of a faithful friend of the bridegroom, who is proud to see his best friend being married to a beautiful bride. Our joy should be like that of the angels in Heaven who rejoice when a

sinner comes to repentance. We should never be envious when others in the Church appear to be more successful in bringing sinners into the Kingdom, or when other congregations of the Church appear to be flourishing. We should be **very** careful about accusing them of false theology (often this is a cover for envy). Rather, our joy should be complete, because the Bride of Christ is being made perfect.

- **He must become greater; I must become less** No prophet can overshadow the Messiah; it is a divine necessity that the honour of the Messiah and his kingdom must prosper and grow. John really understood this and displayed an amazing (only by God's grace!) attitude of humility. In contrast, some preachers seem to want to draw attention to themselves even at the expense of Christ (I refer primarily to those in the tele-evangelism context). But each of us must make sure that his life is lived for the glory of Christ and his kingdom and not for his own glory.

Let us heed the testimony of John the Baptist—and apply it in our lives.

John's Second Testimony About Jesus (Part 2) [February 24] **(West of the Jordan, Late Summer 30 AD. Jn 3.31-36)**

At this point (31) some interpreters attribute the rest of the words in the chapter to John the Apostle rather than to John the Baptist. I believe that the NIV and NKJV are correct in attributing the quotation to John the Baptist. Thus John the Baptist continues to contrast the Messiah's work with his own and tells us that Jesus, the Christ (Messiah), is:

- **A Prophet's Source** John is of the earth, and belongs to the earth. He speaks from an earth-bound context (finite and polluted by sin). Jesus in contrast is the one from Heaven who is above all (infinite and holy). Jesus makes this contrast when he gives testimony about himself (Jn 3.13). It may be that John or one of his disciples had heard the words of Jesus. John believed them and repeated the essence of them to the Jews. There is a lesson in this: a true prophet does not invent his own teaching, for it will be stained with sin. Instead, he takes his teaching

from the word of God and applies it to his hearers. This points out the primary problem with the cults (and of some movements within the Church). They are almost always based on ‘new revelation’ which they claim comes from Heaven, but in fact is from the earth. Only Jesus, in person and through his prophets and apostles, provides the revelation from Heaven.

- **The Peoples’ Stumbling** The Messiah testifies to what he has heard (Jn 3.11) and declares it to men. In general, people reject his message (see, Jn 1.5, 10, 11). But there are always some who believe (Jn 1.12; Jn 2.23). Jesus was rejected by those who heard him, and even witnessed his miracles. Yet he continued to declare the Kingdom and to call men to repentance. We must continue as he did—to present the Gospel regardless of the acceptance it receives from men, because it is the Truth!
- **A Personal Statement** When a person says “I believe in Jesus as my saviour,” his very act of believing is a witness to the truthfulness of Christ and the message of the Bible—man has sinned, man needs a saviour, God provides this saviour in Christ, a who man believes will be saved. If you are a true believer in Jesus then your life and belief are a personal statement to the truthfulness of God. To believe is to accept God at his word and thereby testify or certify that God is truthful.
- **A Provider of the Spirit** The one beloved of the Father was given the Spirit at his baptism. And he in turn gives us the Spirit (see, Jn 15.26) because he loves us. The Spirit is given to us to convert, comfort, teach, empower, and preserve us. This is no minor gift. Along with the sacrificial gift of his own son, God gives us the gift of his loving Spirit. The gift of Jesus was of infinite worth to pay an infinite debt. So the gift of the Spirit is infinite, for he is given “without limit.”
- **A Powerful Sovereign** Everything was placed in the hands of Jesus by the Father. John’s statement is similar to Paul’s (1 Cor 15.27-28; Phil 2.9-11; Col 1.18) and teaches that Jesus is **the** monarch ruling and governing **all** of creation. Jesus is not Lord of the Church alone, or just

a king over a nation that calls itself Christian. His laws do not apply just to those who profess his name. Religious, cultural, and political pluralism are the biggest myth of this century. Only Christianity is true. All other religions are false. Men do not have a *right* to practice them. All laws of men not derived from the laws of God in Scripture are false. Men do not have a *right* to impose them on other men. Only a religion centred on the virgin-conceived, crucified and raised, God-man, will be tolerated by God. Only a rule of law based on Scripture will stand before God. Because God has placed everything under Christ, **everything** is to be subject to him.

- **A Promised Saviour** John speaks of eternal life in the same way that Jesus had previously spoken (Jn 3.15, 16). Notice, however, that he uses ‘has’ instead of ‘shall have’. The difference is that Jesus is speaking of the eternal life that will be given to one who comes to believe. John is speaking of the eternal life that one who has already believed now has. Christians are saved, and are being saved, declared holy, and being made holy, until they reach glory. Similarly, eternal life is both a future and a present reality. This is hard for us to understand when we have to face physical death. Why do we have to face death if we have eternal life now? The truth is, if we are believers, we already have eternal life. We will shed our mortal bodies and be given immortal ones (see, 1 Cor 15.35-49). But of equal importance is the converse—the wrath of God remains on those who do not believe in Jesus. As we noted in the previous meditation, condemnation is not only a future reality, but also a present reality. The truth is that men who do not believe in Jesus are already condemned, are now being condemned, and will be condemned.

Notice how few words John uses while he teaches the Jews—yet what a sermon he preaches! Does it stir you even a little to honour Christ?

From Judea, through Samaria, to Galilee

Rejection and Introduction [February 25]

(From Judea, through Samaria to Galilee, Fall 30 AD. Mt 4.12; Mk

1.14a; Lk 3.19-20; Lk 4.14a; Jn 4.1-4)

Two events trigger the departure of Jesus from Judea and his return to his home territory in Galilee: Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John the Baptist (Jn 4.3), and he heard that John had been put into prison (Mt 4.12).

The Pharisees had looked into the ministry of John (Jn 1.19-24) and may have been threatened by his prophetic activities. It was not they who had put John into prison; it was Herod. But they probably did not object to his imprisonment and were likely pleased that he was out of the way. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were interested in silencing a true prophet of God. They did not want anyone around who could challenge their interpretations of Scripture or their positions of authority. Jesus knew that just as they had taken an interest in what John was doing, so they would be **very** interested in determining what he himself was doing.

To this point the Pharisees in Jerusalem in Jesus' ministry had offered no public challenge to Jesus, nor had they taken any action against him, nor indicated that they planned to. But Jesus knew their hearts—he knew that they would shortly become outspoken in their opposition. Their attitude to John was enough of an indication of where they would take matters as Jesus gained a following. Jesus short-circuited any action on their part by removing himself from their immediate reach. He was going to avoid direct conflict with them until it was the appropriate time—his time.

Jesus may have also been thinking that Herod would take action against him, as he had against John. Herod apparently feared a revolution led by John and did not like being rebuked for having an adulterous marriage (Mt 14.3, 4; Mk 6.17, 18). Jesus as a 'second John' would have been as much of a threat, and Herod would take action to remove the 'embarrassment'.

The action of Jesus to avoid a potential confrontation and conflict indicates that there are times when it is proper for us to leave a situation of persecution or to avoid potential persecution (compare Mt 24.15-21). There have been times in history when people have not avoided

martyrdom when they could have. Instead, they have sought persecution as a badge of honour. This is a distortion of the nature of our call to obedience. Many of the Reformers, Puritans, and Covenanters avoided persecution when it was possible, and fled from their enemies. We are not to be fatalistic about persecution, nor to seek it. Conversely, we are not to be cowards when we are unable to avoid it. We are to face it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But those who torment and persecute Christians, or threaten to, will face judgment from God. Their judgment will begin, in this life, with their rejection by God. This is what we see happened to the Pharisees.

Notice that we are told that Jesus *had* to go through Samaria to reach Galilee. He did not have to go through that province because that was the only way to reach Galilee. Jews generally avoided going through Samaria on their way to Galilee because they despised the Samaritans. They would instead cross the Jordan near Jericho and go up the eastern side of the river and around the Sea of Galilee. This was a slightly longer route than the direct route up the western side of the Jordan, but it avoided contact with the Samaritans. The necessity was not in the route but in the reason.

Why did Jesus have to go through Samaria? It seems that there are two reasons, which are really just one but seen from different viewpoints: he had to go through Samaria because the time of the Jews was coming to an end. They were being rejected by God, and he had to go to begin opening the Gospel to non-Jews. Guided by the Spirit, Jesus went through Samaria.

John uses a word in the Greek which is translated into English *left*. But it has a stronger meaning than other words which can be translated as *left*. The particular word John uses can be translated *abandoned*, *left behind*, *forsook*, *neglected*, and *divorced* (see, for example: Mk 14.50; Rom 1.27). John seems to tell us by his choice of this word the same thing that Jesus' action indicates—the rejection of the Jews has begun. The immediate cause of their rejection is the attitude of the Pharisees to John and Jesus, who are both prophets from God.

Jesus' departure from their territory and his going into Samaria is a sign to both Jew and Gentile of what is going to come (Mt 21.43; Mt 28.19; Acts 1.8). Jesus shows that the Gospel will be taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. He shows this by starting with a 'half-Jew'—a Samaritan woman (Jn 4.5-42). We should thank God that, in the Spirit, Jesus *had* to go through Samaria and had to take the Gospel to us Gentiles.

An Object Lesson: Living Water [February 26] **(With a Samaritan Woman at Sychar, Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.5-15)**

As Jesus left Jerusalem he moved his dealings from one social class (represented by the Pharisee Nicodemus) to the opposite end of the spectrum in the eyes of the Jews (represented by a Samaritan woman). Jesus shows, by speaking with the woman, that he is not a respecter of persons and that the Gospel is truly for everyone—for every social class, race and tribe, and for both male and female (Gal 3.28). Also, in dealing with her he fulfilled the words of God spoken to Abraham—a promise that all nations would be his spiritual inheritance.

How does Jesus approach the Samaritan woman and find an opening for the Gospel? He does at least four things to reach her:

- **He presents a need which she can fill**—he is tired and thirsty, and he asks her for a drink of water. He gives us an example of a technique which is an effective means of gaining a spiritual hearing. To ask for a simple form of help can be an effective way to begin a relationship with another person.
- **He asks for help in a manner that appeared to be humbling**—In general, Jews and Samaritans had no dealings. The Jews considered them to be half-breeds—worse than pagans. They rejected the Samaritan offer to help rebuild the temple (Ezra 4.1ff) and in turn burned, in 128 BC., the temple built on Mt Gerizim by the Samaritans. For a Jewish Rabbi to speak to a woman in public, and a Samaritan at that, was considered to be a great breach of protocol. In addition, he asked her to give him a drink from one of her drinking vessels. This

action would have made him ceremonially unclean according to Jewish practice. Jesus never did things just for the sake of social convention or tradition. In fact, he would break the conventions or the traditions of the elders if they got in the way of the Gospel. There are undoubtedly social conventions created by our traditions which are keeping us from being effective in presenting the Gospel to those around us. We need to seek wisdom in knowing which traditions we should remove, so that the Gospel can go forward to the ‘samaritans’ of our day.

- **He uses natural circumstances for spiritual lessons**—She had come to draw water, and he needed a drink. There is nothing unusual about either action. But he reminds her that she will have to come daily to draw water because the well will not provide a permanent quenching of thirst. There are many opportunities presented to us where we can use the circumstances of the obvious to focus attention on spiritual matters. We must, however, use care and not be perceived as being insincere, or of twisting every situation into an opportunity to ‘preach’. But I am sure we let opportunities for speaking truth pass us by every day.
- **He challenges her presuppositions**—The meeting takes place at Jacob’s well. The Samaritans considered Jacob to be their spiritual father. Ironically, they were drinking from an Israelite/Jewish well. This was an appropriate place for Jesus to make his first introduction of the Gospel to the Samaritans. He challenges her to think of God as more than just the provider of material well-being (10). He also challenges her not to judge by appearances (11), and he challenges (by offering her water that was better than the water from the well [12]) her belief that no one could be greater than their (adopted) father Jacob. We have to learn how to dig below the surface of arguments and challenge the presuppositions on which the arguments are based. This will help people to see the falseness of a philosophy of life based only on material things.

The water Jesus offers is different from physical water. It is living water springing (*jumping*, as the word is used in Acts 3.8) up into eternal life (14). This water is a gift from God (not from Jacob)—a gift of God’s grace

through Christ. The word used for *gift* (10) is found only here in the Gospels. This seems to indicate that a special meaning is associated with the word. In this case, it appears not to be Christ himself who is the gift. Rather, it appears that the gift is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (compare: Acts 2.38; Acts 10.45; Rom 5.15; Eph 3.7; Heb 6.4). We are told by John explicitly (Jn 7.38, 39) that the Holy Spirit is the living water (see also, Jer 2.13; Jer 17.13; Acts 1.4, 5; Acts 2.38). The Holy Spirit is the gift of living water, given by both the Father and Christ to those who believe in Jesus.

The woman at the well thinks that Jesus is speaking about natural water and, probably, about some form of *fountain of youth*. But she takes an important step and asks for a drink (15). Jesus is getting through. So he will now open to her the truth. Has Jesus brought his message to you? Do you understand what he is speaking about? Are you indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Are you drinking from the fountain of eternal life?

Challenge and Evasion [February 27] **(With a Samaritan Woman at Sychar, Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.16-26)**

Notice how Jesus engages the Samaritan woman. First, he attracts her attention by discussing his own thirst and her recurring thirst. Then he moves the discussion from a temporal setting to a spiritual plane. At this point he is ready to move the discussion to the next stage of engagement—the woman's own spiritual condition. As we review the interplay between the two, note how Jesus presents truth on two distinct levels.

Jesus begins by confronting her with her personal sin. He asks her to call the man with whom she should share the living water. He uses this to show her that she is a sinner. She is typical of people today. Many of your neighbours have sinned just like this woman. They have been involved in one sexual relationship after another. Like Jesus, we should look for ways to challenge our neighbours with their sins so that they will start to look beyond their physical existence and face the reality of moral absolutes.

The number of men she has slept with isn't her favourite topic; so she tries

to move the light of interrogation from herself. She chooses to move to a topic which she thinks is more abstract, will not have any direct bearing on herself, and might put Jesus, as a Jew, on the defensive. Her behaviour is similar to the behaviour of non-belligerent people when they are drawn into serious discussions about spiritual matters. When confronted by their own sin they find a way to change the subject to another topic on a more philosophical level which they think will put us on the defensive.

She puts forward her own form of worship—sacrifices on Mount Gerizim—as the form acceptable to God. This is the tendency of us all. **We** want to determine the form of worship that we will give to God, whether it is through a false religion or by unauthorized innovations in Christian worship. Jesus refused to be drawn into the traditional argument between Jew and Samaritan about the proper site for sacrifices. Instead, he took the discussion to another level. He confronted her with the real issue in worship—the authority for defining worship. The Samaritans thought they worshipped the true God, but Jesus shows her that they worshipped in the wrong way. He says in essence that worship isn't valid unless it is spiritual (guided by the Spirit) and true (defined by the spirit).

Both our **attitude** in worship and the **form** of worship are important! Good intentions and unauthorized forms are knocked down with one blow. Men can only be mistaken when guided by their own ideas about what is acceptable to God. We must worship with all our heart in the way that God has defined. Ironically, Jesus deals with the question of *location*. The proper location for worship has been defined. Our worship must be in Heaven—our hearts must be there, and the form must be that defined by Heaven.

Jesus uses the topic of worship as an opportunity to confront the woman about the real condition of her heart before God. Feeling the heat once more, she tries again to move the light of God's eye away from herself. She attempts to move the discussion even further away to what she thinks is the distant promise of a Prophet (Dt 18.18) who might be able to give a response to the things that Jesus is speaking about. At this point in the discussion, he leads the woman to the Messiah. He presents himself to her.

Until the time of his trial, there may be only one other instance where he speaks so plainly. Don't miss the opportunity to introduce Jesus to your neighbours when the conversation leads to him.

His approach and dealings with the woman provide an effective model (but not the only one) for how we can make the Gospel known to our neighbours. Jesus doesn't tell her outright that she is a sinner. Rather, he challenges her in such a way that she comes face-to-face with her sin. Also, he doesn't let her escape the fact that she has sinned against man and God. Then, when she sees her standing before God, he presents the solution—belief in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Underneath the three challenges that Jesus placed before the woman is the *strategy* of his approach to her. Notice that the first challenge is with respect to a sin from the second portion of the Ten Commandments, which deals with our relationship to our neighbours. The second challenge deals with the subject matter of the first portion of the Ten Commandments—our relationship with God and his worship. In his third challenge he confronts the woman with the living truth about himself as the Messiah.

Not only are we to challenge people about their sins in human relationships; we are to challenge them about their relationship to God. It is in this area that most Christians fail. They somehow believe that a pagan or heathen is not obligated to keep the first four commandments. This is one of the biggest myths of our pluralistic and multicultural society. Challenge your neighbours to see their sin and then present Jesus to them.

Harvest Pending, Harvest Present [February 28] **(Sychar in Samaria, Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.27-38)**

At the moment that Jesus was declaring to the woman that he was the Messiah the disciples returned from their grocery shopping. They were surprised to find him talking with a woman. A 'normal' Rabbi would not have been seen talking with her in a public place (a woman was regarded by most Rabbis as inferior), especially since she was a despised foreigner and a woman of questionable morals. But they did not question him about

his behaviour. They had been with him for a few months and knew that he did not do anything just to be conventional. In fact, he would go contrary to convention if it was not Biblical.

Notice that Jesus treated this woman with respect and as an equal (as a fellow human). Today you will often hear people say that Christianity is anti-women. To the contrary! Every false religion—including the religion of secular humanism—twists and perverts the role of women. Christianity alone frees women to fulfil their God-given role. But men and women warped by sin are unwilling to accept God's role definitions and, with the sanction of their false religions, go to one extreme (destroying all distinctions) or the other (oppressing women).

Jesus undoubtedly saw the disciples' surprise, but he was not about to challenge them regarding their views about women. His actions alone were enough of a challenge for them. Instead, he turned their attention to far more important matters: the contrast between the physical and temporal, and the spiritual and eternal—the purpose of his mission.

The woman had left her water jar and gone back into the town to tell the people that she had met the Christ. The implication of her action is that she had come out for natural water and, abandoning this, had returned to the village with living spiritual water. Likewise, when the disciples brought natural food, Jesus abandoned this to turn their attention to the spiritual food that is far more important.

As is so often the case (e.g., the new birth, the rebuilding of the temple in three days, the Kingdom of Heaven) in Jesus' ministry, he is misunderstood. The disciples think that someone has brought him food from the nearby village. But Jesus is speaking of his priorities—his mission and purpose. His hunger and his food are to do the will of God. His priority is to finish the work (Jn 19.30) which the Father has sent him to do (see also, Jn 5.30; Jn 6.38; Jn 9.4; Jn 12.49, 50; Jn 14.31; etc.).

As Jesus is speaking to the disciples, the people from the village are making their way toward him. Jesus knew what was happening back at the

village, for he uses the coming crowd as an opportunity to continue the training of the Twelve. He reminds them and us that we are to stay focused on our primary purpose in life—to serve God and to enjoy serving him. He directs their attention to the coming harvest. The disciples likely think that he is referring to the nearby grain fields which were ripening and were about ready for harvest. But it appears that Jesus is again using a metaphor and is speaking of the people of the village coming out to meet him. They are the living harvest—the result of drinking spiritual water and eating spiritual bread.

To direct their attention to the pending harvest he uses a proverb—four months more and then the harvest. Most people say, “What’s the rush, the seed has been planted, we have to wait for God to work?” This may be the case in the natural realm, but it is not always the case in the spiritual realm. The seed can be sown, and a few moments later a harvest can be gathered in. There is no necessity to wait. In contrast, there should be a sense of urgency. It is always the time to bring in the spiritual harvest:

- “Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” The people of the village are coming out, even at this moment, to meet the Messiah. Where is our sense of urgency? Do we look up from our concerns with the temporal water and food long enough to see the harvest that is ready for reaping into eternal life?
- “So that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.” The disciples had not done much sowing. This work began with the prophets (the Samaritans held Moses to be a prophet), was continued by John the Baptist and, in this instance, completed by Christ himself. But they would see the harvest and rejoice. So it is with us. The seed of the Gospel may be planted by others. God may use us to harvest a soul for eternity. The work of salvation is rarely accomplished through one person. Many lay the groundwork. There is no room for pride but lots of room for harvesting and rejoicing together. Like the disciples, we are to apply ourselves to bringing in the harvest.

The First Harvest from the Nations [March 1]
(Sychar in Samaria, Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.39-42)

Many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony. The seed sown by the prophets and Jesus brought forth fruit. But look beyond their teachings and see what a simple testimony of a true believer can accomplish. We may think that we can't evangelize or preach. We may think that we don't have the training or the gifts to be useful in reaching dying sinners with the Gospel. It may be that people won't listen to us, but the woman's example does teach us that we don't have to be great prophets or systematic theologians to make the Gospel real to our neighbours. We only have to be prepared to speak of the hope that is in us and be able to tell about what Jesus has done to, and for, us.

The Samaritans asked (urged) Jesus to stay with them, and he stayed two days. This is something unheard of—that a Jew would be invited to stay with Samaritans, and that he in turn would accept. This shows us how quickly and thoroughly the truth of the Gospel can change hearts and lives. It is only the Gospel that can truly turn enemies into friends.

Men want peace—in Rwanda, Croatia, N. Ireland, Pakistan, etc. Consider the 50+ conflicts in the world today—how many of them have religious differences compounding the problem? Years ago John Lennon sang a song entitled *Imagine* and said that in his dream-world of peace and harmony there would be no religion. In their dreams men think that religion is the problem—the cause of discord. They are right, religion is the problem—**false** religion which puts man and his efforts on centre stage **is** the problem. But what Lennon and the most of mankind won't face is the reality that the only way to real peace is by inviting Jesus into our homes and asking him to stay with us.

But lest we point the finger too quickly at Islam or Sikhism, let's look more closely. Why is there 'fighting' in the Church? Why is the Church so fragmented today? Why can't one group of Reformed Christians join with another group? Is it because we have lost the enthusiasm for the pure truth? Jesus' prayer was that all believers would be one (Jn 17.21). This

will not happen until we, like the Samaritans, give up our inconsequential differences and seek truly to have Jesus dwelling with us.

As Jesus taught in their town, many more became believers. They believed his words and in him as a person. Christianity is belief in something concrete and specific. It is not a general belief, or an abstract belief, or a feeling. It is both belief in the teachings of Christ and belief in Christ himself. It is not possible to believe in Jesus unless you understand his teachings. Christianity is a religion of the mind and the heart.

Notice that they first believed because of the words of the woman (42), and then their belief was reinforced by what they themselves learned from Jesus. This is how it often is today. Many first come to believe on the witness of the one who presents simply the Gospel to them. Then their belief is strengthened as they come to learn more from, and about, Jesus. This is a good pattern for evangelism: we are to present the Gospel to our friends and then to bring them into the Church for continuing education and development as disciples of Jesus.

Their confession: “We know that this man really is the Saviour of the world” indicates their own personal belief. But it has a second application. Remember, these words were not spoken by Jews. Jews in general believed, based on the prophecies in Isaiah and elsewhere, that Gentiles would come into the Kingdom of God. But this belief wasn’t a daily reality to them—it was abstract and distant. As far as the Jews were concerned, those who believed from the nations would become Jews in order to be saved. They missed the point of the prophecies—Jesus really is the saviour of the world (not only of Jews). The Gentiles as Gentiles would come to the Messiah (e.g., Is 56.1-8; Mt 28.19; Rom 11.11; Rev 7.9). No longer would a Gentile have to become a Jew to inherit with Israel. The confession of the Samaritans is far more than a personal confession. It is a confirmation of the great promise of history, first made to Eve and repeated to Abraham and to the prophets: “In your seed all nations on earth will be blessed” (e.g., Gen 18.18).

The Samaritans as a hybrid-people were among the first fruits of this

promise. Soon to come would be Canaanites (e.g., the Syrophenician woman), local Greeks and Romans, Ethiopians, and people from Asia Minor and Europe. Then the Gospel would go to the ends of the earth.

Do you really believe that the mixed multitude in our city today can be saved? Most of them are Gentiles just like us. They may have a false religion like the Samaritans, but they can be saved. Of Jesus let it be said by everyone of us: “This man really is the Saviour of the world.”

Ministry in Galilee; Calling the Disciples

Beginning the Galilean Ministry—Initial Acceptance [March 2] (Fall 30 AD. Mt 4.17; Mk 1.14b-15; Lk 4.14b-15; Jn 4.43, 45)

After two days of teaching in Samaria, Jesus returned home to Galilee. The reception in Sychar had been so positive that he probably could have stayed longer. But in contrast to the initial interest which had resulted in many conversions, his subsequent preaching and teaching would probably not have been as fruitful. The hardened hearts of the remainder of the population would not have been as responsive; so it was time for him to move on. He could not concentrate his energies on this village when the initial focus of his ministry was to the House of Israel (Mt 15.24).

When he arrived in Galilee, the inhabitants welcomed him. But their motives were not pure. It was because of what he had *done*, not because of who he *was*. Their acceptance was really a subtle form of rejection. It would be shown where their hearts were when his teachings became even a bit ‘objectionable’ (Jn 6.66). Jesus performed miracles as signs of his office as the Messiah, and to demonstrate that he was the Son of God. His works were a sign (Jn 10.38) that what he taught was credible. He did not perform miracles to attract attention *per se* but to set the stage for his preaching ministry. This teaches us at least two things:

- 1) We are not to seek miracles today. The Messiah has come and has been attested to. It is our responsibility to believe in him, not to look for extra-ordinary healing or some other special blessing.
- 2) Our works of mercy and compassion can give credibility to our

message. People probably won't believe our message about salvation if we say that we love and don't show it. But they will be more ready to believe in Jesus if we show them true love.

The bulk of Jesus' ministry was conducted in his home country. He began this phase of his work in the town where he had lived for almost 30 years. He demonstrated the principle that ministry should start at home. And in a similar way our Gospel proclamation is to start in our own homes and among our neighbours. We don't have to go to the ends of the earth to be ambassadors of the Kingdom.

Where is 'home'? It is in our families, places of work, school or neighbourhood, working with a little-league team, or attending a home-and-school meeting. 'Home' is among the folk who know us as we really are. In some ways it is very hard for us to be 'missionaries' among those who know us well, and easier to present the Gospel in a far-off land. In some ways it is harder for us to be truly open about the Gospel with unbelievers with whom we interact daily than it is to tell a stranger about Jesus.

It was in this difficult setting that Jesus began to preach, especially and distinctly, the need for repentance because the Kingdom of Heaven was near. This message had some key points which we should note and apply:

- **Repentance**—His message is that man has sinned against God and must ask for forgiveness. The words *Kingdom of Heaven* used in Matthew means the same as the *Kingdom of God* (Mk 1.15). Our society has lost sight of the Law of God and sin. We need to show our neighbours that they are sinners against God's Law and need to repent.
- **Belief**—But repentance is only one part of the requirement (see, Mk 1.15). There are two dimensions of coming to Jesus—belief **and** repentance. God is the creator, man is a creature; God is holy, man is a sinner. Belief in Jesus therefore must include an acceptance of our finiteness as well as our unholiness. We can admit to God that we have done wrong (repentance). But this isn't enough. If we don't also believe that he is able to forgive through Jesus' work, we won't be saved.

- **Kingdom**—Jesus also emphasized the nearness of the kingdom—the recognition of the rule of God’s anointed. Jesus did not mean that God had not been ruling his creation up to this point. Rather, with the coming of the King, the kingdom was brought closer and there is now a universal recognition of Christ’s reign. It might seem to you that this isn’t the case. But it is a fact, for in every true believer’s heart, throughout all the nations of the earth, Jesus is acknowledged to be the King of kings. And when his kingdom is fully revealed at the end of time, **all** creation will recognize him as King (Ph 2.9-11).

The Gospel writers give us a summary of the content of the message that Jesus proclaimed. We will see later that he used various means to apply his message to his hearers. His message was that man has sinned and needs to repent of his sin and believe in Jesus the Saviour-King. It should also be the theme of the message to our neighbours and the witness of our lives.

Faith Based on Trust, Not Sight [March 3] **(Cana in Galilee, Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.46-54)**

This account sets before us a contrast between a faith based on trust in the word of God and a ‘faith’ based on sight. ‘Faith’ based on sight isn’t faith. It may be belief (see Jn 14.11; Jn 20.29), but it isn’t faith. We are told in Hebrews that “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Notice the last portion of this verse: “what we do not *see*.” Thomas said: “Unless I **see** the nail marks ... I will not believe ...” Jesus replied to Thomas: “Because you have **seen** me, you have believed; blessed are those who have **not seen** and yet have believed.”

Faith is not based on sight; it is based on trust. This was a great stumbling block for the Jews. Most of them would not believe in Jesus just because his teachings and proclamations were true. They said that they would not believe unless he showed them that he was the Prophet by performing signs from Heaven. This is why Jesus says in verse 48 that these people (he uses the plural of *you*) would not believe unless they saw “miraculous signs and wonders.” He is speaking here of the Jews, not the royal official.

The royal official heard that Jesus had returned to Galilee, and he went and begged him to heal his son. Jesus response was a simple statement: “You may go. Your son will live.” He took Jesus at his word and departed. He didn’t say, “But how will I know?” He wasn’t like the Jews who asked for signs before they would believe. He simply believed. Then he went on his way. Notice the degree of his faith. If I understand the account correctly, it appears that his belief was so strong that he was content to rest his animal for the night and to stay over in Cana. He then returned to Capernaum—a distance of about 30 kms—the next morning.

While he was on his way, he met one of his servants who gave him the news that his son was healed. He determined from the servant the hour of the healing, and he discovered that it was exactly when Jesus had said that his son would live. The royal official did not ask for a sign. But nevertheless he was given a sign. But the sign came **after** he had believed. His response showed that his faith was strengthened even more (Jn 4.53).

Notice also that the man was persistent with his request that Jesus would come and heal his son (Jn 4.47, 49). If a man can make such an appeal for the healing of his child, why is it that we are not willing to make such an earnest appeal for the salvation of those whom we love? And, more to the point, why is it that most men and women are not willing to present before God a persistent appeal for the eternal security of their own souls?

“Sight” (material evidences) is the great stumbling block for the vast majority of men and women today. When they are pushed to the wall of ultimate logic—which shows clearly that there must be a God, or there can be no meaning to anything—they respond by saying: “If God will show me that he is really there, then I will believe.” But for most people this is nothing more than a convenient escape from facing spiritual realities. They wouldn’t believe in God, or Jesus, even if someone came back from the dead (Lk 16.31). The request to see a sign is nothing more than an excuse!

People make many excuses for why they will not believe in Jesus. In their hearts they will not come to believe in him because of pride, autonomy, or some other self-interest. Trust means giving up our own cherished notions about reality and self. It means that we are willing to believe God and Jesus based on what they say and not just on what we can see, touch, and feel. This is what made the response of the royal official pleasing to Jesus. His belief was through faith, not sight. He accepted the words of Jesus at face value without asking for any physical evidence.

We can live in only one of two kingdoms of belief: 1) the purely material realm where everything is based on chance motions of electrons and where there can be no such thing as truth, morality, beauty, love or meaning, or 2) the kingdom of truth, which proclaims that there is a God of order and moral absolutes behind the created spiritual and physical realities.

Are we willing to take Jesus at his word? Do we really believe everything that God says in the Bible? Do we believe it because it is the word of God? Or do we look for signs before we will believe? If you are like the royal official, you will believe and look forward to the fulfillment of your belief. Like him, you will see your faith tested by a ‘night’ before you awaken to the dawn of new day. On that day, your faith will be rewarded in glory.

Like the royal official from Herod’s court, we should be willing to accept the truth about Jesus and God from the teachings recorded in the Bible. We should not be like the Jews who wanted signs and wonders before they would even give thought to believing. Let your faith be exhibited through trust in Jesus and not conditioned on the sight of things in this physical realm.

Beginning a Galilean Ministry—Opposition at Nazareth

[March 4]

(Fall 30 AD. Jn 4.44; Lk 4.16-31a)

After his commission through baptism and after his initiation trial—the temptation in the wilderness—Jesus went back to Nazareth his home town (where he was brought up, not where he was born) to launch his public ministry. It was the Sabbath, and he went into the synagogue as was his custom. Here he read a prophetic passage (Is 61.1, 2) which announced his coming. He applied it to himself, only to be rejected by his own people.

This account teaches us a number of things:

- As we noted a few meditations ago, the work of the Gospel should begin at home. This can be a difficult place to start, since our relatives, friends, and neighbours know our background (22) and personality—sometimes in too much detail. It may be easier to be ‘anonymous’ among those who don’t know us intimately than to gain respect and a hearing among those who do know us. If Jesus, who was without sin, had difficulty gaining a hearing, how much more difficult it will be for us who present the Gospel among those who know us “warts and all.”
- It was his custom (habit) to go to the synagogue. His custom of regular congregational worship sets an example for us. It also shows us that Jesus authorized and approved the form of worship of the synagogue.

Although we aren’t told in the Bible how synagogue worship developed or was instituted, there are hints that it was established by the “school of the prophets” and was well-established by the time of the Babylonian captivity and the return from captivity under Ezra. Some people argue that synagogue worship did not have Divine sanction and that therefore this gives us a warrant for establishing our own forms of worship. However, they don’t know for certain that there was no Divine warrant given in OT times but just not recorded. They also miss the point that Christ sanctioned this form of worship by habitually practising it. His very practice of it proves that it had Divine warrant, or he would not have participated in it. It is important

not to miss this point because our form of worship is based upon synagogue worship, and we believe that men don't have a right to create new forms of worship without warrant.

- He declared clearly that he was the Messiah: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” We are not to accept the view of liberals that Jesus slowly came to a messianic conception of his ministry. From the beginning, he knew his appointed task. For example, he knew that he:
 - ◊ had been anointed by the Holy Spirit at the Jordan (Lk 3.21, 22),
 - ◊ was to preach the good news to the poor—he had just come through Samaria where he had preached to a spiritually impoverished village and had just preached in Galilee, the poor territory of Israel,
 - ◊ was to proclaim freedom for prisoners (Jn 8.32-36; Acts 12.6-11),
 - ◊ would heal blind men (Mt 9.27-31) and give spiritual sight (Jn 9.39),
 - ◊ would release the oppressed (Mk 5.34),
 - ◊ was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. This is an allusion to the year of Jubilee (Lev 25.8-55) when slaves were freed and debts canceled, but its spiritual application is to salvation from sin.
- All eyes were on him as he finished reading the Scriptures and during his exposition of its application. After his sermon, the people spoke well of him and were surprised at the ability with which he had taught them. They were considering only his human parents and earthly background and were not considering his divinity. They thought of him as a mere man. We are not to make this mistake and to think of Jesus as merely a good teacher with a good moral philosophy. Rather, we are to acknowledge him as the King who will love and protect those in his kingdom who obey him and will destroy eternally those who reject him as King.

- We are not to expect that the Gospel will be accepted, because of who we are. “Jesus himself had pointed out,” we are told, “that a prophet has no honour in his own country.” We are not to be surprised when we see rejection. If they rejected the Lord of Glory, how much easier will it be for them to reject us? He went to his own, fully realizing that he would be rejected by most of them—nevertheless he went!
- There is a time of acceptance and a time of rejection. His use of the history of Naaman and of the widow of Zarephath reminded the Jews that there was a time for them to believe the Gospel and a time when they would be rejected, if they did not believe. So it is for us—God will offer salvation to us for a time, and then his Holy Spirit will not contend with us any longer (Gen 6.3).

Do you honour Jesus as **the** prophet of God, or is he without honour in your eyes?

A New Headquarters in Capernaum [March 5] **(Winter 31 AD. Mt 4.13-16; Lk 4.31a)**

Jesus was rejected in his home town of Nazareth; so he moved on and took up residence in Capernaum. Mark (Mk 2.1) tells us that Jesus considered this to be his new home. He stayed in the general vicinity of Capernaum (with a few trips to Judea to visit Jerusalem) for about two years. During this time he taught the crowds and trained a group of permanent disciples from which he would later select a core of twelve Apostles.

Capernaum was at this time the major centre of the Galilean province and a cosmopolitan town. It had a full-time tax office (Mt 9.9), a garrison for Roman soldiers (Mt 8.5-13), and a synagogue built by a gentile (Lk 7.5). The city had plenty of fresh water, was inhabited by an industrious labour force which included fishermen, and (based on archaeological evidence) it appears that the city was prosperous. The city was destroyed sometime around 700 AD, probably by Moslems.

Matthew tells us that Jesus' settlement in this area fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah (Is 9.1). The prophet spoke of a special blessing which would be given to the land that was allocated by Joshua to Zebulun and Naphtali as their inheritance. The blessing was to come to the people living on the north and west shores of the sea of Galilee and along the west bank of the north portion of the Jordan. In addition, according to Isaiah, the area to realize the blessing was to be a Gentile area. Capernaum, where Jesus settled fulfills, completely Isaiah's prophecy. It was a Roman colony, occupied by Gentiles, and was located in the midst of the former territory of Naphtali on the northwest shore of the sea of Galilee.

One of Matthew's objectives in writing his Gospel was to show clearly how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the OT. He continually reminds us of the prophecies that are being fulfilled through the life of Christ. It is good for us to remember that Jesus' setting up of his headquarters in Capernaum did not occur by chance. This provides two simple but very important lessons for us: 1) it provides clear evidence that the Bible is the word of God—no other writing can so accurately predict events 600 years in the future, and 2) it reminds us that God is in control of all events—his plan is always being worked out in every detail. Nothing is out of control.

The blessing for the Gentiles is the light of salvation. Don't think that Gentiles weren't saved before. Gentiles were saved outside of Israel (e.g., Melchizedek, Job, Naaman, Queen of Sheba) or by becoming Jews (e.g., Rahab, Ruth). The point of the prophecy is that through Christ the Gospel would be opened expansively to Gentiles. No longer would the message be heard only in dim observance of Jewish ceremonies and hidden in Hebrew. Rather, the ceremonies would be replaced with the light of Reality (Christ), and the Word would become available in a thousand tongues (Acts 2.4-11).

The people living in *darkness* would see the great light. The darkness that the Gentiles lived in was superstition and paganism. The native religion of this region at the time of Jesus may have been a form of Zoroastrianism which includes sacred writings, a twisted perversion of

the sacrificial system of the ancient Near East, and a hierarchy of gods. There would also have been some observance of the mythical religions of Greece and Rome and many who believed in astrology and the zodiac.

Men claim that they aren't pagans. But our city is filled with pagans who, for the most part, live as atheists but have a mystical religion not much different from that of ancient pagans. The primary god in the pantheon of modern society is 'chance'. The lesser gods are the 'fates' ruled by the stars (zodiac), nature (e.g., Gia), and environment (i.e., the psycho-social background of each person). The pagans of today also have sacred writings including the works of Plato, Darwin, Dewey, Freud, Mead, Keynes, McLean, and the horoscope. R. C. Sproul points out that the primary god of the pagans is no god: "Chance exercises absolutely no influence ... chance can do nothing because it *is* nothing. It is *no thing* ... It is merely a mental construct. It has no power because it has no being. It is nothing." (*Chosen by God*, p. 193) Chance is no more a god than the useless idols of Psalm 115.4-8.

The light of the Gospel came in Jesus Christ (Is 42.6, 7; Is 49.6; Jn 1.4, 5, 9). It is the only truth which can dispel the darkness for those living in the land of the shadow of death. Jesus placed himself in the heart of darkness—spiritual darkness—in Capernaum and presented the clear, clean light of truth. The Church (and we in this city) are placed in the land of the shadow of death to present the light of truth.

The light shone in the area of Capernaum for a few centuries, but night fell again. In Jerome's day, the 'Nazaraeans' were neither faithful Jews nor Christians—religious syncretism prevailed. As we see from Romans 1.18-32 and Romans 2.1-16, God will not tolerate a society which does not honour him and which embraces paganism. How long will it be until God turns off the light in our city?

Call of the First Four Disciples [March 6]

(Near Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, Winter 31 AD. Mt 4.18-22; Mk 1.16-20; Lk 5.1-11)

If you have not studied in detail the history of the disciples of Jesus, you might find it surprising that it was almost a year after the beginning of his public ministry that Jesus selected from his followers and hearers a small group who would become known as the Disciples or Apostles. Most people confuse this formal call of the Disciples with the original response of followers of Jesus (e.g., Jn 1.35-51).

There was a group of people (probably a few hundred adults and children) who assembled regularly to listen to Jesus' teaching while he lived in Capernaum, and who believed that he was the Messiah. In general, these people went about their daily business and came together on the Sabbath or at other times when Jesus was teaching. None were yet part of Jesus' core- ministry team. The evidence for there being a larger group of followers than the Twelve is given in such passages as Luke 10.1 where Jesus sends out seventy-two followers, and Acts 1.21-22 where an Apostle is chosen to replace Judas. Using our Presbyterian terminology, we could say that Jesus as a Teacher-Pastor had started a new congregation but that additional elders had not yet been ordained in the congregation.

Luke tells us that the calling of the first elders for Jesus' congregation occurred one day when he was teaching beside the Sea of Galilee (also called Lake Gennesaret, Sea of Tiberias, and Sea of Kinnereth). Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John were among this group of followers in the congregation of Jesus. They continued to work in their fishing business but seem to have been regular pupils at Jesus' teaching sessions.

On this particular day, Jesus was teaching in the morning as the fishermen were cleaning up from the night's work. After he had finished teaching for the day, he asked Peter to do something which seemed rather strange. He asked him to put out again to fish in the middle of the day. Peter was surprised at this request. Fishermen know that the best time to catch fish is early in the morning. Peter and his men hadn't been successful; so why would they hope to find fish now with the sun high overhead? But he obeyed anyway.

Jesus used the surprise on their part to provide them with a concrete object

lesson in faith. The lesson certainly made its point, for Peter realized how weak his faith had been and acknowledged that his doubt had been sinful. But Jesus didn't perform this miracle to demonstrate his power or increase the disciples' belief in himself, although both of these ends are certainly supported by the miracle. The faith that Jesus was focusing on with this lesson was not faith (belief) in him *per se*, but rather, he was teaching them to have faith in him as the one who would build his Church (Mt 16.18).

He was preparing the disciples for their call to become church organizers. Just as the disciples brought in overflowing nets of fish from an 'empty' sea, so they would bring in overflowing churches from an empty (vain) culture. This is a lesson that we also need to learn. We need to confess our sin often for doubting that Jesus can fill the nets. We look around at the empty sea of humanity and say: "What can God do!?" We really don't believe that God can bring about radical change, at what appears to be a most unlikely time, and fill the churches to overflowing. We need to pray for the kind of faith that believes that Jesus **is** building his Church.

It was after this lesson in applied faith that Jesus gave the call to the four fishermen who became his first Disciples. They became the core of his full-time ministry team. It appears that after this call they took up a more permanent residence with Jesus, or at least devoted themselves to full-time training for evangelism and teaching. It also appears that they left their fishing business until after the crucifixion. They returned then to their former occupations for a short time (during their period of perplexity and confusion) until after the ascension of Christ and the Day of Pentecost.

We must understand that their calling was not a 'cold call'. There were a number of experiences in their background which prepared them for the call to be fishers of men—evangelists (Lk 5.10). They had been at the baptism of Jesus and knew that he was the Messiah (Jn 1.41), they had been members of his congregation for about a year and had heard his teachings, and now they had a specific lesson to strengthen their faith.

Nevertheless they followed when he said: "Come, follow me." They were obedient to the call and immediately left their nets, boats, fathers, and

hired men. They took discipleship seriously. We may not all be called to full-time evangelism, but we are called to be full-time disciples. We cannot be just followers of Jesus—we must be his disciples! How long will we remain in his congregation hearing great teaching without becoming his disciples, willing to work with him as he builds his Church?

Healing a Demoniac [March 7]

(Synagogue in Capernaum, Spring 31 AD. Mk 1.21-28; Lk 4.31b-37)

Here we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue. Although he had not attended formal rabbinical training, he seems to be taking advantage of a custom that allowed visiting teachers to participate in the service if they were invited by the synagogue leaders. Paul, although a trained rabbi, also takes advantage of this custom when he goes to new cities (see, Acts 13.15; Acts 14.1; Acts 17.1; Acts 18.4). But Jesus did not need the training of men. He came with training from Heaven, and in his own authority.

The teachers of the law based their instruction (rightly) on Scripture, but they also appealed to tradition and to the writings and sayings of previous generations. As a result, there were various opinions among the rabbis (like denominations in the Church today). These rabbis often interpreted Scripture incorrectly, because they misunderstood God's grace and the true requirements of his laws. They had added so much to the basic counsels of God that their interpretations were often self-contradictory, and they confused the people. But Jesus came with his own authority and cleared away all the cobwebs of rabbinic interpretation. Compare his words in the *Sermon on the Mount*, where he says: "You have heard that it was said [by the rabbis] ... But I tell you."

Notice that Mark says that Jesus taught with authority, and Luke tells us that his message had authority. Jesus teaches truth, and he is Truth. Preachers today can teach with authority. But their message cannot have more than a derived authority. Jesus' message had authority, because he was its author. He didn't quote human authorities. We must never forget that Jesus is the final authority. Modern ethics and morality are based on individual opinion or crowd opinion—a vote of the majority, or opinion polls. But

opinion can never make something absolute. We must make sure that our morality is based on the word of Christ in Scripture, and not on what we or the crowd think.

It is in the context of this display of authoritative teaching that a demon comes onto the scene. In God's providence, this demon comes to challenge the authority of Christ. But in the very act of a challenge the demon reinforces Jesus' authority. The demon digs a pit and falls into it!

The cry of the demon has three points. Each is an attempt to trip up Jesus and to make him look like a fool instead of the final authority.

In each statement, Satan is the accuser:

- **What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?** In effect the challenge is: "Why are you, a man (Jesus, from a place), meddling with demons and the supernatural? Men shouldn't concern themselves with demons. But if you deal with us, maybe that shows that you are on our side." This is a challenge for him to show his real colours, and in so doing to make him look silly. If he answers that he can deal with demons, he will be misunderstood; if he says he has no dealings with them, he will look weak. He answers with silence.
- **Have you come to destroy us?** "If you are not on our side, then you must be our enemy; let's see what you can do." Again there is a moral quandary. If Jesus says he wasn't there to destroy the demons, then he might be viewed as being on their side. If he said that he was there to destroy them, then the people would expect to see action. Jesus knew that this was not the time to discuss the coming judgment of Satan and his demons by God. Jesus answers with silence.
- **I know who you are—the Holy One of God!** It isn't until the exposure of his Messiahship that Jesus finally reacts. Jesus did not want his sovereignty declared at this time by the demons. They will declare it (Phil 2.10), but now is not the time. It will confuse the people about his nature as they ask: "Who is this, a man with power, making himself

equal with God?” Jesus responds with a rebuke.

Jesus did not even bother to give an answer to the demon. He just told the demon to be quiet. A demon has no right to demand from God anything. A demon cannot bring God to account. Scripture tells us not to answer a fool according to his folly (Prov 26.4). Demons are the worst of moral fools. There was no reason for Jesus to give an answer.

Jesus demonstrated on whose side he really was—God’s—as he commanded the demon to get out of the man. This showed that his authority as a teacher could not be challenged by men, angels, or demons. What kind of authority does Jesus have? Even the demons obey him. This is the one in whom we trust. He has the ultimate authority. Believe him, trust him, accept his teaching—it has authority.

Healings [March 8]

(Capernaum, Spring 31 AD. Mt 8.14-17; Mk 1.29-34; Lk 4.38-41)

The scene changes to Peter’s house. Jesus and his disciples probably went there directly from the Synagogue after the Sabbath service to take part in the traditional afternoon fellowship meal. It is on this Sabbath afternoon that Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law. We should understand the purpose of this healing in its context. It follows directly after the events in the Synagogue where Jesus demonstrated his authority. We must not think of this healing as some kind of preferential treatment for Peter’s family. The purpose of the healing seems to be to demonstrate Jesus’ Divine authority which has just been declared. By healing on the Sabbath he breaks Jewish tradition and interpretation of the law and teaches that it is valid to perform works of mercy on the Sabbath. He shows that he is Lord of the Law and of the Sabbath.

It is important to observe what is happening. Notice that the people of the town, hearing of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, waited until after sunset (i.e., until after the Sabbath was over) to bring their sick to Jesus. It was a Jewish tradition that a person was not to carry a burden of any kind on the Sabbath. But notice also in Luke’s account that there is a hint that

the people walked on the edge of the Jewish interpretation of the law. They began to carry their sick while the sun was setting.

We can learn two things from these events:

- 1) We are all prone to walk as close to the edge of the law as we can. Instead, we should walk well back from the edge.
- 2) But there is a more important principle—the law that we observe scrupulously must be a valid law. We must ensure that we understand God’s intent for Law and that we don’t impose our own traditions or interpretations on his Law. This should apply in our personal lives and in the corporate life of our church or nation.

We should also note that there is another example of how these two principles are to be applied. It was Peter’s mother-in-law whom Jesus healed. It is clear that Peter was married (see also, 1 Cor 9.5). Celibacy was not a requirement for an Apostle of Christ. Forbidding clergy or anyone else to marry is wrong (1 Tim 4.3). The Church over the centuries has misunderstood God’s intention (e.g., 1 Cor 7.1) and has set invalid boundaries. Then it has put people into a situation where they are burdened with rules and walk too close to the edge, and even cross the boundary, of God’s Law (e.g., by committing sexual sins). By observing the proper balance—God’s Laws, not man’s laws and additions—we will not have too much law or too little.

Jesus’ miracles were performed primarily for didactic (teaching) purposes—to declare his Lordship. Each writer provides a different perspective on the scene. By this they help us understand the purpose of the miracles.

Matthew’s focus is on the kingship of Christ. He says that what Jesus did was touch (with **kingly** authority) her [Peter’s mother-in-law], and she was healed. Mark considers Jesus’ life and ministry from the perspective of his suffering, humiliation, and servanthood. He tells us that he took her hand (with **priestly** care) and helped her up. Luke’s focus is on Jesus as an historical teacher. As a doctor he provides details about the fever and tells us that with a (**prophetic**) rebuke Jesus healed her.

Although each writer has his own focus, there are two additional lessons that all three accounts teach us:

- 1) After she was healed she began to wait on them. Her healing was followed by service. And so it should be with respect to our spiritual healing. We don't serve to be healed. We are healed to serve. Obedience and service are to be the fruits of salvation.
- 2) The healing of Peter's mother-in-law opened a flood-gate—the people brought their sick and demon possessed, and Jesus healed them all. Matthew applies the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 53.4) to these events. Notice that the parallel images of this prophecy relate not to physical infirmities, but to spiritual infirmities (see, Is 53.5, 6). The healing of the sick and demon possessed was a sign that Jesus would accomplish the far greater miracle of removing sin and its guilt—a greater miracle because it provides healing for those who are guilty of infinite sin and should be left eternally dead, and it gives them eternal life.

Through these healings Jesus continued to rebuke the demons because they wanted to lead the people astray and have them set him up as an earth-bound king and healer. But with his victory over Satan through the resurrection, the demons have been silenced. Now we who have been healed of our spiritual infirmities need to declare him as the Prophet, Priest and King.

Prayer, Healing, Teaching and Preaching [March 9] **(Galilee, early Summer 31 AD. Mt 4.23-25; Mk 1.35-39; Lk 4.42-44)**

The next day, after showing his Lordship over the Sabbath by casting out a demon and by performing a healing miracle, he went out to pray very early in the morning in a solitary place. This action of Jesus provides a few lessons for us:

- **He prayed after a significant victory over Satan**—It is after his victory over evil and sin's consequences that he makes a special point of going out to pray. There are times when we especially need to pray—when we are at a low point, but also, surprisingly, when we are

on a high. I think that we can all understand why we would want to pray when we are in the ‘dumps’. But why should we pray when we are on a high? Because it is at precisely this point that the Devil can tempt us and lead us astray. Jesus would have been as open to temptation at his point of victory as he was during his low point after fasting in the wilderness. He could be tempted in all the ways that we are, and the temptation to be proud probably led him to ask his Father to refocus his ministry and to keep him from glorying in successes in his human nature. He continually reminded his disciples and hearers that he had nothing which had not been given by the Father. We need to think and act the same way.

- **He went out very early, at daybreak**—Our time of prayer should be like his. Regardless of the nature of our calling we should start each day with prayer—before we begin our work. The idea of rising early to spend time with God seems to be a challenge in our culture. Maybe it always has been, but I wonder how much evening-television has influenced our lives and made it harder for us to rise early.
- **Went to a solitary place**—He spent time with his Father in private. In the Middle East places of private worship (think for example of Nathaniel under a tree and the place of prayer for Lydia near a river) were often outdoors because most of the indoor living-spaces were communal. We think of indoor spaces as private. Like Jesus, we should resort to one of our private places to spend time with our Father.

Simon and his companions went looking for Jesus because a crowd was seeking him. Why did they go looking for him? Why do we go looking for him? Because of what he can do for us, or because of who he is? It is not wrong to seek Jesus for what he can do for us—forgive our sins and teach us. But it is better to seek him because of who he is—to worship and honour him.

The people were looking for him primarily because they were seeking healings. But as Matthew tells us, his ministry consisted of three parts: teaching, preaching, and healing. As we have noted before, the healings

were secondary. What they signified was primary—the message of salvation. His primary purpose was to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, which in various contexts means: the eternal kingship of God, the rule of God, the personal presence of God in Jesus, a spiritual domain, and a coming eternal realm.

So beside healing, he taught and preached the kingdom in the synagogues and open air, depending on the day of the week and locale.

The root word, in the Greek, for teaching is *didasko*, which has been brought into English as ‘didactic’. In English, didactics is the science of systematic instruction. The word in NT Greek appears to have a somewhat similar meaning—systematic instruction in doctrine and Apostolic tradition. Teaching is not specifically **preaching** in the NT sense, although teaching and preaching are very closely aligned and often occur at the same time and in the same context (e.g., Acts 15.35; 1 Tim 4.13; 1 Tim 5.17). Preaching in the NT sense is the proclamation of the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, and is a translation of words such as, *euangelion*, *euangelizo*, *kerygma*, and *kerysso*. We often make a distinction today between types of preaching by adding a qualification—‘evangelistic preaching’ and ‘doctrinal preaching’. This is necessary because we use the word ‘preaching’ today to mean both teaching and gospel proclamation.

You may be thinking that this distinction is not worth much consideration. But it appears that the Church does not fill its commission from Jesus unless it provides a balanced diet of teaching and preaching. Too much preaching (gospel proclamation) will produce hearers with little understanding of what God requires of us by way of obedience. Too much systematic teaching without the gospel will leave us dry without an appreciation of the great work accomplished on the cross.

It is significant that Jesus began his first tour of teaching and preaching with prayer. Let us pray for the ministry of teaching and preaching.

Healing (Cleansing) a Leper [March 10]

(Galilee, early Summer 31 AD. Mt 8.2-4; Mk 1.40-45; Lk 5.12-16)

In the past few meditations we have considered a number of healings in succession: a demoniac, Peter's mother-in-law, and then some general healings. Now we find Jesus healing a leper—again on the Sabbath. In the next meditation we will consider his healing of a paralytic. Why is it that after the general healings, Jesus performed these two specific healings? It appears that he wanted to demonstrate through these healings that he was the Messiah. Healing people of their fevers, muscular pains, etc., was an amazing thing, but the result was really incidental. Jesus' purpose was much greater than healing the illnesses of people who in a few years would die.

Temporal healings are a sign of what Jesus does in the spiritual realm—he removes the curse of sin, including spiritual blindness, spiritual paralysis, and the guilt of spiritual leprosy (total depravity). He is the Messiah, and he wanted to demonstrate through the healings that he was fulfilling the prophecies of the OT (for example: Is 35.56-6; Jer 30.17; Jer 33.6; Zeph 3.19). Jesus shows through temporal works applied to the flesh that he can provide eternal spiritual-healing.

Notice how the gospel writers give us different details to fill in the picture. The full picture shows that a man covered with leprosy came to Jesus and knelt before him with his face to the ground and begged him saying: "Lord (sir, master) if you are willing you can make me clean." The request of the leper teaches clearly that it is not ultimately the faith of the recipient that is required for healing but, rather, the will of God. The leper probably had very little knowledge about Jesus; yet he understood the facts about healing.

Why is it that the 'faith healers' of every age continue to emphasize the faith of the recipients and are quick to ignore the will of God? The folks who flock after today's healers should test the healers. When the healer says to the invalid: "if you believe, you will be healed," the invalid should respond as did the leper: "If you are willing, you can make me whole."

This would quickly demonstrate the unreality of their ‘ministry’ and place an authenticating seal on the ministry of Jesus.

In the request of the leper, there is a lesson about the way of salvation. It is not our faith that saves us. It is God’s work and willingness that save us. Our faith is the instrument for applying the healing, much like saliva was used by Jesus to heal a blind man.

Jesus showed compassion for the leper and reached out and touched him with his hand. This leper had been cut off from human company, and all who saw him would avoid even looking at him. Yet Jesus came along and not only looked at him and spoke with him but also touched him. He brought upon himself the ritual defilement (Lev 13.45-46; Lev 5.2) that came from touching something unclean. For Jesus, ceremonial considerations were over-ridden by his compassion.

As our Priest, Jesus does the same for us. He overlooked his absolute holiness and took upon himself a human nature with its weakness and temptations. From conception and birth we are outcast—nothing to look at, spiritually polluted, foul and unclean. But Jesus reaches out his hand and touches us with the Holy Spirit, and draws us into his bosom.

Jesus then ordered the healed man not to tell anyone about the healing, and sent him on his way. What is the reason for this? It is often said that Jesus gave these instructions because it was not his purpose to be seen as a miracle worker. He did not want to be distracted from his teaching ministry. Although this is true, there is a more explicit reason given in this account. It seems that the ex-leper was to tell the priests so that they in turn would receive Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus says that the ex-leper’s appearing before the priests was to be “a testimony to them.” If the priests knew their history (2 Ki 5.1-14), they would realize that a greater than Elisha had come—who could only be the Messiah.

The man disobeyed Jesus. We can try to excuse the man for his excitement. But he did disobey, even if he thought he had a valid reason. This is an example of letting “the end justify the means.” Notice the result

of this man's disobedience. Mark tells us that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. People came for healing rather than for teaching, and probably more opposition arose from the Jewish leaders (Lk 5.17). This provides a clear lesson—how easy it is to spoil the work of Christ by our disobedience, even when we think that the end is good. We can't pick and choose which commands we wish to obey.

The lessons from this portion of Jesus' life are:

- Jesus came to heal our souls of their eternal, spiritual 'sickness,'
- we are to seek the spiritual healing that he alone can provide, and
- we are to obey his commands (Jn 14.15).
-

Healing (Forgiving) a Paralytic [March 11]

(Capernaum, early Summer 31 AD. Mt 9.1-8; Mk 2.1-12; Lk 5.17-26)

Jesus returned to Capernaum from the outlying regions of Galilee where he had healed a leper. When the people heard that he was at home, they crowded into the house. Do you think that this was a good thing? What was their motive for being there—for temporal or spiritual healing?

In the previous meditation, we noted that Jesus ordered the healed leper not to tell anyone except the priests about his healing. He told him to go to the priests because this was required in the Law, and so that the priests might receive Jesus as the Messiah. In addition, Jesus gave this instruction because he did not want to be viewed as a miracle-worker and healer, and thus to be distracted from his teaching ministry.

As we noted, the man **disobeyed**; and now we find Jesus and a crowd assembled primarily for healing, not teaching. In the crowd were some Pharisees. This is the first time in the life of Jesus that the Pharisees are mentioned in the Galilean context. From the ex-leper's talking, the opposition has begun in Galilee; and it will continue to grow.

Even though he wanted to be preaching and teaching, he had compassion on the sick and was healing people. For this reason, four men brought a paralytic on a mat. Because the entrance was blocked by the crowd, the

four went up onto the flat roof and removed the floor used for drying foods and other household activities, and lowered the man in front of Jesus.

It is at this point that Jesus reminds his hearers that he was on earth primarily to proclaim the coming of the Eternal Kingdom, and not to heal. We are told that when Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the man: “Your sins are forgiven.” This isn’t what the four men expected. They had brought their friend to be healed of his paralysis. But Jesus spoke of healing (forgiveness) of their sins.

Notice also in passing: it isn’t only the faith of the crippled man that is of importance but also the faith of the **carriers**. This presents a real challenge to modern “faith healers.” Do they ask the person who drove the cripple to the auditorium about his faith before they perform a ‘healing’?

Doesn’t it seem strange that Jesus forgave the paralytic’s sin when this was not what he was expecting. He hadn’t hoped for this, nor did his companions carry him to Jesus for this reason. This twist of events shows us that Jesus wanted to focus attention on his work of salvation.

The Pharisees and teachers were thinking to themselves that Jesus blasphemed since only God can forgive sins. In their opinion he blasphemed—not by using God’s name in vain but by claiming to be equal with God through his words and actions.

Jesus’ divine nature came through, and he knew what was in their hearts. So he challenged them with questions. First, he asked why they were thinking these things (it must have been a shock to them to see that Jesus knew even their thoughts) and then asked a rhetorical question, to compare the difficulty of forgiving sins with commanding a crippled man to walk. On the surface, the expected answer seems to be that it is easier to tell someone that his sins are forgiven.

But it may be that the expected answer is not the immediately obvious one. Is it really easier to forgive sins than to heal the lame? Surprisingly, it is easier to heal the lame! From a human perspective, we find it difficult

(though possible) to forgive a person, but impossible to heal a cripple. But from God's perspective, it is the opposite. It is not difficult for God to heal. After all, he created the entire universe in six days. He created Adam from dust. It is no challenge for him to heal a man's legs.

But what about God's forgiving sin? Sin is an infinite affront to God's character and Godhood. To forgive sin is impossible without the debt being paid. It was difficult (using a human term) for God to forgive sin. He had to show great love to unrepentant rebels by sending his son to die. Do not underestimate the difficulty God the Father faced when his son cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

For man, providing physical healing is difficult. For God, providing spiritual healing is difficult. Jesus uses the difficulty of one to illustrate the difficulty of the other.

At least the people realized that the healing was from God, even if they rejected the Healer. And they praised him. Can we learn a lesson from this? We need to believe in Jesus as the Spiritual Healer and praise him, when he provides eternal healing from sin.

The Calling of Matthew the Tax Collector [March 12] **(Capernaum, early Summer 31 AD. Mt 9.9; Mk 2.13-14; Lk 5.27-28)**

We know from elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Lk 3.12, 13) and from other historical documents that tax collectors were prone to exact more taxes than the Romans wanted collected. In general, men in this trade were dishonest and had no scruples (see Jesus' reference, which places tax collectors in a bad light, in Mt 5.46). The Romans had vague tariff rates relating to the trans-shipment of goods, and a tax collector could levy tariffs based on his own interpretation of the rules. Usually the interpretation would be to his benefit and he would skim off the difference.

It appears that Levi became rich from this practice. One evidence is that we find him holding a feast in his home (e.g., Lk 5.29). A second is the location of his tax-booth. It was in a prime location for collecting tariffs on

merchant goods in transit by sea (Mk 2.13-14) and on the main highway from Damascus to the Mediterranean—the “way of the sea” (Is 9.1). Both the feast and the location of his booth seem to indicate that he made more money from being a tax collector than the basic clerk’s wages would have supplied.

Tax collectors were, as a group, despised—primarily because they were on contract to the Roman Government, but also because they collected more money than they should have. Because of their compliance with Rome, they were usually excommunicated from the synagogues. To compound matters, Levi may have been a Levite (this suggestion is based on his given name). If he was a Levite, he was not living as one who served the temple.

Consider someone working in a gambling casino or bingo hall. We might despise him for his chosen profession. It might be hard for us to see how he could be brought to Christ. But the fact that Jesus called Levi teaches us that God can bring **anyone** to faith and repentance.

Notice that both Mark and Luke refer to Matthew by the name *Levi*. Yet he refers to himself by his name *Matthew* in his own Gospel. Jesus may have given him the name Matthew as his apostolic name just as he gave Peter his new name. Matthew means *Gift of the LORD*. Is he not a fitting example of someone saved by grace? He had experienced grace and he wants us to know it.

Don’t think that his formal calling was a sudden thing. Many people think that Jesus just walked into town and went up to the booth and told Levi to follow. The reality is that Jesus had been in Capernaum for three to six months teaching in the synagogue and in homes. It is also likely that Levi had heard the preaching of John the Baptist and may have been among the tax collectors who had gone out to see him (Lk 3.12, 13). Just as others whom Jesus called as Apostles were at the Jordan, Levi probably also had been there. It appears that a qualification for one who would be an Apostle was that he had been with Jesus from John’s Baptism (see, Acts 1.22).

Levi's heart had been prepared by Jesus' teaching and the witness of the miracles. When Jesus called, he followed. Notice that the command of Jesus is "follow me" not "believe in me." I think that by this point Levi was a believer in Jesus as the Messiah. He had not yet made the formal commitment to break with his former life, but at his call, he became a true disciple and he became a *Matthew*.

Jesus broke the tradition of the Rabbis by calling this social outcast. In so doing he shows us that he does not go by the outward appearance. In contrast are we quick to judge by outward appearances? Are we quick to make assumptions about who should or should not be part of our congregation, based on our traditions?

We have noted previously that the word *follow* in the Greek can mean more than just walking behind someone. It can mean going over completely to Jesus, committing entirely to him, and becoming a disciple. This is what Matthew did. He left everything (Lk 5.28) and followed Jesus. He left his occupation and the income from it—never to return to them. By this Jesus shows that his saving and calling are without return.

The Apostles took discipleship seriously, they gave up their old ways of life—whether considered honourable (e.g., fishermen) or dishonourable (e.g., a Roman tax collector or a zealot)—and committed themselves wholly to the Lord Jesus. We may, or may not, have to give up our careers at this time to follow Jesus, but we must be ready to do so if he calls us.

Please note in passing that this tax collector became the author of a gospel. As you read his account notice how often there is an emphasis on ethics and law (e.g., the *Sermon on the Mount*). Levi as a conniving law-compromiser came as Matthew to understand what Biblical Law really means, and he wants you to understand this with him.

The Banquet at Matthew's House [March 13] **(Capernaum, Summer 31 AD. Mt 9.10-13; Mk 2.15-17; Lk 5.29-32)**

After becoming a permanent disciple of Jesus, Matthew held a great feast

at his house and invited his associates to come and meet Jesus. But outside stood the Pharisees, being critical. This living parable provides us with a number of lessons about salvation:

- **Fellowship Feast**—Matthew confessed his discipleship by eating with Jesus. And so it is in the Church—we partake of the Lord’s Supper as a public confession of our union with Christ. The Lord’s Supper is not an evangelistic ordinance; it is a feast of fellowship with those who are striving with us to have the mind of Christ.

Don’t, however, carry the analogy too far. Although eating together is a sign of fellowship with like-minded individuals, Jesus is found eating with the despised folk (the outcasts from synagogue and society), many of whom probably had not put their faith in him. Why did Jesus eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’? To fellowship with them? No, rather to be among them as a witness. How can we follow Jesus’ example? Matthew’s actions do not teach us that we should invite every kind of sinner to the Lord’s Supper. But they do teach us that a meal (such as our monthly fellowship lunches) is a place to which we can invite our neighbours and friends so that they can learn more about Jesus.

Jesus’ eating with the outcasts upset the Pharisees. It was contrary to their tradition to eat with anyone who, in their opinion, was not an upright citizen. How can we cross the cultural divide in our generation and city? Jesus as the Son of God knew how best to reach the outcasts. We need to ask him to show us how we can reach the ‘unreachables’ in our city.

- **Sincere Sinners**—Many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came to the banquet at Matthew’s house. Outwardly, this class included prostitutes and thieves. But the folk in Matthew’s house were in their hearts no worse sinners than the Pharisees. This is one reason why the NIV puts the word in quotes.

But there was something more notable about them than their outward

sins, and it provides another reason for putting the word in quotes. The Pharisees outside Matthew's house were also sinners because of their self-righteousness and rejection of Jesus.

- **Pious Pharisees**—The sect of the Pharisees arose during the period 166-142 BC and by the time of Jesus had become the most prominent. As a group, they were both formalistic and hypocritical. Among them were teachers of the law, but not all teachers of the law were Pharisees. It was members of this pious sect who stood outside the door of Matthew's house being critical of Jesus' actions. We must be very careful that we don't act like the Pharisees. We can act this way when we criticise the work of others working in Christ's Kingdom. It seems to be very easy to find something wrong with everyone else's work in order to justify our own feeble efforts.
- **Real Repentance**—What is needed to be right with God? Not the pious self-righteousness of the Pharisees, but real repentance. Jesus says that it is not the whole/healthy who need a doctor but the sick. The 'whole/healthy' are those who think that they are not sinners, just like the Pharisees thought. The necessary condition for repentance is a recognition that we are sinners before God. Without this knowledge there is no repentance. This truth is illustrated by those at Matthew's feast.

But recognition of our state before God is not enough. Jesus came not to **call** the righteous but **sinners**. The guests in Matthew's house knew that they were sinners and because of this knowledge were on their way to becoming righteous, and so they came to meet Jesus. A person who really understands that he is a sinner will come to Jesus. Often it is the ones who are most 'down and out' who realize their need for salvation. The outwardly 'good' have no time for Jesus. Self-righteousness is the greatest form of blindness.

- **Satisfactory Sacrifice**—To challenge the Pharisees' smugness Jesus quotes from Hosea 6.6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." He tells them to go and learn what this means. We also need to learn the meaning.

Sacrifice with a bad attitude and with no love in our hearts is corrupt. We should all be put to shame by this. Our worship may be ‘pure’, but what are we doing to reach out to the unsaved ‘sinners’ in our community? Do we love them as Jesus did? Do we bring them to meet with Jesus as Matthew did?

The Disciples’ Feasting Instead of Fasting [March 14] **(Capernaum, Summer 31 AD. Mt 9.14-17; Mk 2.18-22; Lk 5.33-39)**

Some of John’s disciples and the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question about fasting. They asked him why they had to fast but his disciples did not. Why did they question him about fasting? What did God require? The only regular fast appointed by God in the OT was the Day of Atonement (Lev 16.29-31; Lev 23.27-32). It appears that four other fasts were added around the time of the Jewish captivity in Babylon (see, Zech 7.1-7; Zech 8.19). By Jesus’ day, it seems that the Pharisees were fasting twice a week (e.g., Lk 18.12).

Of course there were occasional fasts proclaimed for various reasons (e.g., 1 Sam 7.6; Neh 9.1; Est 4.16), and individuals often fasted to “afflict the soul” in repentance, to suppress their personal will, to facilitate grieving, or to obtain guidance and help from God. Fasting sometimes included total abstinence from all food and other proper pleasures, and at other times it meant a restriction of food (e.g., a small amount of bread and water).

Notice that this dispute about fasting follows a feast—the banquet at Matthew’s house. It is possible that Matthew held his banquet on either a Monday or a Thursday which had become the traditional fast-days of the Pharisees, and thus the feast on this particular day seemed to be out-of-line with the prevailing thinking about ‘holiness’.

Jesus often did not provide a straight answer to questions. In this instance he answers indirectly because he may not want to challenge the Pharisees’ notions about fasting with John’s disciples present. For John’s disciples, fasting may have been a matter of true faith and repentance, whereas for most of the Pharisees it was nothing more than an outward ritual. If he

challenged their ritual he may have discouraged John's disciples who were heading in the right direction through faith. Later in the same year, after another visit from John's disciples, Jesus did challenge the Pharisees directly on their attitude to his eating and drinking (see, Mt 11.2-19; Luke 7.24-35). In that instance he contrasted his ministry and life with that of John, which included fasting. He rebuked them for not accepting either ministry.

Jesus assumed that his followers would fast (Mt 6.16-18). He does not speak against fasting in the passages we are considering today. He only speaks about the right time to fast. He showed by example that there is a proper time to fast. The Apostles showed by their example that fasting is proper at special times (e.g., Acts 13.2-3; Acts 14.23). Proper fasting is one of the neglected aspects of worship in our hedonistic age. I expect that we all need to think seriously about how we should apply fasting in our lives.

When is the right time to fast? Jesus says that the guests of the bridegroom don't fast (mourn) while he is with them. He implies that while he is present with his people it is like the time of a wedding week. A wedding is a joyous occasion—a time for feasting, not for fasting.

A time will come when Jesus, the bridegroom, will be taken from their presence. Then it will be the right time for his disciples to fast. When would this be? When he went to the cross as a sacrifice for sin—when he became the atoning sacrifice. This took place on the **final** Day of Atonement when Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system. All of the fasting of the Jews had pointed as a sign to that day when Christ would pay the penalty for sin. But his hearers did not understand this.

So when should we fast? In one sense Christ is always with us (e.g., Mt 28.20). But there are times when we drift away from Christ. It is when we are out of his presence, and are far from him, that we should be humbled with real fasting and confession of our sins. When else should we fast? When we desire to have a special measure of God's grace poured out on us; for example, when we are going to undertake a particularly difficult venture for his kingdom or face extreme difficulties. It is at these times that

we should seek the Lord with fasting.

Jesus concludes this dispute about fasting with three illustrations:

- Men don't sew a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment otherwise the patch will tear the garment when it is washed and the patch shrinks.
- Men don't pour new wine into old wineskins because the skins are already stretched and will burst with the fermentation of new wine.
- No one who is used to drinking old wine wants to drink new wine, for he says, "The old is better."

These illustrations teach essentially the same thing as the object lesson of turning water into wine. A new order has come, the old ceremonial system has passed away in Christ. The Pharisees did not accept this new order. But we, under the new order, are to worship Christ in Spirit and in Truth, fasting not by the 'letter of the law' but to refresh his presence in our lives.

Sabbath Controversies, the Son's Equality with the Father, and Choosing the Twelve

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath [March 15]
(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.1-9)

Jesus went from Capernaum to Jerusalem to attend one of the feasts. It was probably the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Ingathering or Feast of Booths). This feast was not based on myths like a pagan harvest festival; it came from God. Sincere Jews understood that this thanksgiving-feast signified that Israel's life rested upon redemption supplied by God. God took the initiative to supply forgiveness from sin.

The same is taught by the actions of Christ. In the Gospel of John the events at the pool take place one year after Jesus met the Samaritan woman. At harvest time Jesus gathered in the Samaritans. Here also he performs a miracle as a sign of the ingathering of helpless sinners.

This miracle has an added significance—it was performed on the Sabbath. This, however, is not the first time that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. For

example, after a Synagogue service (Mk 1.29-34) Jesus provided healing for Peter's mother-in-law. But this is the first time that he performed a healing-miracle in Jerusalem. His previous miracles were all performed in Galilee.

It is evident that Jesus uses this miracle on the Sabbath as a means of establishing his authority as the Messiah. It provides a challenge for the Jewish hierarchy and is the first of a series of controversies about the Sabbath. Later in his ministry there will be others (Jn 9.13-34; Lk 13.10-21; Lk 14.1-24). It is interesting to note that Jesus seems to use the observance of the Sabbath as a benchmark for truth. He gives teachings related to the other nine commandments, but it is only over the fourth commandment that there seems to be such heated controversy.

The Sabbath also is a benchmark-commandment for our generation. Anyone who calls for a proper observance of the Sabbath is challenged even by people in the Church, just as Jesus was. The Jews seem to have made the Sabbath the most important of the Ten Commandments and had placed a 'straight-jacket' around its observance. In contrast, most of the Church has thrown out this Commandment. We must make sure that our thinking about the Sabbath is Scriptural and conforms to Jesus' practice.

Jesus went to the pool (Bethesda) near the Sheep Gate. The pool was surrounded with a courtyard of four colonnades. A fifth colonnade divided the pool into two sections. The water from this pool was used in a pouring-ceremony (Jn 7.37; Zech 14.17; 1 Sam 7.6) and was believed to have special healing power. Whether it did or not, the fact is that many people were waiting in the colonnades believing that by remaining there, there was a chance that they would be healed.

Jesus approached one man who had been there for thirty-eight years and asked him if he wanted to be healed. This man had never been able to get to the water first when it was stirred because he had no one to help him get to the pool. Notice that the man does not ask Jesus to heal him. He didn't know who Jesus was, or that he could heal him. (Contrast this man with Blind Bartimaeus who had heard of Jesus and called out [Mk 10.46-52].)

The man explained that he couldn't make it to the water on his own in time to be first. Notice also that in this account no mention is made of faith or belief on the part of the man. All that is mentioned is his need.

It is significant that as Jesus began his public ministry in Jerusalem he took the initiative. This is how it is with salvation in general—God goes looking for the lost (Mt 18.10-14). Adam was in great need after his sin, but as God was walking through the garden he did not hear Adam call out: “Lord save me!” Rather God went looking for Adam in his need—“[Adam,] where are you?” Today, men are not calling out to God for salvation. But God still goes looking for them, and he sends his people to help find the lost (Mt 28.19-20).

Why are we told about the healing of only this man? Many others who needed healing were around the pool. Jesus' purpose was not to heal but to teach. The person he chose to heal was one of the most needy present. He had been there half a lifetime and had almost lost hope. Jesus saves the hopeless and helpless—which is all of us. The man was helpless—no action on his part could bring him healing. And so it is with us—we have no hope. God takes the initiative and goes looking for us. We need to respond to his call and thank him as we respond.

Then Jesus commanded him to pick up his mat and walk. John makes special reference to the fact that this took place on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of physical rest and the sign of God's provision of eternal rest in eternity. It is a sign of physical and spiritual healing.

The ‘Problem of Evil’ [March 16] **(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.10-15)**

Jesus continued to show that God's general grace provides benefits to men even when they don't know the source of their blessings, and don't thank him for their blessings (Rom 1.21). The man who was healed did not know who Jesus was because Jesus didn't tell him, nor did he tell him that his sins were forgiven (as he did, for example, with another paralytic [Mt 9.1-2]). So the man was unaware that the one who had healed him was the

Christ or that his healing was the work of God.

Not everyone whom Jesus healed came to salvation. For example, there is no record that nine of the ten lepers (Lk 17.11-19) whom Jesus healed ever came to give thanks to God or that Jesus offered them the Kingdom of Heaven. We are not told that the man who was healed by the pool thanked Jesus. Nevertheless, he may have been truly thankful since we are told that Jesus found him later in the temple (14). He may have been there praising God for his physical ‘salvation.’

When Jesus found him in the temple, he used this encounter as the opportunity for spiritual instruction. Every physical infirmity is not the result of a specific sin (Jn 9.1-3), although sin in general is the root cause of all evil in this world. But some infirmities are directly related to sinful practices (e.g., the destruction of a liver through alcohol addiction, or AIDS acquired by a homosexual). It may be that this man’s lameness was the result of a particular sin. So Jesus told this man to stop sinning or something worse would happen to him.

From the human perspective, what could have been more serious or worse than having been handicapped for thirty-eight years and lying by the side of a pool waiting for healing? The world looks at this kind of affliction and says: “How terrible!” and then presents Christians with the so-called ‘Problem of Evil.’ Men say: “If God is all-good and all-powerful, why does he allow bad things like this to happen?” Men argue that God is either not really totally good or, if he is, is not all-powerful.

But in saying these things men choose to ignore some very important truths:

- A person who says that God can’t be good if he allows such evil has in one breath contradicted himself. How can man say that there is evil without God’s standards for right and wrong? He can’t. Without God’s moral standard one man’s ‘evil’ is another man’s perverse pleasure. The man who has the real Problem of Evil is the one who denies God’s existence or holiness. He cannot provide a definition for *evil*, let

alone demonstrate that it exists. We must accept God's standards, not man's.

- God has morally good and sufficient reasons for permitting sin and its evil consequences that always result in fulfilling his plans (Ps 145.17; Jn 9.1-3). We must not judge God and his actions by our standards (Is 55.8, 9; Rom 9.19-21). We must trust God.
- We see only part of the picture. Things that appear evil when taken out of context can in fact result in good. When a child suffers through a series of vaccinations (e.g., for rabies), people don't say this is evil because they know the context. Yet if someone looked through a small window and saw only a screaming child being poked by a needle, he might draw the wrong conclusion. We are like the man looking through a small window at God's working out his plans of Providence. We do not know **his** context for anything that happens around us. We must wait and see how God will work out his plan.
- Man has sinned. We cannot blame God for sin or evil. Bad things happen to sinful people, not sinless people, if there were such. Bad things happen to us because we are all by nature sinners. We must repent of our sins.
- God has provided a way of escape from sin and evil – salvation through Jesus Christ. To claim that God is not good because he permits evil is to slap him in the face. Jesus has paid the debt of sin through the Cross. Men have no right to say that God isn't a good and loving God. We must believe in Jesus.
- God will bring on any who don't stop living a life of sin something far worse than the infirmity of the man lying by the pool. What are thirty-eight or even eighty-eight years of physical misery in this life when compared with an eternity of punishment? We must flee from the eternal destruction of Hell.

Thank God that Jesus found this man in the temple and offered him the

message of life. He also offers it to each of us today.

The Jews Try to Kill Jesus [March 17]
(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.10-18)

Jesus told the healed man to carry his mat. The Jews told him that it was wrong for him to do so. They believed that it was wrong because of their mis-interpretation of the Law's instructions against carrying loads on the Sabbath (e.g., Num 15.32-36; Jer 17.21-27; Neh 13.15-22).

When they saw the man carrying his load, they wanted to know who had commanded him to 'break' the Sabbath. They eventually found that it was Jesus. Although they claimed ignorance about the origin of Jesus, it is clear that they knew that he was more than a mere man—they acknowledged that he had healed the man so that he could walk again (11).

In this confrontation is the challenge which man has faced since the Garden of Eden. Will we obey God's commands or man's? Satan asked Adam and Eve: "Did God really say ...?" As they persecuted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath the Jews asked essentially the same thing: "Did Jesus really say ...?" Nothing has changed in thousands of years. If God said it, men question it and replace it with their own commands.

Man's existence today seems to be premised on the will to disobey God. If God says something, men do exactly the opposite. We are like children who do the opposite of their parents' wishes. For example, think of how the world responds to God's prohibition against homosexuality, adultery, and divorce. Lest we become self-righteous, the Church plays the same 'doubting game'. For example, even when Christians hear solid, logical arguments about Sabbath-keeping, the propriety of capital punishment, or the merits of exclusive Psalm-singing in worship, they respond "Did God really say ...?"; and they go and do what they want to do.

We must assess seriously how committed we are to God. Are we really trying to please him, or are we living for self-gratification? If we are concerned about doing what is right—what God requires—then we will

constantly try to understand what he says in the Bible about how we should live. We will stop looking for ways to excuse ourselves from obedience. The Church would be far stronger today if all Christians made it their goal to please God.

The Jews wanted to know who was challenging them: “Who is this fellow? Who is it who can reinterpret Moses?” The man found out and told them, and they became angry in their self-righteousness. So Jesus confronted them by telling them that he worked just like his Father. God does not cease on the Sabbath from his work of governing and preserving his creation. Jesus used this as his justification for working on the Sabbath. But he implies that the **kind** of work that he was doing was the same as what his Father does—works of mercy. The kind of work which we can do on the Sabbath is to be similar to that which God does and Jesus did while on earth—work that proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom and work that provides for the safety and survival of men.

The Sabbath was not set aside for us to do as we please (e.g., Is 58.13-14), although it was given to us for our well-being. We achieve this well-being through worship of God, meditation on God’s work and revelation, and physical rest – not through pursuing our worldly pleasures and business.

To support his interpretation of the Sabbath law, Jesus stated that he stood in a special relationship to God—he called God “My Father.” The Jews could have accepted his saying “our Father,” but they understood by the expression he used that he was claiming equality with God. They would not have challenged him if he had claimed to be some kind of pagan god or just a human miracle-worker—they would have dismissed him as lunatic. The problem, as far as they were concerned, was that this man claimed to be the very Jehovah who gave the Sabbath to man and defined its bounds.

Jesus cared for doing what was right on the Sabbath. For example, it was his regular practice to attend the synagogue. But he also cared for lost sinners and thus healed and saved them, regardless of the day of the week. In contrast, the Jewish leaders claimed to care about the proper observance

of the Sabbath, but they were all talk and outward show (Is 29.13). The true spirit of their hearts was shown by their attitude toward the healed man and toward his healer. There was no rejoicing among them over the man who had been healed and they went out of their way to find opportunities to persecute Jesus. They cared only that **their** law had been broken.

We should care for the things God cares about, and in the same proportion. We are to keep the Sabbath holy. But as Jesus has shown us, we are not to neglect the weightier matters of love and mercy. It is not Sabbath-keeping *or* mercy that God wants—it is Sabbath-keeping *and* mercy.

The Son's Equality with the Father [March 18] **(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.19-30)**

How would you react if someone claimed that he was God? You would dismiss him as liar or a 'nut'. This is how the Jews dismissed Jesus when he claimed to be God. There is, however, a difference between his claim and that of someone today. A person today could make the claim, but it would be false, and he could not prove it. Jesus made the claim and he substantiated it by miracles. The Jews chose to ignore this evidence. Much of the world continues to ignore the evidence as it is recorded in the Bible, and most men continue to dismiss his claims.

The Jews didn't accept his miracles as evidence that he is God and so they persecuted him (16). But he replied to their scepticism by answering it with an emphatic declaration of the truth about himself. But in his declaration he didn't use the words "I am God." It is not that he cared that such a bald statement would have upset them. Rather he chose to use an approach which would add to the revelation about God.

To this point in history God had not revealed fully that, while there is only one God, there are three persons in the Trinity. If Jesus had claimed to be God, the Jews would have thought he was claiming to be the Father. His tactic was to declare his divinity through an explanation of the relationship between the Son and the Father. By describing aspects of this relationship

he declared that he is God—not a created god, not a lesser god, not a man endowed with divinity, but a person equal in power and majesty with the Father. This is a tremendous claim. It was too much for the Jews!

He declares his divinity through the illustration of his relationship with the father in the following ways:

- **Co-working Father and Son** (19)—Jesus is not speaking here from the perspective of his human nature. He is not stating that he is limited in his actions. Rather, he is speaking of the unity of purpose in the Trinity. The Son cannot work in a way that is contrary to the Father because they have a unity of purpose. It is impossible for the members of the Trinity to act contrary to one another.
- **Mutual Love** (20)—The love between the Father and Son means that they communicate intimately their purposes with each other and so work together. It is because of their mutual love that the Father reveals and the Son acts.
- **Divine Work and Honour**—Jesus declares that the Father will reveal to the Son great things (20) and in response the Son will perform the great works of God and be honoured in them. There are four things that Jesus says that he does with the Father:
 - ◇ *He Raises the Dead*—The Jews believed that God would raise the dead. Jesus claims the divine prerogative to restore life “to whom he ... pleased” (21). Jesus raised the dead while on earth (Jn 11.38ff) and he will raise the dead at the Last Day (25, 28, 29).
 - ◇ *He Gives Life*—He does more than restore life – he gives it absolutely. Jesus says (26) that he has been granted the right by the Father to communicate life to others. Just as the Father is the author of life (Gen 2.7; Dt 30.20; Job 10.12; Job 33.4; Acts 17.28), so the Son is the author of spiritual life (Jn 5.24, 25; 1 Jn 5.10-12).
 - ◇ *He Judges* (22, 27, 30). God is the judge of the earth (Gen 18.26; Ps 94.2), and he judges through the Son (Rev 22.12, 13). Jesus is an impartial judge, judging each man’s case by its merits (30). Who, on the final day, will accuse Jesus of being unfair? What

room will there be in his courtroom for a mistrial or a procedural mistake?

- ◇ *He is Worshipped* (23). Only God is to be worshipped (Dt 6.13; Rev 19.10). Jesus is to be worshipped as God (Jn 20.28; Rev 5.12). Those not honouring the Son do not honour the Father.

In each of these statements Jesus declared his equality with the Father, and each time the Jews dismissed him as a heretic. They knew that he was making himself equal with God (18), and they would not accept it.

Jesus declared himself to be God by showing his relationship with the Father. As God he has a claim on us. A day is coming when we all will be called back to life to appear before the great Judge. We must have settled out-of-court with Jesus and “crossed over from death to life,” or “rise to be condemned.” Don’t dismiss his divine rights as the Jews did.

The Son is Life and He Gives Life [March 19] **(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.26)**

In the previous meditation we considered how the Son shows his equality with the Father. Today I wish to explore in more detail one aspect of their equality—in Jesus, like in the Father, is life which he himself gives.

A common question of children is: ‘Who created God?’ The answer is as difficult for us to understand as it is for them – no one created God. God **is** the creator (Gen 1.1). Thus, he is both eternal and self-existent (Ex 3.14).

The difficulty with getting our minds around this aspect of God’s being is not so much a problem of understanding his eternal existence. We can obtain a limited understanding of how God could have existed forever because we can think of extending time, which is a familiar concept to us, into the infinite past. Of course, we really don’t come close, for true infinity is not just the addition of one second to another – it transcends time altogether. But our approximation of infinity is enough for us to feel comfortable with the concept of infinity.

It is the realm of self-existence that really boggles our finite minds. We have nothing in our spatial-temporal experience which comes close to approximating the concept of self-existence. In fact, we can only define self-existence in negative terms: God did not create himself, nor was he created by anyone.

It is ironic that even though the keenest philosophical minds have had difficulty understanding the concept of self-existence, modern man is quick to accept the myth that the universe is self-existent. Men realize that if they don't declare the universe to be self-existent, they are left with only two other possibilities:

- 1) The universe created itself—they know that this is absurd since something cannot *exist* and *not-exist* at the same time, or
- 2) The universe was created by something or someone—they know that this opens the door for God, whom they do not want to acknowledge (Rom 1.18-23).

Men in blind faith believe the myth that the universe is self-existent, and that chance working on matter through time created life. At the same time they deny the possibility of there being a God who is self-existent.

They also deny this divine attribute to Jesus. Jesus says (26) that “as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.” Jesus is claiming that he also is self-existent. Jesus declares the same thing elsewhere when he says “before Abraham was born I am!” (Jn 8.58; compare with Ex 3.14)

Do not misunderstand his words. Jesus is not saying that he is a *created* god. A self-existent being cannot be created—that would present a logical impossibility. Jesus speaks (26) in terms of his office as the Mediator and the role he has been granted by the Father. Notice that he refers to himself as the Son of Man (27)—this is his self-designation as the Mediator. As the God-man he has been given the authority to be the life giver.

The Jews (and the Greeks, when being intellectually honest) understood that it is God alone who can give life to creatures (e.g., Gen 2.7; Dt 30.20;

Job 10.12; Job 33.4; Ps 36.9; Acts 17.28). So, Jesus says (26) that the Father has delegated to the Son the right to be the author of life.

The Father gives the essence of life and Jesus claims this right also. As the author of life's essence, his authority, extends to two other dimensions:

- 1) **He Raises the Dead** – Jesus claims the divine prerogative to give life “to whom he is pleased to give it” (Jn 5.21). Jesus raised the dead on earth (Jn 11.38ff) and he will raise the dead at the Last Day (Jn 5.25, 28, 29).
- 2) **He Gives Eternal Life** – Those who have heard the words of Christ and believed have eternal life (Jn 5.24, see also 1 Jn 5.11). They have been granted life (“have crossed over from death to life”) by the Son. Eternal life is more than just *life*. The kind of life Jesus gives is more than mere existence. The resurrected beings condemned to Hell will exist (Jn 5.28, 29); they will not be annihilated. But their life will be a shadow compared to the life of those in Heaven.

Men in their pride think that some day they will create life either from proteins or from silicon chips. Many are eager in this hope, because they think they can dismiss God. But God alone is the author of life. Let us turn to the one who alone gives life—eternal life now and at the resurrection.

Testimonies to the Son [March 20] **(Jerusalem, early Fall 31 AD. Jn 5.31-47)**

After claiming equality with the Father, Jesus continues his discourse with the Jews. Logically, he moves on to consider the question of who, or what, supports his claim. You will notice that there are witnesses that Jesus calls to defend his claim, and others he rejects. Who and what are they?

- **Himself**—He rejects himself as a witness (Jn 5.31), not because his testimony is untrue but because his claim cannot be self-validated. He knows that he cannot make a claim without the Father. Ultimately his claim can be validated only by revelation. It takes the Holy Spirit (sent by the Father) to convince us that he is the Christ. Also, Jesus knows that the Law required legal matters to be validated by multiple

witnesses (Dt 19.15). His claims are so weighty that they need more than one witness.

- **John**—He rejects the testimony of John (Jn 5.34) not because it is untrue but because it can be thought of as from human origin. John declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God sent to save sinners (Jn 1.29). Jesus reminds them that if they believed John's testimony they would be saved. Although what John declared was true, the Jews could doubt him because he was a man. No human testimony can be guaranteed to be accurate, so Jesus doesn't appeal to human authority.
- **His Work**—Jesus says that a weightier witness than the words of John is his own work. He probably means that the healing miracles he performed should provide a sufficient testimony that he was sent by the Father. No one can do what Jesus did, unless he has been sent by God.
- **The Voice from Heaven**—An even more obvious witness is the testimony of the Father (Jn 5.37) which was given in a voice from Heaven (Mt 3.17). At that time the Father publicly declared that Jesus was his beloved Son. The Jews present at the Baptism of John probably heard the voice, but because of the hardness of their hearts they didn't listen and apply the word in their lives (Jn 5.38). Instead, they denied what they had heard or attributed the voice to a natural phenomenon.

It is the same today. Men hear the 'voice' of God (e.g., in the heavens [Ps 19.1]) and are blind to their maker. Notice that Jesus says that they did not understand because they did not believe (38). This reminds us that all the evidence in the world will not convince a person to believe in Christ. You cannot argue someone into the Kingdom. It is only when the Holy Spirit changes his heart that a man will come to believe the evidence (e.g., your life and words) that you present.

- **The Scriptures**—Jesus claims the Scriptures as a valid testimony to himself (39). But those who diligently study them will only come to possess eternal life if they believe in him. We must study the Bible to learn more about Christ. But it is not the Scriptures that we need to

know— it is the Christ of the Scriptures. There are many who have studied the Bible in detail, as a botanist might study a plant, and have memorized many verses; but if they don't know Christ, about whom the entire Bible is written, they don't know anything of real importance for eternity. Man's problem with sin is a problem of *will*, not of *knowledge*.

- **Men**—Jesus will not accept praise from men (Jn 5.41). Here he uses praise as a substitute for a testimony. He is to be worshipped by men, but this is not the final authority for establishing his equality with the Father. General praise from men (e.g., from those who say Jesus is a good teacher or fine example) does not count, since it isn't from the heart (42) and is offered to men who come in their own name (Jn 5.43, 44).
- **The Father**—It is praise from God (the Father) that really counts (44). This is ultimately the only testimony to a person's character which has value. Jesus implies through his statements that this is the very testimony that validates his ministry, but because the Jews rejected this testimony, they themselves would not receive praise from God.
- **Moses**—The final testimony that Jesus claims is the great prophet of the Jews (Jn 5.46). Moses gave the Jews the Law to teach them about sin, and told them of a coming prophet whom they were to listen to (Dt 18.15). Moses wrote as a witness, or testimony, to Jesus as the saviour; but the Jews would not believe his words. So they rejected their Messiah (Jn 5.47).

Weigh the evidence of the witnesses. It is overwhelming. Jesus is the Anointed Son of God sent by the Father to save his people from their sins. How many witnesses will it take to convince us of this truth? Piling evidence on top of evidence will not provide any more truth. It is time to appeal to God the Holy Spirit to open our hearts so that we might believe.

Controversy about Picking Grain on the Sabbath [March 21]
(Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 12.1-8; Mk 2.23-28; Lk 6.1-5)

Among congregations or families that believe that the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath what do you often find is their emphasis? Do you find that there often is an emphasis on what we should **not** do rather than on what we should do? It seems that both children and adults rarely ask what God expects from us on this day. Instead, we seem to begin our consideration of the Sabbath with a negative focus.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day seemed to be of the same mindset. They were caught up with the negative aspects of the Sabbath and focused on what should not be done rather than on why the Sabbath was ordained by God and what its value is to us. Their negative attitude is displayed by their reaction to what they saw Jesus and his disciples doing.

As Jesus and his disciples walked along, probably heading to the synagogue meeting (Mt 12.9), they passed through some grain fields and picked heads of ripe barley or wheat. As they continued, they rubbed the kernels in their hands to remove the chaff and then ate the grain. Taking the grain was not wrong, as God had made provision for this as a means of caring for the poor (Dt 23.25). The Jews did not react to their taking the grain. They reacted because their tradition taught that what Jesus' disciples did was equivalent to reaping, threshing, and winnowing, and therefore was work (Ex 34.21). So they told Jesus that his disciples were acting unlawfully on the Sabbath.

How does Jesus respond to their charge? Note that he does not start his challenge with the proclamation he used in the *Sermon on the Mount*: "You have heard that it was said ... but I tell you ..." He isn't ready at this point in his ministry to present himself as the final prophet. He is still validating his ministry through sign-gifts. But he gives a hint of what is to come shortly when he declares himself greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath (i.e., the one with authority to interpret how it is to be observed). He begins his challenge of the Pharisees by pointing to the Scriptures and asks them how they understand what is taught there.

He points them to two examples of godly men. Their actions appear to be

examples of ‘breaking’ the ceremonial Law. The two examples he uses are:

- 1) David’s eating the consecrated bread. Twelve fresh loaves were regularly set out before God. The bread being replaced was to be eaten only by the priests. Jesus indicates that David’s necessity overruled the ceremonial aspects of the law.
- 2) A baby boy was circumcised on the eighth day, even if this fell on the Sabbath. By this he showed that one ceremonial law overruled another.

Jesus points out in these examples that godly men did something that in general was ‘unlawful’. But he is **not** denying the importance of the Law, nor is he undermining the principles taught by the Law. Rather, he is showing that there are circumstances where we may be required to act in a way that is ‘beside’ the Law. We learn from this passage that:

- The Sabbath Law continues to apply to us. Jesus does not say that it is okay for his disciples to pick grain because the principle of the Sabbath (weekly rest) is cancelled. Rather, he says it is okay because the Sabbath, when properly interpreted, was made for mankind’s (not the Jews’) benefit and as such has perpetual value.
- There appears to be a hierarchy of law. Sometimes a law can be set aside, temporarily, for a just cause (but not doing evil for a good result). We see an example of this hierarchy when someone sets aside a no-trespassing law to rescue a drowning child.
- Jesus is not teaching some form of subjective morality or ‘situational ethics’, nor is he trying to find a way to rationalize the Law, as we are prone to do. By giving examples from the Scripture, he shows that it is God who defines how we may act in ways that are beside the Law.
- One way of acting beside the Law is doing a work of necessity (e.g., preparing food) on the Lord’s Day. He quotes from Hosea (Hos 6.6) to show why works of necessity and mercy are lawful on the Sabbath.
- Jesus is the interpreter of Law. What we do on the Lord’s Day should

be what he has told us to do or shown us, by example, what we should do.

The multiplication of negative laws by the Pharisees made the Sabbath a burden for the people. Let us remember the purpose of the Sabbath and look for opportunities to use it for God's glory and our benefit in spiritual, mental, and physical refreshment. Let it be a delight and joy, not a burden.

Healing a Man's Shrivelled Hand on the Sabbath [March 22] (Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 12.9-14; Mk 3.1-6; Lk 6.6-11)

Leaving the grain fields, Jesus and his disciples went to the Synagogue where they were confronted by the Pharisees and others who were looking for a way to accuse Jesus of doing something unlawful. In the Synagogue was a man with a shrivelled hand who the Pharisees thought they could use as a means of trapping Jesus in sin or a contradiction. A Pharisee doesn't care about helping those in need; he cares only about how to apply his strict definition of 'holiness'.

The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Their rabbinic teaching said that it was unlawful to heal someone unless it was necessary to save his life. Notice how Jesus uses their own teaching to confound them (Mk 3.4). Jesus had already healed on the Sabbath (e.g., Mk 1.29-34; Jn 5.1-9); and although the Pharisees did not seem to be around at those times, they had undoubtedly heard about the healings.

They knew that Jesus could heal – the question wasn't *could* he, but *would* he heal on the Sabbath? They wanted to know if he was a 'moral' healer. They were looking for 'inconsistencies' in his teaching or practice so that they didn't need to heed him. Men are the same today. His teaching demands a response, so men use any means they can to deflect the moral challenge of it. If they can find some 'problem' in the Bible, then they can claim it faulty and think that they don't need to adhere to it. It is better, from their perspective, to find fault with God and his word than with themselves.

In the grain fields, Jesus demonstrated the justice of doing works of necessity on the Sabbath. Now he must show the justice of doing works of mercy. In the previous case, he responded by using scriptural examples as the base for his defense. In this case, he uses an example from everyday life. Jesus used different means at different times to present truth.

His example is that of rescuing a sheep that has fallen into a pit. Today if he were speaking to a ‘pharisee,’ he might ask him if he would help a stranded woman fix a flat tire. You must realize that he was dealing with people who had drawn incredibly tight boundaries around what was lawful to perform on the Sabbath. We don’t find this problem too often today, since most people in the Church have removed all boundaries from around the Sabbath. But the attitude of the Pharisees still plagues the Church. Modern ‘pharisees’ draw boundaries in other places, making laws where God does not. We need to guard that we don’t place the rules of men on the level of God’s Law.

Notice that Jesus answers a question with a question. He asks the Pharisees to compare the value of an animal with that of a man. (This is a good question for men today. Many in our culture place the value of a baby seal, whales, or even trees, above the value of an unborn human.) He then asks them whether or not it is lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath. As Jesus does so often, he places them in an impossible situation. They cannot answer without condemning themselves. He knew that in their wicked hearts they were rationalising why it was okay to rescue an animal but not to heal a man, or why it was ‘proper’ not to help the man.

Having silenced them with his questions, he performs a miracle to answer their question. He had asked the man to stand at the front of the synagogue, and he now commands him to stretch out his hand, and he heals it. Notice that the man’s hand was ‘completely restored’. What Jesus does is not by half measure, nor is it done in secret.

Jesus did not answer the Pharisees’ question with words, but he did show them the foolishness of their position through words. He then went on to demonstrate by action a proper way of observing a holy Sabbath. Here we

see the *living* Word – Word in action. God also works this way in Salvation. The crucifixion was visibly public, and it demonstrated God's love for us (Rom 5.8). We also are to demonstrate our words with action (James 2.14-26).

Instead of being pleased that the man was healed, or accepting the rebuke of Jesus, the Pharisees went out of the Synagogue in a huff, plotting how they could kill him. What an irony! They refused to accept his doing good on the Sabbath and plotted evil on the very steps of the Synagogue. At times, the heart of the Pharisee pumps in all of us. It is easy for us to make 'rules' for others to follow, easy to be angry when we don't get our own way in the Church, and hard to accept a rebuke. Do we then set out to 'get even' as the Pharisees did? Watch out for this kind of heart, it pumps black blood.

Jesus has shown us that God desires mercy not 'sacrifice' (Hos 6.6). He has shown us how to keep the Sabbath holy with works of necessity and mercy.

With Crowds by the Sea [March 23]

(Sea of Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 4.25; Mt 12.15-21; Mk 3.7-12)

Jesus was aware that the Pharisees were plotting to kill him because he had healed on the Sabbath; so he left the populated regions of Galilee and went into the countryside. Beside moving away from the threats of the Pharisees, Jesus may have also left the town (probably Capernaum) for practical reasons. Excavations at Capernaum have shown that the Synagogue there held 130-150 people. It is possible that the crowd that assembled to see Jesus was around 10,000 people. Likely, no meeting hall or theatre in Capernaum could have held an assembly of that size.

News of his work had spread throughout Galilee and to regions beyond. People came from a distance to see the 'miracle worker'. They were crowding him, pushing forward to touch him so that they could be healed (Mk 3.10). To avoid being pushed into the lake, Jesus told his disciples to prepare a boat in which he could sit. It is not necessary for Jesus to

touch a person to heal him. It is possible that he taught the people from the boat (e.g., Mk 4.1, 2), but he may have only provided healing from the boat.

Besides healing the people of their diseases, he cast out evil (unclean) spirits. The people possessed by the demons fell down before him and declared his relationship to the Father: “You are the Son of God.” Jesus warned them (the people and the evil spirits) not to tell who he was. The time for revealing his identity still had not come. The publicity about his healing hindered his teaching and attracted antagonism from the Pharisees.

We have noted previously that Jesus’ primary purpose in coming to earth was to go to the cross to pay the debt of sin for his people. Other purposes included announcing the Kingdom, and teaching. To provide healing for the sick was not his main purpose in coming to the earth. The miracles were performed to demonstrate that he had come from God. This is what Matthew shows by quoting from Isaiah (Is 42.1-4). From this passage we learn that Jesus is the:

- **Chosen Servant** – As the Son of God, endowed by the Spirit, Jesus is the appointed servant who came to do the Father’s will. His miracles demonstrated that he was from the Father (Jn 10.25, 38; Jn 14.11). There is no other Servant, there is no other way to the Father, there is no other Saviour (Acts 4.12). He is the one we must turn to.
- **Loved Son** – Jesus is loved by the Father for who he *is*, the one who shares all glory with the Father, and because of what he has *done*, fulfilling the will of the Father by saving sinners. As the Father loved the Son, so must we, for who he *is* and for what he has *done* for us.
- **Just Judge** – Jesus proclaims justice in two ways: 1) He declares to those who are not his sheep that they are condemned for their disbelief and wicked actions, and 2) he declares to his sheep that they are blessed because they have believed in him and obeyed him (Mt 26.34, 41). His justice is not for the Jews alone. It is for all nations

like those who came from the regions around Galilee (Mk 3.8). Those who put their hope in him (Mt 12.21) will be led to victory, but those who do not place their hope in Jesus will be cast out.

- **Gentle Healer** – The miracles of Jesus pointed to a greater healing. He came, ultimately, not to heal the sick of their bodily ills but rather to heal the spiritually sick, just like he healed the sick beside the Sea of Galilee (Mt 12.15) and ‘healed’ a woman by the well (Jn 4.4-42). He came to heal our lives when we feel like a bruised reed or a smoldering wick; having no life, burned out, and crushed. When we are his sheep, we can turn to him no matter how we feel and can know that he will care for us and heal us.
- **Humble Messenger** – He didn’t come with a shout, an earthly army with weapons of war, trumpets and royal robes, a bugle corps and drums, or a ticker-tape parade to take the praise of a hero. His approach was almost silent. He arrived in poverty, in a stable. He came to bear scorn, hatred, persecution, and torture. He came to live a rebuke, to die a curse. He didn’t come to argue with the Pharisees or carry on debates in the city streets (Mt 12.16, 19). He left Capernaum to avoid these confrontations. He came with healing, to bring true peace. He came to save and help the needy. He knows our situation, our infirmity, needs, hurts, and frustrations. He came to help us!

Matthew, in his Gospel, continually shows how Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies. He reminds us that the earthly life of Jesus was like no other. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Lk 19.10) You and I are lost, without Jesus. Go out to meet him and receive him.

Choosing the Twelve [March 24]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mk 3.13-19; Lk 6.12-16)

We are about two and a half years into Jesus’ ministry on earth. He has been followed by a great number of disciples since his baptism. From this large group of followers (at least seventy-two, see Luke 10.1) he called his disciples to him (Lk 6.13) and from these he selected twelve

Apostles.

It appears that Jesus is at this point ready to commission some of these followers to as the founders of the NT Church (compare Eph 2.19-20). This isn't stated, but notice that the *Sermon on the Mount* (Lk 6.17 and following) and other extensive teaching portions of his ministry follow their appointment. This seems to show that Jesus selected the twelve for a special commission as teachers, and that they were to communicate his teaching to build the NT Church. We note their appointment was:

- **In prayer** – Jesus spent the night praying before selecting the Apostles from men he knew well. He sought extraordinary guidance from God when he made an important decision or had an especially difficult challenge. Do we pray for even five minutes before significant decisions? The Church should appoint men to leadership only after it knows the men well (1 Tim 5.22) and after considerable prayer (Acts 1.14, 24).
- **To be with him** – They were to be more than just students. They were to participate with him in prayer, worship, fellowship, and teaching. Jesus wants all of his disciples to be not just hearers but doers. The leaders in the Church are to be “with Jesus.” But, so also are all the saints.
- **To be sent** – The term apostle means “sent one.” These disciples were selected as the ambassadors of Christ, to represent him on earth as the NT Church was being established. Jesus was an Apostle sent from the Father to do his will (Jn 4.34; Jn 5.36-38; Heb 3.1). He in turn sends men to do his will. The formal office of Apostle has been completed, but today Christ still has his “sent ones” – pastors – who represent him.
- **To Preach** – Those selected by Christ as his representatives were given a specific mandate: they were to preach the gospel of salvation from sin and to teach the converted the fundamentals of the Faith.
- **To Drive out Demons** – The Apostles had special authority to validate

their ministry – power to drive out demons and perform miracles. Pastors don't have this authority, since the foundations of the NT Church have been laid. But they do have an authority which validates their ministry – proclaiming the Word of God to drive out the 'demon' sin.

- **To Represent Israel** – Twelve Apostles were chosen to represent symbolically the twelve new tribes that make up the Israel of God (Gal 6.16) – the NT Church. With this new phase of the Church, Jesus selected a cross section of society, John, from the priestly line, Matthew, a tax collector; some fishermen, and an (ex) Zealot. Leadership in the NT Church does not belong to any class or segment of society. It is made up of the spiritually mature who have been called to their office by Christ.
- **By name** – We are told the names of all of the Apostles. Some we know nothing about, other than their names. Others, we hear about a lot in the rest of the NT. Yet all were Apostles. Jesus knows all of his sheep by name (Jn 10.3), and he calls all his “sent ones” by name. This reminds us that we are not to hold up one leader in the Church as better than another. We are to treat with respect all faithful leaders in the Church who have been called by God (1 Cor 3.21-23).
- **By Outward Profession** – To men, the Apostles appeared to be godly. Even Judas Iscariot made a good impression. This teaches us that the Church is to judge a man called to office by his profession of faith, substantiated by practice. Paul provides the qualifications (1 Tim 3.1-12). Although we may make mistakes when we elect leaders in the Church, it is not for us to probe into their motives. Only God knows the heart of a man, and he often hides a person's true character from other men.
- **By the will of God** – The choosing of Judas (the one “who betrayed him” and “became a traitor”) to be an Apostle teaches us that it is God who ultimately appoints Church leaders to their office, not men. We must remember this and respect them because of their appointment by

God to office (1 Tim 5.17-21).

The special office of Apostle ended in the 1st century. But just as there were other leaders then who were “sent ones” (e.g., Barnabas, James, Jesus’ brother, Timothy, Titus, etc.), so there are “sent ones” today in the Church. We can learn much about the calling of Church leaders today from Jesus’ appointment of the Twelve.

Sermon on the Mount

The Setting for the Sermon [March 25]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.1-2; Lk 6.17-19)

Large crowds continued to follow Jesus around Galilee. Soon after the appointment of the twelve Apostles, we find him in a rural area on a plateau on a hillside. As he was standing among the people he healed their sick. He then sat down, as the custom was of Jewish Rabbis (Mk 4.1; Mk 9.35), and began to teach them. The particular teaching that he gave that day has become known as the *Sermon on the Mount*.

It seems that we are to find in the actions of Jesus on the hill a deliberate object-lesson. He positions himself as the second, but greater, Moses. We can note some of the similarities and differences between the two to see how Jesus is the fulfilment of Moses, who was the foreshadow:

- **Appointed Representatives** – Moses was encouraged by Jethro, his father-in-law (Ex 18.17-26), to appoint assistants to represent God to the people. In effect, he appointed apostles who were to assist him. Jesus did the same by appointing the Apostles.
- **Works of Mercy** – Prior to delivering the Law, we find Jesus healing the sick. Moses did not perform this type of miracle, but we do find him as the instrument of God showing mercy through the manna, quail, and water from the rock (Ex 16-17).
- **The Law on the Mountain** – The obvious similarity between the two

is that the Law was delivered in the OT on Mt Sinai (Ex 19.3) and in the NT it was re-applied by Jesus on a hillside, with emphasis on its proper interpretation.

Here the similarity ends.

- **Keeping Distant vs Drawing Close** – In Moses' case the mediator separated himself from the people who were told to keep their distance from the mountain. In Jesus' case he let the people draw near on the hillside (see, Lk 6.19). Do not misunderstand this contrast. It is not a change in God's nature, but in the way he graciously changed his dealings with men. The Mosaic Covenant teaches us that God dwells in unapproachable light and purifying fire, and that we are entirely incapable of approaching his holiness on our own merits. The New Covenant teaches us that Jesus as the God-man opens the way to the Father so that we may now enter his presence.
- **One Law** – What law did Jesus teach in the *Sermon*? The Law of Moses! He did not deliver a new law code. It was the Law of Jesus that was given to Moses on Mt Sinai. Jesus tells us (Mt 5.17-20) that his Law stands forever. His teaching in Galilee did not contradict the Law given far to the south; it placed it in its proper context. The *Sermon* is an exposition of the Law given through Moses. Jesus teaches his disciples how that Law is to be *applied* by Christians, not how it is annulled. He teaches the hearers, and us, what he means when he summarizes the Law in the 'new commandment' – to love God and our neighbours with all our heart.

This *Sermon* is the first example of Jesus' teaching recorded in the Bible. Both Matthew and Luke give reports. The differences between their accounts seem to indicate that Jesus taught more than either records. We will be blessed by studying what Matthew remembered and by comparing it with what was reported to Luke (Lk 1.2) by other eye-witnesses.

Although the *Sermon* was directed specifically to Jesus' Apostles and his other disciples (Mt 5.2; Lk 6.20), it was given in the hearing of a crowd; so

they were indirectly included (see, Mt 7.28; Lk 7.1). The *Sermon* applies to all of us. It presents a picture of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like and how we are intended to live in it. It shows us how a Christian, whose life is ruled by the Spirit, will interact with his neighbours and walk faithfully before his God. It is a lesson in ethics.

We will find that it contains two of the key elements of a Covenant:

- 1) Blessings (beatitudes – Mt 5.3-12) and curses (Lk 6.24-26), and
- 2) Exhortations (Mt 5.13-20; Mt 6.1-7.23) to live by the Spirit **and** the letter of the Law.

Jesus will contrast a proper interpretation of the Law with Jewish traditions (Mt 5.21-48) and will illustrate the importance of practising his teachings (Mt 7.24-27). We should listen to his instruction and live our lives in his presence, with obedience to his Law.

Blessings and Curses [March 26]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-26)

Compare Matthew's account of the *Sermon on the Mount* with Luke's and you will notice that after Luke records the *Beatitudes* he lists some corresponding curses. The opening of the *Sermon* reminds us of the blessings and curses in the covenant which God made with Israel (Dt 28.1-68). Jesus as the greater Moses (Heb 3.1-6) teaches in this *Sermon* how the covenants of the OT are to be properly understood by Christians.

We are prone to make too sharp a distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We need to see that God has made **one** Covenant with man, with various administrations named for their human mediators (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David). These administrations are representations, or types, of the Eternal Covenant (Heb 13.20) made with Christ on our behalf.

All covenant administrations in the Bible (including the New Covenant) appear to have the basic elements of a covenant: calling the people (Mt 11.28; Rev 22.17), recitation of history (Mt 1.1-17; Lk 3.23-38; Acts 7.2-

50), a mediator (Heb 9.15), covenant obligations (Mt 5.13-7.27), a profession or creedal statement (Rom 10.9-13), blessings and curses (Lk 6.20-26), a sign (1 Cor 11.25), and a ratification before witnesses (Jn 19.17-20; 1 Tim 3.16). The NT serves as a legal document in which God has given us the record of the Eternal Covenant. He calls Heaven and Earth to witness that he has made a covenant with man through his Son Jesus Christ.

The *Sermon* is part of this covenant. It includes a primary record of the covenant obligations. It also opens with blessings and curses. If you observe the covenant obligations, you will be blessed, if you do not keep the obligations, you will be cursed. But notice a key difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old states first the obligations and then the blessings and curses. The New starts with the blessings and curses, and follows with the obligations. Why is there this difference?

Under the New Covenant the emphasis is reversed, because you must *be* before you can *do*. The stipulations of the Old Covenant demonstrated that man cannot obey the Law and be saved. Jesus obeyed it on our behalf, and now we can obey the Law – but only **after** we have become new creatures.

The fact that the blessings and the curses appear before the stipulations demonstrates that man needs a saviour. Man in his state of sin cannot do anything that will please God, and he can never do anything which will provide payment to cover his sin.

Jesus does not begin his teaching ministry by demanding obedience. He first describes the type of person who will be blessed and the type who will be cursed. Who is the person who will be blessed? The one who is a member of a special realm – an eternal, spiritual, and heavenly kingdom. The man who is cursed is the one who is not a member of this kingdom. How is citizenship in this kingdom obtained? Not by works of righteousness, but by displaying a character that is righteous – one that is right with God.

The remainder of the *Sermon*, which follows the blessings and the curses, is a commentary on the OT Law. It shows what kind of obedience is expected from a member of the Kingdom of Heaven – that is, the fruit that a righteous person will bear. But we cannot begin with the fruit; we have to start with the tree. For if the tree is not righteous, it cannot bring forth righteous fruit (Lk 6.43-45).

So we should begin where Jesus begins, with the character of the Christian. This character must proceed his conduct and must permeate every pore. The Christian must, in other words, not only hunger and thirst after righteousness but must also be in poverty of spirit; mourn over his sin; and be merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker.

These are spiritual attributes which cannot be obtained by a man steeped in sin. These are attributes of a different kind than the attributes of the world, and are not a matter of degree. The only way that a man can display the character of the Christian is to be a Christian, converted by the grace of God. Therefore, before we consider the Covenant obligations, we should ensure that we are right with God – by receiving his Son Jesus as our Saviour.

Conditions for Blessing (Part 1) [March 27] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-22)**

The *Beatitudes* are named for the blessings of the Christian life. But before we can have the blessings we need to meet the conditions. These conditions do not describe what we must **do** to earn the blessings; they define those who **are** truly Christians. They are the descriptive spiritual attributes of the person who is already in the Kingdom of Heaven. If you are not a Christian, you cannot perform some Herculean task to endow yourself with them. But you can ask God to empty you of sin and self and change your heart. If you are a Christian, you will display the attributes that Jesus defines by his life and in his teaching. Ask God to strengthen you and make you more like Christ, so that you will be:

Poor of Spirit – You cannot be part of the Kingdom unless you believe that you are poor before God – poor because you are finite and he is infinite, and poor because you are a sinner and he is the Holy One. It is humility before God. This is not a weakness, false humility, or a lack of courage. It is knowing God, being utterly dependent on him like Jesus was (Jn 5.19), and using every gift and talent he gives you for his glory. To be filled with the Spirit we must be emptied of ourselves.

Mourning over Sin – The world’s philosophy can be summed up with one icon: ☺. Pleasure, worldly happiness, and a hatred of the doctrine of sin are the essence of existence for most men. The Christian, in contrast, mourns over things the world thinks will bring happiness – satisfying covetous and lustful desires, and believing the “health-and-wealth” superstitions of our age. This does not mean that he is a dour crank full of false piety. He is a realist, hating the weight of sin (Rom 8.23; Heb 12.1) that drags down himself, the Church and our nation.

Meek – Meekness has nothing to do with weakness or being lazy or flabby. It is being humble with men, being obedient to lawful authority, and showing respect for others. It is not looking for honour or a position of respect, asserting yourself, seeking prominence, or wanting respect from others. It is not worrying about what others think of you.

Hungering for Righteousness – Men of our age hunger for food, drugs, sex, alcohol, entertainment ... none of these will satisfy our deep need for meaning and a purpose in life. The only thing that will satisfy is being right with God and wanting to be like Him in holiness. Really to live, we must desire to be free of sin – its guilt, power, and curse. We must love his people, worship, and law, not a passing experience or the latest fad. We must want to be holy as God is holy.

Merciful – Those who seek to do the will of God, will follow his example of showing kindness to those who do not deserve it. A Christian will work to relieve misery and will not repay evil with evil. Since we have received mercy we will be quick to dispense it.

Pure in Heart – Men tell us that man's problems arise from his social environment or from a lack of education. Adam in Paradise had a perfect environment and the best education possible. What makes men think they can provide better? God tells us that the problem is with our heart. Out of the heart comes evil or good. Good comes only from a pure heart, not just in outward actions. Before we *do* we must *be*. Purity of heart is not just believing a set of doctrines; it is bringing the mind, faith, will, and emotions into conformity with God's holiness.

A Peacemaker – Jesus is not speaking of those who forge treaties among nations, of those who appease or compromise, or of Nobel Peace Prize winners. He is speaking of a peace that overcomes sin. It isn't war, it is sin, that is the ultimate problem. A peacemaker is, first, one who has made peace with God. His primary concern is the glory of God. A peacemaker is, second, one who lives a co-operative self-sacrificing life modelled after Jesus who made peace through his blood (Heb 13.20; 1 Jn 1.7).

Persecuted – This is not a description of Christian character, but of the Christian situation. A true peacemaker will not be honoured by the world; he will be persecuted. Those who are righteous and live godly lives will be persecuted (2 Tim 3.12). A Christian is not nosy, bossy, objectionable, self-righteousness, or fanatical. Yet he will be hated by the world because he is like Jesus (Jn 15.18-20). Christians are not to seek martyrdom or to be persecuted. And they are not to die for a political cause. Instead, they are to live righteous, holy lives to please God. They are to live with their hearts already in Heaven.

Conditions for Blessing (Part 2) [March 28] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-22)**

When Jesus began to teach about the nature of the Kingdom, he started by listing the attributes which define a citizen of the Kingdom – a Christian. These are the attributes of living faith. Jesus did not teach in the *Beatitudes* the way to become a Christian, he taught the way a Christian will live – not the way **to** Christ, rather the way **from** Christ.

Jesus taught the same thing his brother James, about thirty years later, would teach: “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2.17) One dimension of salvation is the act of justification which is applied to us by faith alone – faith unaccompanied by works. But another dimension of salvation is the process of sanctification, by which we work out our salvation (Phil 2.12). From this perspective, faith alone is nothing – an un-applied faith is not true faith. Belief alone – belief in God, in facts about God, and that what God says is true – is not true faith. The demons in Hell believe these things (James 2.19) but it doesn’t mean that they live a life which responds to belief. True faith is displayed with evidences as it has an impact in our lives.

The evidence of true faith is the set of attributes that Jesus lists in the *Beatitudes*. Just as light is made up of the seven colours of the rainbow, so a Christian is defined by the entire set of attributes that Jesus lists. Of course, you and I display the attributes in varying degrees because of the remnants of sin still inhabiting our natures. If one of the colours of the rainbow is filtered out, there will not be a pure white light. In like manner, if one of the Christian attributes is polluted by sin we will not display the pure white light of Jesus Christ. We need to ensure that the full spectrum of our lives shines forth pure and bright.

You will notice that Jesus lists the attributes in a deliberate order, mirroring the logical, but not necessary chronological, process of salvation. The attributes of the Christian life build upon one-another. He starts with poverty of spirit. Without knowing our poverty in sin, it is impossible for us to mourn over it. Once we are truly sorry about having broken God’s holy law, we can see ourselves in a proper light and be humbled before God and our fellow men.

It is impossible for us to see that we are totally depraved without the Holy Spirit showing us our poverty. But if this is impossible, it is harder still for us to confess our sins and swallow our pride. Of course, literally, nothing can be more difficult than something that is impossible. The point is that we cannot mourn over sin and display a spirit of humility

until we have been set right with God and have come to understand our total poverty before his infinite holiness.

Our age is one of self-reliance and self-confidence. We do not want to accept a doctrine which would cause us to be devalued. But the reality is that all our own spiritual wealth (self-righteousness) is absolutely worthless (Is 64.6). Do you really believe this about your own abilities and works? You must start at the root and ask God to show you your sin so that you can confess it. Once you have been emptied of self, you are ready to move on in the Christian life.

The first three attributes define the emptiness of our souls as we are born sons and daughters of Adam. Once we have measured the vast emptiness we can seek to fill it. It is then that we begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness. As we begin to seek God's righteousness, we move from an inward focus to an outward focus – we move from considering our condition to considering God and his laws.

As our emptiness is filled we begin to over-flow with righteousness, and we have an impact on those around us – both a positive and a negative impact. The positive impact that we have is a direct result of each of the internal changes that have taken place. We are merciful only because we have seen our own poverty and the mercy we have been shown by God. We are pure in heart as a result of mourning over sin. And, we can be peacemakers only if we are truly humble.

The other impact that flows from a righteous life is negative. To the extent that we live righteous lives, to that extent we will confront our friends and neighbours with their sin. They will react against the challenge to their self righteousness, just as we did before we were brought to see our poverty. Thank God that he has shown you your poverty of soul and he has filled it with his righteousness.

The Blessings of the Covenant (Part 1) [March 29]
(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-22)

Remember that the *Beatitudes* do not provide a list of things that you must do to earn your salvation. Rather, Jesus describes the attributes of a living faith – he shows what a Christian will be like, to a greater or lesser extent, as he lives out the Christian life. It is to the degree that we live as consistent Christians, loving and obeying the law of God, that we experience the blessings of the Christian life.

There is a three-fold cause-and-effect relationship that results in blessings in the Christian life. The first, and ultimate, cause is the gift of salvation that we receive from the Holy Spirit, and is the greatest blessing. It means that we are saved from the guilt and curse of sin and will reside in Heaven for all eternity. The assurance of this blessing is written in indelible ink in the record books of Heaven and cannot be erased.

The other two categories of blessing are the result of living as a Christian. They are determined by how much we desire to obey Jesus and by how much we actually do obey him. When we strive to serve God we can expect additional, and increased, blessings in two areas: 1) as we live out our lives on this earth, and 2) as we fulfil them in eternity.

There seems to be much confusion about the blessings that flow from living the Christian life. There are some who think that the primary blessings are material, such as increased financial resources or a life without illness. These blessings may be the result of living a sincere Christian life. For example, Moses tells us (Dt 28.3-14) that Covenant keepers will be blessed with large and healthy families and that the “LORD will open the storehouse of his bounty.” Malachi tells us similarly that those who are faithful to God will be blessed (Mal 3.10-12).

As much as we may like material blessings, they are really secondary. In this life there are many sincere Christians who gain very few material blessings. Are they in some way inferior Christians? If this were the case, we would have trouble explaining why God allows many wicked men and women to prosper materially. The measure of a true Christian life is

not that of the world: “he who has the most toys has won the game.”

What are the primary blessings of the Christian life both now and in eternity? Jesus tells us that they are:

- **Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven** – This is not just a future blessing. We already are adopted sons or daughters of the King of kings. We have been made princes through salvation and have received part of the inheritance. Being declared righteous (justification) and being made righteous (sanctification) are part of that inheritance. We are no less princes because we have not obtained the full inheritance.
- **Comfort and joy** – We have an answer now to the sin-problem. The worldly man has neither an explanation for evil, nor the solution. And in glory, we will have even more joy as the consequences of sin are replaced with eternal comfort (Rev 21.4).
- **A renovated earth** – We have a promised inheritance of a new Eden: all creation will be restored (Rom 8.19-22), the new heavens and new earth will be established (Is 65.17-25; 2 Pt 3.13; Rev 21.1), and Heaven will be extended to earth (Rev 21.2-4).
- **Filling to satisfaction** – All of us are born with big holes in our souls. We try every pleasure and escape of this world to patch the hole, but the gnawing emptiness remains. Our souls can only be made whole by the Holy Spirit, through salvation. After conversion our souls can be filled more or less by the Spirit. The more we live out the Christian life, the more we are filled. In Heaven we will be filled to overflowing.
- **Mercy** – We are inclined at times to say “it isn’t fair.” Do we really want what is fair, or what is best for us? Hell is fair; it is what we deserve. But God gives his people what they don’t deserve – Heaven!
- **Seeing God** – Augustine said that the *summum bonum* (greatest good) that man could ever obtain was to be with God forever. What more could we need or want? In eternity we will be in his presence; we will see the glory cloud of the Father and will walk with Jesus.

Of all these blessings, only the renovated earth is physical. What does it take to teach us to stop seeking material objects and experiences, and to

begin storing up treasures in Heaven? Why do we doubt Jesus when he tells us that the best blessings are those which we take into eternity? “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mt 6.21)

The Blessings of the Covenant (Part 2) [March 30] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-22)**

There are many things that men born in sin find hard to believe. One of the most difficult is that nothing in this world will make them happy. Most men are fooled by the attraction of wealth, some by power, and others by pleasure. But, at honest moments, men without Christ in their lives sometimes confess that the things of this world have not really made them happy. Occasionally they will admit that there is an emptiness that has not been filled by all their possessions, pleasures or experiences.

In the *Beatitudes* Jesus tells us what makes a man truly happy. It certainly isn't wealth, power, or pleasure – it is instead the attributes that he lists as conditions for blessing, such as being poor in spirit or being merciful.

The Greek word translated ‘blessed’ can be translated ‘happy’. Happiness is the subjective, inner state that results from being blessed. But the best translation of the Greek word, in this context, is ‘blessed’ since it shows that there is an objective reality on which our eternal happiness is based.

It is the objective reality of being blessed by God, and understanding that one is blessed, that is missing in our culture. Men hide from God, and neither seek blessings from him nor give thanks for those they do have (Rom 1.21). They emphasize feelings over truth and say: “if it feels good, do it” instead of “do what is right.” They claim that each man should be true to himself and his own standards, and reject even the possibility that there are absolutes outside of man which govern his behaviour. They attribute their prosperity to their own efforts, never giving a thought to God and his providential dealings with them.

Feelings and self, rather than beliefs and God, are key marks of our age.

Although there are many *-isms* or ‘beliefs’ filling the feeling-based thoughts of contemporary man, they can all be collapsed into two basic views of reality, or world-and-life-views:

- 1) **Paganism** – this includes all *-isms* that at root involve the worship of nature (e.g., pantheism, New Age, Astrology), false gods (e.g., Hinduism), or a god of ‘self’ (e.g., materialism and nihilism).
- 2) **Moralism** – This includes any form of philosophy which places man’s hope or meaning on the adherence to a set of rules. Islam, Judaism and Roman Catholicism are the most prominent. Followers of these systems hope to earn a ‘heaven’ through adherence to a codified system. Other forms of moralism include systems which emphasize moral systems with no hope beyond this life (e.g., Buddhism).

All non-Christian philosophies and *-isms* can be distilled to one single factor – man’s opinion. Only Christianity is based on an objective standard – God and his Law. In all other systems man is the measure.

Notice that the *Beatitudes* teach us the failure of both classes of *-isms*. The first three deal with our hearts before God (being poor in spirit, mourning over sin, and being meek before him). These remind us that God alone is worthy of worship and that we are to live *for* God. The fifth through seventh show us that we are to live out the truth of our faith – living *from* God. These two sets of *Beatitudes* are the opposites of paganism and moralism. We can view these as sides of a triangle. At the top point of the triangle is the fourth *Beatitude*. The pinnacle of true religion is a hunger and thirst for righteousness. At the bottom of the triangle is the result of a life lived *for* God, and *from* God – a life marked by confrontation with the systems of paganism and moralism, a life marked by persecution.

In the *Beatitudes* Jesus teaches the same thing that we find in the rest of the Bible, because it is the core message of God’s covenant with man – we are to *love* the LORD and *obey* him. Who is a covenant keeper? He is

one who seeks to be holy as God is holy (hungering and thirsting after righteousness). He is one who worships God correctly with a proper understanding of his position before God, and who lives out his life in service to God.

The Jewish audience of the *Sermon on the Mount* would have understood that Jesus was not teaching a new religious paradigm, but that he was expounding the Covenant as it is properly to be understood.

A question we must ask ourselves is: do we understand what Jesus is teaching? Do we have a heart that is focused on loving and worshipping God? Do we as a witness to our love for God live out our lives in obedience to all his commands? If we are Christians, then we will understand what Jesus is teaching and will be truly blessed. To the measure we are blessed by God to that measure we will be truly happy.

The Blessings of the Covenant (Part 3) [March 31] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-22)**

God has dealt with mankind, from creation, through a number of Covenant formulations. The first was made with Adam. Subsequent formulations include the covenants with Moses, Abraham, and David. In each there is a statement of obligations and consequences of obedience or disobedience. In a previous meditation we noted that the Jewish audience listening to the *Sermon on the Mount* would have understood Jesus to be restating the Covenant obligation of Law-keeping and the blessings that result from it, or the curses that result from disobedience.

In the New Covenant, Jesus (as the mediator) expounds the obligations of the Covenant in the *Sermon on the Mount*. What he teaches does not provide a new kind of covenant but only a new, and final, form for the Covenant. In essence, there is one Covenant. All of the covenant administrations emphasize one or another aspect of that one Covenant.

In general, each covenant administration also has promises associated with it. These are often given in the context of the blessings that will

result from obeying the covenant obligations. This is what we find in the *Sermon on the Mount*. In each of the *Beatitudes*, Jesus' audience would have heard a restatement of an OT promise. Let's consider each of the blessings and see how it applies the spiritual reality of a promise from the OT economy.

- **Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven** – When God gave Israel the royal law he told them that they would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19.6). A believer among them who considered this promise would think about Adam who forfeited his service as king (with appointed sovereignty over creation) and priest (to bring worship to God). He would also consider the typical nature of the king/priest Melchizedek and see that a greater than David was to come. This one would be a king/priest (Ps 110.1-4) ruling an eternal kingdom (Dan 4.3) in which righteousness and peace would dwell together (Is 9.6-7).
- **Comfort and Joy** – The Jews suffered great trials throughout their history – persecution in Egypt, wandering for forty years in the desert, occupation by enemies, the Babylonian captivity. A wise believer knew that Joshua had not given Israel eternal rest (Heb 4.8). He was looking for the “consolation of Israel” (Lk 2.25), which he knew would come with the eternal kingdom (e.g., Is 52.1-12; Is 54.1-17, etc.) and would restore fellowship between men and God to its form after creation.
- **A Renovated Earth** – The Garden of Eden was lost in the waters of the Flood. OT believers knew that the land of Canaan was not a restored Eden but that it was typical of the new, and eternal, Eden that was to come (Is 65.17-25).
- **Filling to Satisfaction** – The land of Canaan flowed with milk and honey and provided for all Israel's needs as long as they remained faithful to God. But the curse on the earth still affected their labour in the land. The OT saints knew that Palestine was not their final abode (Gen 47.9; Heb 11.10). Instead, they looked for a new land in which

there would be a great feast into eternity (Is 25.6).

- **Mercy** – The life of the OT believer was paced by the rhythm of the sacrificial festivals and services. But those who understood the ways of God knew that these sacrifices were not of themselves the source of God's mercy. They knew that the sacrifices pointed to a final sacrifice which would satisfy God's demand to punish sin and show him to be pouring out eternal mercy on undeserving men (Ps 40.6-8; Is 53.1-12).
- **Seeing God** – In the Garden, Adam communed with God. Fellowship was shattered by sin. The Tabernacle and Temple of the OT economy brought God close to the people, but because of sin the way of access to the Holy of Holies was veiled. The true believer looked forward to a great high priest who would enter a final time to restore fellowship.

Do you see the blessings of the *Sermon on the Mount* as spiritual ones? Do you understand their eternal, spiritual nature? Consider each blessing again with its eternal fulfilment for all believers:

- Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven – Mt 25.34; 2 Tim 4.8
- Comfort and joy – 1 Cor 1.3-7; Jude 24; Rev 21.4
- A renovated earth – 2 Pt 3.13
- Filling to satisfaction – Rev 19.9; Rev 22.2
- Mercy – Heb 4.16; 1 Pt 1.3
- Seeing God – Heb 10.19-22; Rev 4.2-3 with Rev 7.9-10

What promises! Is your hope placed in Jesus who gives us Heaven?

The Curses of the Covenant [April 1]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.3-12; Lk 6.20-26)

What do Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal mean to you? These hills are located in central Israel. Between Ebal (to the north) and Gerizim (to the south) is a valley. At the eastern end of this valley was located a Canaanite town called Shechem. Abraham built an altar there after God had promised him the land in a covenant (Gen 12.6-7), and Jacob buried

the strange gods (Gen 35.1-4) and raised an altar to God (Gen 33.20). Later Joshua called the elders there to give them their final charge (Josh 24.1), and they buried the bones of Joseph there (Josh 24.32). This is also where Jesus met with a woman at the well (Jn 4.5-6). When the woman pointed to “this mountain” (Jn 4.20), she was pointing to Mount Gerizim.

Moses told the people that when they came into the land they were to write a copy of the Law on plastered stones (Dt 27.1-4; Josh 8.32) and to set them up on Ebal. He also ordered them to read the Law publicly and then to pronounce a series of blessings and curses (Dt 11.26-30; Josh 8.34-35) – the blessings from Gerizim and the curses from Ebal.

The Law was set up in the heart of Cannanite territory as a reminder that God rules over all people (Jew and Gentile). It was set up on the hill of cursing to remind all observers that they would be cursed if they disobeyed the law (Dt 11.29).

The Law was read in the natural amphitheater formed by the hills. Joshua may have read a few lines and then the priests repeated them as a form of amplification system. The blessings and curses would have thundered through the valley. The impact of the voices like thunder (Rev 6.1), on the people in Shechem, would have been overwhelming. The account would have swept through all the nearby nations. Gerizim and Mount Ebal stand as visible reminders of the blessings and the curses of the Covenant.

Our nations have rejected the Covenant, and the Law of God is being removed from public places. The Law cannot be posted in a government building or read in a public forum. This shows the degree of moral deterioration which has overtaken our civilization. In our ‘enlightened’ society God’s Law cannot be posted lest it offend those with another religion. The reality is that modern ‘Cannanites’ do not want God’s moral obligations restricting their pagan practices. How desperately we need the public posting and reading of the Law of God today!

As the mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus took his place on a

mountain and proclaimed the Law. This included an enumeration of the blessings **and** the curses (Lk 6.24-26). When we read the *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew, we often miss the parallel account in Luke. Even if we did not have the account of the curses in Luke, we could infer it – because when a blessing is given for obedience, a curse is implied for disobedience.

But Jesus did not skip the curses. He proclaimed them along with the blessings, just as they were declared 1,500 years before, at the time of Joshua. What are the curses that are the result of disobedience to the Law of God? They are the consequences of **not** receiving Jesus as saviour, and continuing to disobey him. All the curses associated with disobedience are summarized by Jesus under four categories of temporal ‘blessing’:

- **Full Purse** – Those who place their hope in riches will find that the money, toys, and trinkets they have now are the full extent of their wealth. With this they will never be happy. They will always look for more with covetous eyes. And, when the end comes, they will be left with nothing.
- **Full Plate** – The gluttons of this world are well fed and stuffed to nausea. But their burps are useless for improving, and providing meaning for, man’s sin-filled life. If they consider the situation of a starving sub-Saharan as disgusting, what will they think when they are cursed with an eternal gnawing spiritual hunger?
- **Full Party** – The crowd that ‘parties until it drops’ under the hot lights and in smoke-laden air, is destined for destruction. In the searing heat and smoke of Hell, their laughs will be turned into the weeping and wailing of eternal death. There is no dancing and laughing over there!
- **Full Persona** – Those who seek meaning in power, friends and reputation will gain an eternal reputation of being fools. The demons won’t be their friends or bow down and worship them – they’ll mock them forever.

If we rebel against the Covenant and despise the righteous requirements of God’s Law, we will be cursed. Our age is not unique. God will judge

us as he did the Canannites. Heed the curses for they will be heard again!

Persecuted for Righteousness [April 2]
(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.10-12; Lk 6.23)

Jesus expands on the blessing of persecution. How can it be a blessing to be persecuted? This seems to make no sense. From the world's viewpoint persecution is a curse, not a blessing. But the logic of God is not the logic of men. Because sin pollutes our whole being we do not "think God's thoughts after him" and are not able to understand spiritual things. We must believe what Jesus says – those who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed and will receive a great reward in Heaven.

What does it mean to be persecuted because of righteousness? It is being hated for being a Christian or for proclaiming that the righteous demands of God's laws apply to all men – whether or not they proclaim Christ as Lord. It is being excluded from the public forum because we reject wicked practices. For example, if a Christian organization speaks out against homosexuality, it won't be allowed to use facilities which are funded with 'public' money. If Christians reject humanistic philosophies of education, they will be driven out of the public schools.

Persecution for the cause of Christ also comes in the form of jokes and innuendo in the media that label us as 'fundamentalist' or 'the radical right'. It comes when godliness is called fanatical and when breaking God's Law is encouraged. For example, if a Christian defends capital punishment it is said that he is not compassionate. Or, if he dares to suggest that all stores should be closed on Sunday, he is called intolerant.

These are forms of persecution without physical abuse. But sometimes persecution comes in the form of property confiscation, imprisonment, beatings, and execution. In God's Providence we are not, at this time, persecuted like the early martyrs, Reformers, Covenanters, Huguenots, and Puritans; or like many Christians today who suffer under Buddhist, Islamic, or Hindu oppression. But we all still must face persecution of one kind or another (Jn 16.33; Acts 14.22; 2 Tim 3.12). Christianity

cannot be challenged rationally, so persecution will come in one of two forms—either with farce or force, scoffing or scourging, ridicule or repression—because there are really only two ways that pagans can persecute Christians.

The more Christ is displayed in the lives of Christians the more there will be persecution against them. There are many reasons that pagans hate Christians and persecute them. Some of these reasons are:

- They **hate God**. Anything that reminds them of God brings them closer to their rebellion against God's sovereignty. They cannot tolerate fundamental truths: God is the creator, God is the author of moral standards, and God is sovereign over life and death.
- They do **not want to have their sinful lives challenged** by Christians living God-honouring lives. Christians remind them of God's judgment and of eternal death. They do not want to deal with death.
- They do **not want God to have a sovereign choice** in salvation. Ironically, they claim to believe in chance, yet they say that salvation cannot come from outside of man but must be earned.
- They **hate Christ** – his perfect life, his perfect standards, his perfect demands, and his perfect sacrifice for sin. So they hate anyone who is a spiritual brother or sister of Christ.

When we suffer because of righteousness we should not be concerned; rather, we should rejoice (James 1.2) because this persecution reminds us that we are:

- **Living lives that honour Christ**. Only Christians suffer because of righteousness. We must be having an impact on society if people care enough to hate us for the sake of Christ (1 Pt 4.14, 16).
- **Considered worthy to share in Christ's suffering** (Phil 1.29; Acts 5.41) and the suffering of the prophets and apostles. This means that we are not weaklings but champions.
- **On our way to Heaven** (2 Cor 4.17, 18). A non-Christian will do all he can not to think of Christ, death, and eternity. But this is not the case for a Christian. The more he knows of Christ, the more he longs for death (not with a death-wish!) so that he can be in eternity with

his Lord (Phil 1.23).

Do you trust God in this? Do you believe Paul when he says “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him ...” (Rom 8.28)?

Salt and Light (Part 1) [April 3]
(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.13-16)

Consider the flow of the opening of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Jesus first presents the attributes of Christian character in the *Beatitudes*. He follows this with the reality of persecution for those who live a righteous life. He reminds us that our reward is Heaven. If he left it there we could argue that Jesus is telling us that we are to live consistent Christian lives for his glory, accept the world’s persecution, and wait to be taken into Heaven.

But he does not stop there. After mentioning the hope of Heaven and reminding us that we share our persecution with the ancient prophets, he returns to consider the role of Christians in the present world. This tells us that the reason we must accept persecution on behalf of Christ is not to prepare us for Heaven but rather to prepare the world for judgment.

Trials and persecution do not prepare a Christian for Heaven. Rather Heaven is being prepared for Christ’s people (Mt 25.34; Jn 14.2; 1 Cor 2.9; Heb 11.16). A person is ready for Heaven at the moment of conversion; his name is written in Heaven (Heb 12.23), from all eternity; and he has been declared righteous (Rom 5.1, 2). It is true that God is continually perfecting our holiness throughout our lives. But if the final goal of the process of sanctification is to make us fit for Heaven, then it will fail. We will never be ‘good enough’ for Heaven through the lives we live on this earth. If God’s only objective was to make us holy, then the most effective means of accomplishing this would be to remove us from the world. At that moment we would be made completely holy.

Why do trials come upon Christians? They come so that as we persevere through them we can bring glory to God (e.g., Jn 9.3; 2 Cor 4.10) and

help others (e.g., 2 Cor 1.3-4). It is as we live the *Beatitudes*, especially through persecution, that we bear witness to God before the world. This is why Jesus follows his instruction about Christian character with the statement that a Christian is the salt of the earth and light of the world.

We should not take salt and light as separate components. They need to be considered together. A Christian living the *Beatitudes* is both ‘salt’ and ‘light’. It seems that Jesus uses these metaphors because Christians:

- **Provide Preservation** – It is not the value of salt as a seasoning agent, but as a preservative, that Jesus is considering. It is not as if the world had a good flavour that could be made richer by the presence of Christians. Rather, the presence of Christians protects the world from putrefaction, decay, and total rottenness. As God would willingly have preserved Sodom from destruction if there had been ten believers in the city, so he preserves a city or nation because his people are there.
- **Reflect Radiance** – The world is in darkness without the light of Christ (Jn 1.4, 5, 7-9). Christians reflect his light as Moses reflected the glory of God (Ex 34.29-35). We derive our light from the Holy Spirit living in us, and from the means God uses to communicate his grace to us (the Bible and the sacraments). As the moon reflects light derived from the sun, so Christians reflect the light derived from the eternal Son. It is not our light that we give to the world; it is the light of Christ.

Christ uses the salt of Christians to keep the world from becoming as rotten as it could. He uses the light of Christians to give direction in the darkness of sin and depravity. Christians are a witness to the world in two ways – they keep the world from going totally bad, and they show the world the way of good.

Christ left his disciples on the earth as his ambassadors. But it is not just the Apostles, theologians, seminary professors, or those ordained to Church offices who are salt and light. It is every Christian. Remember that Jesus was not teaching just his disciples in the *Sermon on the Mount* (see, Mt 5.1; Mt 7.28). It is ordinary men, women and children who, as

true believers in Christ living out the *Beatitudes*, are salt and light.

When you live consistently, showing that you care about God's righteous requirements given in the Ten Commandments, when you display the character traits of the Christian which Jesus lists in the *Beatitudes*, and when you persevere through the trials which will inevitably come, then you will be salt and light in the world. You will act as a preservative among your family members, friends, and school or business associates; and you will point the way to Jesus, the light of the world.

You are the salt and light "of the world." You have not been called out of the world. You have been sent into it as Christ's witnesses until he comes again to complete his work with total victory and vindication.

Salt and Light (Part 2) [April 4] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.13-16)**

Jesus teaches that Christians are the salt and the light of the world. By implication, the world of non-Christians is rotting and is in darkness. Non-Christians cannot preserve or enlighten the world. This seems contrary to evidence. Are not most philosophers, scientists, doctors, engineers, politicians, and businessmen non-Christians? Where does all the 'success' of the world come from, if not from non-Christians? Aren't Christians, as a group, ineffective and generally inconsequential in the flow of history?

A superficial answer to these questions seems to undermine what Jesus teaches. But the truth lies deeper. The fact is, the non-Christian world is 'successful' (however you wish to define it) because it consumes Christian capital. No individual, or country, which lives *consistently* by its non-Christian religious or philosophical systems will be successful continually.

According to their philosophical principles life is nothing more than the vibration of molecules, there is no meaning to life beyond self-realization and self-fulfillment, and each individual is at the centre of his own moral

universe – life is chance events working on chaotic matter and man is autonomous. This is the philosophy of the world of decay and darkness.

It is only as non-Christians live *inconsistently* with their professed beliefs and follow Biblical principles that they are successful. When people are honest, keep their vows, are respectful of other people's property and life, and refrain from outward idolatry and foul practices they find that their lives are more fulfilled and they are more successful.

Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, the life (Jn 14.6). The world considers the unique claim of Christ and Christians to be vain. But in reality, it is the thinking of the world that is vanity and foolishness. It is only from Jesus, through his people who are salt and light, that the way of life is made known and truth is revealed. How are Christians the salt and light of the world? They are salt and light in two ways:

- **Man's Conscience** – Christians keep the world from becoming entirely rotten. Communism has collapsed. Islam and Hinduism will also collapse if Christ's return is delayed. Every human system eventually implodes under the weight of its inconsistencies. It is only as there are Christians in a city, nation, culture or civilization, living righteous lives, that the world is kept from becoming so foul that God turns away his face with disgust.
- **God's Testimony** – Christians are God's means of bringing truth to the world. Christians living humble, obedient lives are a witness to God – to his glory, moral demands, worship, and judgment, and to the reality of eternity. The world sees and hears from Christians God's requirements and is held accountable for the light it is given.

Jesus reminds us that the essence of being a Christian is to **be** salt and light. Salt cannot be anything other than salt. If it loses its essence, which is not possible, then it is no longer salt. It is the very nature of light to shine and dispel darkness. It cannot do, or be, anything else. If light is blocked, it is no longer giving light and is not fulfilling its purpose.

Lesson 1: It is not enough for us to be right with God ourselves. We are expected to have an impact on the world. A false piety of many

Christians teaches that once a person is saved he is to withdraw from the world and its institutions. Jesus, in contrast, impels us into the world. Christians are to declare Christ's sovereignty over every aspect of life – politics, law, science, education, business, recreation, the arts, family, etc. Being **the** salt and light of the world leaves no room for keeping religion out of politics, God's laws out of the courtroom, creation out of the classroom, morality behind closed doors, etc. Christ is Lord of all areas of Life!

Being salt and light is not a matter of absolutes only. There are areas of the world (e.g., Turkey, North Africa) where the salt and light of Christianity has been applied at times in the past and is almost entirely absent now. There are also areas where the effect of the salt and light of Christianity seems to be waning (e.g., Europe and to a great extent, NA).

Lesson 2: To the degree that we are *not* acting as salt and light there will be decay and increasing darkness. The purpose of the Christian is to preserve and enlighten the sinful world. God leaves us on earth to stand out for his truth – to declare sin for what it is, to proclaim God's holy laws, and to call men to repentance.

Christianity is the only true religion, the salt and light of the world.

Jesus Endorses the Old Testament [April 5] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.17)**

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5.17 have been interpreted in a number of ways. This makes it difficult to know if we have the right interpretation. On one extreme there are some who argue that the word 'fulfill' means that Jesus completed all aspects of the OT, and therefore the OT laws do not apply to NT believers. This seems to present a contradiction with the fact that Jesus says he did not come to 'abolish' the Law.

There are others who say that since Jesus says that not a single stroke of the pen will disappear from the Law, this implies that **all** the details of the OT laws are binding on Christians today. It seems that there are at

least two problems with this view: 1) at least some aspects of the OT law (e.g., the laws relating to sacrifices and excluded foods) are clearly not to be practiced by Christians – we could say that they have been abolished, and 2) Jesus says that the Law, with the Prophets, have been fulfilled in him.

To interpret this passage correctly we need to consider as a unit the fulfillment of the Law **and** the Prophets. In the way that the one is fulfilled the other is also fulfilled. It seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets in, at least, the following ways:

The promise became reality – The promises of the Prophets became actual events in Christ. The Law, also, was realized in its totality in him:

- The prophecies of the OT which pointed to the Messiah are realized in an awe-inspiring synthesis in the various aspects of his birth (e.g., Mt 1.22), life (e.g., Mt 8.17; Mt 12.17; Mt 21.4; Mt 26.56; Jn 15.25; Jn 18.32) death (e.g., Mt 27.9; Jn 19.24, 28, 36), and resurrection (e.g., Jn 20.9).
- He was made subject to the Law (Gal 4.4) and kept the righteous requirements of the Law. The first Adam failed to obey God. The Last Adam (Christ) kept every command in the Law in full precision and detail, whether a moral principle, an application of a principle (also called a case law) or a ceremonial observance. He kept the law completely in his birth (e.g., Lk 2.21-24), life (e.g., Mt 3.15; 1 Pt 2.22), and death (e.g., Gal 3.13 with Dt 21.23).

The payment was realized – The debt of sin had to be paid. The Law and the Prophets anticipate this payment:

- The symbols and types of the OT (e.g., the tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrificial system) culminate in the death of Jesus on the cross. He is the final altar, priest, and sacrifice as he purchases our redemption. In these functions, he gives full meaning to the elements of the old economy that were hidden in shadows from Abel's offering of fat to the LORD to the tearing of the veil of the temple from top to bottom.

- The requirements of the Law were not only met by Jesus' obedience but also by his death. The Law and its demands cannot be set aside. The requirements of the Law must be satisfied. The punishment that he received in our place satisfied the divine requirements for justice.

The purpose was revealed – The meaning of the prophecies and many of the laws (and the proper way to observe them) was often obscure to the people of God living before Christ. All the prophecies and laws in the OT (i.e., the entire OT) point to Christ. Jesus revealed through his life and teaching the full intent and meaning of both the Prophets and the Law:

- Until Jesus appeared in history it was not clear how the Kingdom of God would appear. In him all OT prophecies have their correct interpretation. They announce his uniqueness and his birth, death, and resurrection. Their ultimate purpose is to reveal God's plan of redemption.
- He teaches the correct application of every law (especially as he shows in the verses that follow Matthew 5.17 in the Sermon on the Mount). He illustrates how the laws are generalized into principles of justice which reveal God's character and the nature of his universal reign.

Jesus makes an incredible claim ... "I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets." In this he places his seal of authority on the whole OT, endorsing it as the word of God. We cannot question the authority of the OT without questioning the authority of the Son of God himself.

He alerts his hearers, and us, to the context of his teaching. Everything he teaches is entirely consistent with the OT and contrary to the teaching of the legalistic Pharisees (Mt 5.21-48). Pay attention! The OT he endorses he will now apply. He shows us how to live as Christians in this world.

The Continuing Validity of the Law [April 6] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.17-18)**

We noted previously that Jesus endorses the OT and tells us that all of

his life and teaching are consistent with it (17). He then makes a second pronouncement (18) and tells us that the OT has perpetual and universal application. Nothing in the OT is abolished by Christ's having fulfilled it.

It is likely that Jesus is referring to the entire OT when he uses the word 'Law' (18). Jesus is teaching that the entire OT, even to the smallest letter, will continue to be valid until everything in history is brought to an end. His work in redemptive history does not end with the Resurrection; it ends with the Judgment. Everything will be accomplished only at his return in triumph. He teaches that the OT remains valid for all time. Therefore it applies to us today. This is consistent with what Paul tells Timothy about the usefulness of the OT (2 Tim 3.16, 17).

The OT is relevant for us today because it:

- Places Christ's work, and our lives, in a historical context.
- Helps us understand better the meaning of the work of Christ.
- Tells us prophetically of the glory of Christ's eternal kingdom.
- Provides a God-breathed songbook for the Church in all ages.
- Provides the basis for God's moral standard that governs all nations.
- Teaches us how to live wise and holy lives.

The Law, as a specific portion of God's word, continues to be valid in the NT era and retains its validity in its entirety (Mt 5.18) and in its parts (Mt 5.18, 19). There is no part of the Law about which we can say "This is abolished or cancelled." Jesus says specifically (Mt 5.17) that he did not come to *abolish* the "Law". There is no room in Jesus' statement for the idea that the OT is obsolete, has no application to us, or that we do not have to obey its commands. We are not to be NT Christians; we are to be Biblical ('whole-Bible') Christians.

But the fulfillment of the Law by Christ does have the effect of altering the specific *way* we are to keep many of the laws. And in other cases the specific observance of some of the laws has been set aside, or the *form* has been changed, because the righteousness they require is now experienced in a different manner.

This, of course, introduces serious difficulties for us today:

- Which OT laws are to be observed today exactly as they were at the time they were communicated by God?
- Which OT laws must we continue to observe but in a new form?
- Have any of the OT laws been discontinued? Why?

Since both Jesus and Paul teach that the entire OT applies to us, the difficulty is to determine how the laws apply. This is not simple. There is much disagreement in the Church on how to apply the OT laws.

Where is the right place in the spectrum of possibilities? Are we to apply only laws repeated in the NT by Jesus or the Apostles? Are governments today to apply only the last six Commandments? Are they to apply only nine of them, or all ten? Are we required to keep any specific OT laws, beside the Ten Commandments, even if they are not repeated in the NT?

We will be in danger if we assert a simple extreme such as “all the laws of the OT are set aside” and say that we are required to obey only the laws given in the NT by Jesus or the Apostles. The danger is illustrated by the fact that we would lose many of the specific laws relating to sexual morality given in Leviticus 18.1-30, because these are not repeated in the NT.

We will be in as much danger going to the other extreme: all the laws of the OT still apply in detail except entire classes that are explicitly changed in the NT, such as those that point to Christ’s redemptive work (e.g., the sacrifices). The danger of this extreme can be seen in laws that appear meaningless to apply in specific form in our context today (e.g., Dt 22.8). Following this course we would miss the general principles and carry over features specific to the Israelite context.

We must avoid extremes and affirm that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the OT and the NT. However, too many in the Church today do not recognize the continuity and see only the discontinuity. As a result, they use a ‘smorgasbord’ approach and let either their own opinions or majority opinion be the determining factor

about which laws of God apply today. It is important that we try to approach the difficult subject of the applicability of the OT laws with principles derived from the Bible.

No simple ‘rules’ will make this problem disappear. However, in our next meditation we will consider some guidelines that may help us determine how to apply OT laws in our cultural context.

Guidelines for Applying the Law [April 7] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.17-18)**

In our previous meditation we noted that we must avoid extremes with respect to determining how OT laws apply today. We are to affirm that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the OT and the NT. No simple ‘rules’ will make this problem disappear. However, there are some guidelines that may help us determine how to apply OT laws today:

- God does not alter his Law from age to age. God’s Law is an eternal and universal moral standard, reflecting his character and defining righteousness. It applies to all mankind, at all times (e.g., Rom 2.15; Rom 8.4; 1 Cor 7.19; 1 Tim 1.8-11; 1 Jn 3.4). It is against this standard that men will be judged on the Last Day. Time or geography do not alter his standard.
- Keeping the Law expresses love for God (e.g., Mt 22.37-40; 1 Jn 5.2-3).
- God does, however, change specific ways in which his Law is applied and observed as he deals with men through unfolding revelation. For example, he places before us the eternal requirement to worship him as he prescribes but has changed the specific forms at various times. Abraham offered sacrifices and had a single covenantal sign (circumcision). The sacrificial system under Moses became more elaborate with the introduction of many elements pointing to Christ. At the time of David, God added new elements such as instrumental music. With the destruction of the Temple the form of worship was simplified—the types were replaced by spiritual equivalents.

- The fulfillment of the Law by Jesus (17) does not abolish any of God's laws (principles) but does change, in many cases, the specific way we are to observe the laws. For example, the ceremonial law is **not** abolished. We are still required to worship God – some (most) of the external features have been set aside, but not the principles.
- The Ten Commandments are the universal and eternal summary of all of God's laws. All other laws in the Bible are instances, or examples, of how to apply the Ten Commandments in specific circumstances.
- All the specific laws in the OT are applications of one or more eternal principle summarized in the Ten Commandments. Although the principles are always binding on all men (Rom 2.15), the specific applications may not be. For example, we do not put walls around our roofs (Dt 22.8); but the principle, derived from the Sixth Commandment, makes it right for a city council to require fences around swimming pools.
- The NT writers accept the OT law as normative and often carry forward, either by inference or explicitly, specific laws of the OT in NT contexts (e.g., 1 Cor 5.1; 1 Cor 9.9, 13-14; 2 Cor 6.14; 2 Cor 13.1; 1 Tim 5.18; James 5.4).
- It is not necessary for the NT to repeat a specific OT law in order for it to apply to us. Where specific laws deal with human relations they still apply in detail today, even as to Israel (e.g., laws about sexual relations, weights and measures, employer/employee relationships, kidnapping, theft, etc.).
- The OT forms for observing the redemptive types in God's Law—the sacrificial system (e.g., Heb 7.11, 12; Heb 9.9, 10; Heb 13.15), the ceremonies (e.g., Acts 20.7; Col 2.16-17) and the OT signs of the covenant (e.g., Acts 2.38; Gal 5.11)—are not required by NT Christians because of God's completed revelation in Christ. The types have been replaced by NT counterparts by which Christians fulfill the requirements of the Law.
- Specific laws of holiness and separation (e.g., food laws; clothing, seed and animal mixtures; intermarriage with non-Jews; Levirate marriage; cities of refuge; etc.) are not to be observed today (e.g., Acts 10.9-16) as they were by the Jews. These were physical

symbols of principles that are to be manifested in the spiritual life of believers (e.g., Mt 16.11, 12; 2 Cor 6.14-18).

- It is wise for us to operate on the principle that specific OT laws, especially where the circumstances are the same (e.g., people relating to one another), continue to apply in the same way unless we find a clear reason (either explicit or by inference) in the NT showing that this is not the case.
- The collection of specific laws in the OT is *not* exhaustive (covering every aspect of life). For example, a civil magistrate may create a law requiring us to stop at a red light, as an application of the sixth Commandment. Therefore, specific OT laws that apply today are not the *only* specific laws we are to follow. However, specific laws created today must be consistent with the principles established in God's Law and must follow the examples in the Bible of applying the Ten Commandments to specific situations.

If we apply these guidelines when we consider which OT laws apply today, we should be able to obtain a proper balance between the continuity and discontinuity found between the OT and the NT.

Keeping the Least Commandments [April 8] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.19)**

Jesus endorses the OT and tells us that his life and teaching are consistent with it (17). He then tells us (18) that the OT has perpetual and universal application and that nothing in the OT is abolished by his having fulfilled it. Third, he informs us that we must keep the 'letter' of the Law (19). The 'little' laws of God as well as 'big' laws are to be obeyed. What are these 'little' or 'least' laws that we are to obey?

We must first determine what he means by 'these commandments' (19). Although he has taught the crowds prior to delivering the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Mt 4.23), we are not told the specific content of his teaching until now. So it seems unlikely that he is referring to any specific commandments he has given. Since he has just mentioned the OT (the Law and the Prophets), it seems reasonable to conclude that he is

speaking of commandments that are found in the OT. In effect, he says that the OT commands remain normative for NT believers.

What are these commands? He does not tell his audience specifically which ones, but there are two indicators of how we are to understand the meaning of ‘these commandments.’ First, by referring to the entire OT in the preceding verses, it appears that he is speaking of the commands of the OT. Second, since he uses the word ‘least,’ he seems to be including more than summary commands or principles. He is teaching that the commands found in the OT – from the two sections of the Ten Commandments to the various detailed laws – are relevant for teaching us how to live as Christians. Paul says essentially the same thing (2 Tim 3.16) when he tells us that the OT has value for teaching us how to live a Christian life.

We considered in our previous meditation guidelines for determining which of the detailed OT laws continue to apply specifically today, and not just the principles that they represent. We saw that God has changed some of the specific forms by which his Law is applied and observed as he has dealt with men through increased revelation. But we should note, as Jesus teaches in verse 19, that at least some of the detailed (‘least’) OT laws apply today and not just the summary laws (e.g., the Ten Commandments) or the principles that they reveal.

Don’t misunderstand the place of the Law (detailed examples or summary principles) in the process of salvation or in the life of the Christian. As we noted when we considered the *Beatitudes*, Jesus teaches that law-keeping is not the source of our salvation but the fruit of it. He says that anyone who breaks any of the commands in the Law will be “called least in the kingdom of heaven.” He is speaking of those who are already in the kingdom. They have been saved by grace and not by law-keeping. But once saved, they are expected to keep the details of the Law meticulously.

There is an indication in Jesus’ teaching that law-keeping is not in vain. Jesus provides a hint that the rewards in Heaven will be greater for those

who strive to keep the details of the Law (see also, Mt 16.27; Mt 25.14-30). Therefore, it is not enough for us to repent of our sins and then to drift along as Christians in a state of semi-obedience, attempting to cover over our sins with fits of passionate confession. Jesus wants us to strive for perfection in this life by obeying the Law. Perfection cannot be obtained. Nevertheless, it is to be our goal. But our motive for striving for perfection is not for the rewards we may receive but rather because we want to please God who has given us our salvation. We should keep the Law for his glory and trust that the Righteous Judge will dispense rewards justly.

God is the God of law and order. He expects those in his kingdom to live by the rule of law. He expects also that each of us will teach others to do the same. We all have this responsibility – not just pastors, elders, or teachers. We are to teach others to keep the details of the Law through our example, personal encouragement, and verbal instruction. Jesus does not say that because we are to teach others to keep the Law specifically this gives us the right to sit in judgment of them if they don't. In fact, he teaches exactly the opposite later in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 7.1-5). We have enough to do keeping the details of the Law ourselves without worrying about how well others are doing, and correcting them.

Jesus teaches in verse 19 how to apply the principles of the Law – by keeping the details found in the OT! Later in the *Sermon on the Mount* he will illustrate the correct way to keep the details as he interprets specific sample laws from the OT (e.g., divorce and oath-keeping).

His instruction presents a challenge for us. Many today say that since we are under grace and not under law (Rom 6.14) we do not need to keep any of the specific OT laws. But it is precisely because we are under grace that we are enabled to keep any of the details of the Law (Rom 6.16-18).

Excessive Righteousness [April 9]
(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.20)

Jesus endorses the OT in its entirety (Mt 5.17), and tells us that it has perpetual and universal application and that nothing in it is abolished by his having fulfilled the OT (18). Then he tells us that we must obey the ‘letter’ of the Law – the ‘little’ laws as well as the ‘big’ ones (19). Then he makes a fourth pronouncement about the Law (20) – our keeping of the law has to be more precise than that of the Pharisees.

What a challenge Jesus presents in verse 20! How is it possible to be more righteous than a Pharisee? Paul tells us that the best Pharisee was faultless with respect to his legalistic righteousness (Phil 3.5, 6). I know I can’t claim that perfection, can you? Yet, Jesus tells us that if our righteousness does not *surpass* that of the Pharisees we certainly will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Is there hope of salvation for anyone?

Imagine what Jesus’ hearers, sitting on the hillside, must have thought. They knew, in ways we never will, how hard it was to keep all aspects of the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws given in the OT. They knew also that even the Pharisees struggled with law-keeping, although most of the Pharisees probably would never admit to the struggle.

What does he mean? How can any mere human keep the Law more precisely than a Pharisee? How can our righteousness exceed theirs? We can understand his teaching by considering what he says in the preceding and following sections of the *Sermon on the Mount*. The preceding verses speak of the source of our righteousness; the following ones speak of the fruit of righteousness. Let’s consider these two aspects of righteousness:

- **Justification** – The problem with the Pharisees was not their law-keeping. Jesus does not say that we should do something else instead of keeping the Law. He says that our righteousness is to be *more* than just law-keeping. The problem with the Pharisees was that they depended upon their own law-keeping as the basis of their justification and of being declared right with God. They based their justification on their own perceived ability to keep the Law. They were self-righteous or self-justifying (Lk 16.14, 15).

Jesus speaks against self-righteousness in the *Beatitudes* (Mt 5.3-12). He teaches that law-keeping is not the means of salvation but the fruit of it. The only way that our righteousness can exceed that of the Pharisees is if it is not *our* righteousness. The only way to have true righteousness is when we are emptied of self-righteousness and pride, and hunger and thirst after true righteousness. The only way we can be more righteous than a Pharisee is to have the righteousness of Christ credited to us by God. This grace is applied (credited to our account) through faith in Jesus and through repentance of sins.

- **Sanctification** – Law-keeping does not earn us our salvation. Law-keeping is the evidence that we have been saved (1 Jn 2.3). If we don't keep the Law, it is a clear indication that we have not been saved from sin and declared righteous (justified). Of course, this does not mean that we must, or can, keep the law perfectly or we aren't saved. *All* Christians continue to sin (1 Jn 2.1), but they have a real desire to please God through obedience and to become more like him.

The measure of true, non-Pharisaical, obedience is the attitude of our hearts – the *reason* why we keep the Law. In the remainder of this *Sermon* Jesus teaches that it is not the outward observance that is the measure of law-keeping; it is the inward observance. True Christians desire to keep the Law in order to please God even if men don't see it.

Jesus teaches in verse 20 that true obedience requires conformity to the entire will of God rather than just the observance of a minimal set of outward standards derived from the 'letter' of the commandments. The sad situation in much of the Church today is that we take a minimalist approach to the Law. We ask what is the least that we have to do; and we tend, with the Pharisees, to dismiss the importance of putting to death sin in our hearts (Rom 6.2; Col 3.5; 1 Pt 2.24).

The demands of law-keeping are not less for us today in the Church than

they were for the people at the time of Jesus. They are greater! We have the complete revelation of God in the Bible, and we can understand fully not only what he requires of us but why. A Christian is called to keep the whole Law before man and before God.

The real measure of a Christian is how he stands before God in private. Do we keep the Law even when men aren't watching? Holiness is the daily practice of law-keeping in our actions and in our *hearts*.

Heart and Walk Obedience [April 10] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.21-48)**

What Jesus endorses, he now applies. He endorses the OT (Mt 5.17-20), and tells us that it provides the abiding standard for the life of a Christian. In his teaching in the remainder of the *Sermon on the Mount* he uses examples to apply the OT Law to NT Christians.

We must be careful not to misunderstand the *Sermon* as many do. It is **not**:

- **A new law** – Jesus does not present in the *Sermon* a challenge to the OT. He shows that the true meaning and intent of the Law is that both our actions and our hearts should be tuned to obedience to God.
- **Works-based means to obtain salvation** – The *Sermon* teaches how those who are saved will behave, not how to be saved by obeying.
- **An exhaustive NT ethic** – The *Sermon* provides sample applications, not a complete ethic. The *entire* Bible provides the Christian ethic.
- **An unattainable ideal** – It is true that we cannot obey God perfectly, nevertheless Jesus expects us to strive to obey his commands.
- **A higher standard than the OT** – God's Laws are eternal (Ps 119.160; Mt 5.18), the NT does not provide a different standard. The *Sermon* provides an explanation of how a Christian's righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees, not that of Moses (Num 12.7).
- **A commentary not on just the Ten Commandments** – Jesus gives examples of how to apply correctly the Commandments (e.g., murder

[Mt 5.21-26] and adultery [Mt 5.27-30]). He also gives examples of how to apply correctly the “least commandments” (Mt 5.19) – the OT laws that are derivatives of the Commandments (e.g., oath keeping [Mt 5.33-37], divorce [Mt 5.31-32], and just punishments for crimes [Mt 5.38-42]).

The remainder of Matthew chapter 5 provides a correct exposition of selected OT laws against the false interpretation of the Pharisees. Chapter 6 gives examples of how a Christian should walk before God (applications of the first four Commandments), and Chapter 7 shows how a Christian should walk before his neighbours (applications of the last six Commandments).

Jesus gives the proper interpretation of six OT laws that were misapplied by the Pharisees to illustrate how they, in particular, and men in every age find ways to twist and rationalize the keeping of God’s Law.

Jesus sets up two important contrasts:

- **The Tradition of the Elders vs the Written Word of God** – Each example is introduced by the words: “it was said” (Mt 5.21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). In most cases they reported the basic laws correctly. The problem was that they misinterpreted the laws. Jesus’ words, after his endorsement of the OT Law (Mt 5.17-19), contrasts the oral tradition of the interpreters of the Law with the God-breathed written word. Jesus often appeals to the written word (e.g., Mt 4.4, 7, 10; Mt 12.3, 5; Mt 19.4; Mt 21.16, 42; Mt 22.31) as the final authority. By this contrast he teaches the supreme importance of the written word of God, and that the Bible is the definitive standard for establishing truth.

We are to respect the wisdom of those of the past who have given much thought to the interpretation of the Bible. But we are not to appeal to the ‘fathers’ for a final interpretation of the Bible. Scripture alone is its own interpreter. When the fathers contradict Scripture, we are to follow the teachings of the Bible. This is a principle that

was re-established during the Protestant Reformation. It continues to be a feature distinguishing Protestantism from Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. These traditions accept the interpretation of the fathers even when it contradicts Scripture. Jesus teaches that we must not accept the opinions of the elders over the written word of God.

- **The Tradition of the Elders vs the Word of Jesus** – He follows each statement of the oral tradition of the Pharisees with the words “but I tell you.” Jesus declares that his interpretation contradicts that of the Pharisees. His innate authority as the supreme Prophet gives him the right to overthrow the false interpretations of centuries.

But more importantly, by giving the correct application of the Law he teaches that he is the one who provides its true meaning and intent. This makes him greater than Moses who only delivered the Law (Dt 5.22). Jesus declares in the words “but I tell you” that his authority is unique. He is not just a teacher (one of the elders); his word has final authority – the authority of God. He places himself on God’s throne and declares that he is the one who proclaimed the Law to Moses.

As we look at how Jesus applies the Law, let us note that as the Supreme Lawgiver he teaches that we are not to obey the Law *just* outwardly for its own sake but *also* inwardly to please God and to bring him glory.

Heart-Murder [April 11]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.21-26)

As Jesus begins to apply the OT Law, he first addressed the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder.” This seems surprising. Probably none of his hearers had ever committed murder. It is the same in our society. Only a small fraction of the population has committed murder or even knows anyone personally who has murdered. It would seem that of all the Ten Commandments, this one would be the least likely to need attention by the Messiah. Therefore, we need to consider why Jesus starts

his correct application of the law with this particular command.

It appears that Jesus starts with this command because it most clearly shows the distinction between actions and attitudes. Most people can claim that they have never committed a physical act of murder, but no one can claim that he has never hated another person. Jesus starts with this command to show clearly the intent and force of God's law—to teach us what God requires of us and to make us conscious of sin (Mt 22.37; Rom 2.18; Rom 3.20).

Another important reason that Jesus starts with the command against murder may be because it is a particularly grievous sin. Murder destroys a man and attempts to destroy God. To murder a man, who is the image-bearer of God, is to deface the image of God.

The 'fathers' and the Pharisees reported the command correctly (Ex 20.13). The problem that Jesus addresses is their false interpretation and application of the command. Their error is shown in the association of "not murder" with "judgment." They made two mistakes:

- They interpreted the judgment (Num 35.30-31) to be applied by the Sanhedrin to a murderer only in the temporal sense and ignored the eschatological judgment of God—which includes hellfire (Mt 5.22).
- They applied the judgment only to the actual act of murder and not to the attitude of the heart that God would judge.

They made their interpretation of the law very narrow so that they could delude themselves with the belief that they were never guilty of breaking the law against murder. Thus, they could declare themselves righteous (e.g., Mk 10.19-20). In contrast, Jesus shows that the command applies to the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for out of the heart proceeds all manner of evil (Mt 15.18, 19).

By going to the 'heart' of the matter, Jesus shows that everyone is a murderer and has broken the law of God. He illustrates the way in which we all break this command by focusing on two bad attitudes every person has:

- *Anger* – When we are angry for the wrong reasons (Eccl 7.9; James 1.19-20)—e.g., a co-worker doesn't let us get our own way and we hold a grudge, or a neighbour does something that bothers us and we give him a cold shoulder—we have committed the equivalent of murder.
- *Hatred* – When we display some form of hatred (e.g., we call someone a name, we wish him harm, or we speak with contempt to him or about him) we have committed murder (1 Jn 3.15).

Jesus includes anger and hatred in his definition of murder because they are equivalent to wishing that a person is dead. In most cases we are constrained from carrying out our wishes because God graciously stops us—by causing us to fear the consequences of the action or by helping us purge the wicked thoughts from our minds. However, under certain circumstances, any person can become an overt murderer—as evidenced by the atrocities of genocide through out history.

Jesus does not stop with a definition of murder. He goes on to show us how we are to solve the problem of heart-murder. Each of the Ten Commandments has prohibitions and implied requirements. Since we are commanded not to murder, we are also commanded to preserve the life of our neighbour and to further his welfare. This begins in our hearts.

Jesus speaks particularly to those who call themselves Christians. We must not go into to the house of God to praise him or pray if we are harbouring anger or hatred against a brother or sister in the Church. God will not hear us (Ps 66.18; Prov 15.8-9; Mt 6.12). The way to have proper behaviour is first to have a proper attitude. When we have had a falling-out with a brother the way to show that we have a proper attitude is to seek reconciliation with him before we dare present ourselves before God.

Jesus teaches that it is important that we not persist in murder by being angry or hating a fellow human as well as by avoiding the obvious sin of committing a physical act of murder. We must ask God to cleanse us and to remove the bad attitudes from our hearts. The time to ask God to

forgive us and to purify us is now! If we don't settle matters with God quickly in this life, he will settle matters at the judgement day as the judge. Hell is not the place to repent of heart-murder, it is too late.

Jesus' teaching about murder is an indictment against us all. We all murder others by mistreating, ridiculing, hating, fault-finding, criticizing, destroying reputations, gossiping, thinking evil, or being angry—we have all committed heart-murder, and we all must repent quickly.

The Extreme Cure for Adultery in the Heart [April 12] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.27-30)**

Jesus uses the command against adultery as a second example from the Ten Commandments to dispel the Pharisee's claim to self-righteousness (e.g., Mk 10.19-20). Many of his hearers had not committed the actual act of adultery, just as they had not committed murder. So they felt they had kept the law perfectly. But by focusing on the explicit statement of the Command, they missed not only the wide application that is included under the summary statement but also the application to their hearts.

The tenth Commandment shows explicitly that the Commands apply to more than just outward actions. The command not to covet a neighbour's wife provides an immediate comment on the command not to commit adultery. It shows that we must deal with the state of our hearts, if we are truly to obey God's Law.

What is the state of our hearts? Some of us might honestly be able to say that we have never entertained the thought of committing adultery. But does that mean we have not broken the seventh Commandment? Far from it! We are just like the Pharisees. We think that if we define boundaries for the command we will be able to say that we have kept it. I don't want to provide here a catalogue of the sinful thoughts that are included under the summary command. You can find such a list in the answer to the 139th question in the Larger Catechism.

Instead we will consider a few contemporary examples of how we

commit adultery. We commit adultery when we listen eagerly to the evening news to find out the details of sexual misconduct by a politician, watch a TV show with jokes based on sex acts, watch a movie that (implicitly or explicitly) endorses sex outside of marriage, or read in a novel the account of a sexual act. We don't have to be at the beach watching bodies go by to entertain adulterous thoughts. Adulterous thoughts fill our culture from one end to the other, and none of us are immune from them.

The sin of adultery is not just an outward act; it is anything that pollutes our minds and hearts with thoughts that are impure and displeasing to God. It is out of the heart that all manner of evil proceeds (Mt 15.18, 19).

Why are these thoughts, in God's eyes, the same as committing an act of adultery? Because we are to love God and to think about things that are pure (Phil 4.8). When we fill our minds with anything impure, we push out thoughts about God and his righteousness. We bring in other things and substitute them for God and holiness. This is spiritual adultery.

How does Jesus tell us to deal with adultery in the heart? He tells us to take extreme action – to cut out the offending sin. He uses a metaphor of removing body parts to show how serious sins of the heart are. Some reading this instruction of Jesus have misinterpreted him. He does not tell us to perform literal acts of self-mutilation. If he meant that we were actually to gouge out an eye or cut off a hand, then each of us would be half-blind and handless – since each of us has committed heart-adultery.

It is a serious mistake to think that Jesus would tell us to mutilate our bodies to avoid sin in the heart. We need to clean our hearts, not our bodies. Removing body parts will not change our wicked hearts.

How can we clean our hearts? Ultimately we cannot. Only the Holy Spirit can. But there are means to be used to clean our hearts of sin. We must:

- 1) Understand what sin really is. Sin is not just an outward wicked act, it is also thoughts and desires that don't please God (Gen 6.5).

- 2) Realise how serious sin is. Any wicked thought is enough to condemn us to Hell for eternity (James 2.10).
- 3) Hate sin as God hates sin (Ps 5.4).
- 4) Earnestly find out every sin in every corner of our hearts and purge it out with confession (Col 3.5; Ps 32.5).
- 5) Be constantly watchful against sin coming into our hearts and make sure that we don't welcome it and let it grow (Rom 13.14; James 1.14).
- 6) Remember that we belong to Christ, and remember what price he had to pay to redeem us from sin (Rom 7.4; 1 Cor 6.18-20; Gal 5.24).
- 7) Ask God, in prayer, to give us clean hearts continually (Ps 51.10).

These are some of the things that Jesus means for us to do when he says to gouge out an eye or cut off a hand.

He adds another sobering instruction. He tells us to consider the destiny of our souls. If we don't clean out the sin in our hearts we will be thrown into Hell. It is easy to find ways to nourish sin in our hearts. It is hard to root it out. Ask God to dig out every sin before it is too late.

Divorce [April 13]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.31-32)

The OT Law speaks about a man divorcing his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce (Dt 24.1). The Pharisees understood this to mean that for any cause (compare Mt 19.3) a man could write a certificate and send her away. But this is not what Moses taught. A man could only divorce his wife if he found "something indecent" about her. The word that is translated 'indecent' or 'uncleanness' is the same word that elsewhere (e.g., Lev 18.6-17; Lev 20.11, 17, 20, 21) describes indecent or dishonourable sexual relations. The only reason that a man could divorce his wife was if he found that she had committed adultery.

Some interpreters of the passage in Deuteronomy conclude that Moses is talking about something other than adultery. They argue that the OT

punishment for adultery was death (Lev 20.10), and therefore divorce wouldn't be required since the adulterers would be dead. The punishment for an adulterer was death only if there were witnesses who could testify (Dt 22.22). No one was to be put to death without the evidence of two or three witnesses (Dt 17.6). But there are circumstances when adultery occurs without witnesses. This is one reason why God instituted a test for unfaithfulness (Num 5.11-31). In these circumstances divorce is *permitted*.

Jesus does not *correct* Moses by saying that the only ground for divorce is marital unfaithfulness (fornication/adultery). Jesus endorses Moses since Moses also said that the only ground for issuing a certificate of divorce was marital unfaithfulness. Jesus endorses this part of the Law outside the Ten Commandments to show that the “least” commands (Mt 5.19) in the Law as well as the “greatest” commands – the details as well as the summary – apply to all men in all generations.

Some professing Christians think that they can live a life that pleases Jesus through some mystical ‘love.’ Love for Jesus is not shown by waving hands in the air or mouthing spiritual-sounding words. But if we ask how we show our love for Jesus, it becomes difficult to define love without reference to specific commands and obedience to them. Love is shown by obeying his commands (Jn 14.15), including those that deal with divorce.

Divorce is permitted only in the case of marital unfaithfulness (Mt 5.32; Mt 19.9). Most interpreters conclude that Paul teaches that divorce is also permitted when an unbeliever deserts a marriage because his partner has become a Christian (in 1 Cor 7.10-15). In the context of his instructions about marriage, Paul would have viewed an unbeliever who had deserted a marriage as being ‘dead’ (1 Cor 7.8, 39). Divorce is unnecessary when a former marriage partner is dead, and the believer is not bound and is free to remarry. Thus, Paul permits divorce as a means of declaring the former marriage partner ‘dead’.

The only legitimate cause for divorce is marital unfaithfulness. But the

Church has been infected with the thinking of the Pharisees. Professing Christians are almost as likely today to divorce as are non-Christians. The excuse used by the Pharisees was that Moses permitted it. Today the Church doesn't attempt to defend its disobedience by misapplying God's Law. It just ignores it. God says that he hates divorce (Mal 2.16); and although (for marital unfaithfulness) he permits divorce because our hearts are hard (Mt 19.8) it is not required, nor is it ideal. The ideal action is for us to forgive as God forgives, and not to tear apart what he has joined together (Mt 19.6).

Marriage is an institution established by God at creation. It is a covenantal relationship (Mal 2.14) between a man and a woman that represents the covenant between God and his Church, or Christ and his bride (Eph 5.25-28). Divorce breaks the covenant. That is one reason why God hates it.

Marriage is social behaviour: divorce is anti-social behaviour. Marriage brings together in covenant: divorce separates in covenant breaking. Jesus places his teaching about divorce after his teaching about adultery. Divorce is the outcome of the lust of a heart that pursues its desires. Divorce is a result of the selfishness that permeates our hearts.

We need to apply two lessons we can derive from these considerations about divorce. We can apply one lesson in a direct sense and the other in a typical sense. First, we must stand firm on what the Law teaches and speak out against divorce in every illegitimate case where divorce is not an option (e.g., abuse, incompatibility, or 'growing apart'). This will be hard, and men will scoff at us for defending God's law.

Second, we should also consider spiritual adultery and divorce. If we are married to Jesus through belief, we must not commit spiritual adultery or seek to break the marriage covenant through divorce. "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate (Mt 19.6)."

Lawful Oaths and Vows [April 14]
(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.33-37)

During jury selection proceedings in a Canadian criminal court, I noted how often the name of God was used when the potential jurors were asked to swear an oath to tell the truth. For many people the action seemed to be a formality. Nevertheless most people, regardless of their religious background, put their hand on the Bible and swore to tell the truth. Out of the forty people who were called before the judge only two people refused to take the oath. One affirmed that he would tell the truth, and the other, a Jehovah's Witness, refused to either take the oath or make an affirmation.

During this court proceeding four different attitudes to taking oaths were displayed. We can examine each approach by considering what Jesus teaches in this section of the *Sermon on the Mount*:

- **A Casual Attitude to Taking Oaths** – Jesus condemns taking oaths in casual conversation, such as when a person says: “I swear to God ...” People today have trivialised taking oaths, just like the Pharisees had. When people trivialise oaths, they misuse the name of God and break the third commandment (Ex 20.7). Jesus pointed out the necessity of taking oaths only in a serious context (e.g., before a judge).

We should note that Jesus' teaching about oaths follows his teaching on divorce. A person who divorces his or her spouse (except for adultery) breaks an oath. Jesus also condemns this casual attitude to taking oaths in which people take them about as seriously as their commitment to brushing their teeth – nothing more than a ritual with no permanent obligation on their behaviour.

- **Alternates when Taking Oaths** – The words that Jesus quotes (33) as having been said to the people long ago are not found in the OT. These words were used by the Pharisees to make a false distinction. They argued that only oaths sworn in the name of God were binding and others were not. But Jesus condemns their interpretation by teaching that swearing an oath by *anything* other than God is wrong.

Swearing by a created thing is to place a creature above the creator.

A person in a court today who agrees to tell the truth, but will not swear by God, puts himself in the place of God and is an idolater.

- **Refusal to Take an Oath** – People, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, who refuse to take an oath in a legitimate setting, such as before a judge, declare themselves to be 'holier' than God, Jesus, and the Apostles.

God shows us that it is valid to take an oath in the right context. He took an oath in his own name (Heb 6.16, 17); and the writer of Hebrews justifies taking oaths, in general. Jesus also justifies oaths. It was only when God's name was invoked in an oath that he answered (Mt 26.63-4). Paul also justified oaths by his own words (2 Cor 1.23).

God is not inconsistent. He gave instructions for oath taking in the OT (Num 30.1, 2) which still apply today. This is the reason that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 22) says that it is a sin to refuse to take a lawful oath.

- **Lawful Oaths and Vows** – There are many settings (e.g., joining the army, before the courts, serving in a civic office, being inducted into a church office, at a baptism, or at a marriage ceremony), in which it is lawful, and required, that we take oaths imposed by a lawful authority. We are to take our oaths with solemn seriousness as an act of worship before God. When we invoke God as our witness, we are to use his name with a holy fear and reverence.

Taking oaths is a serious matter for serious times. In all other settings we are not to use oaths or invoke the name of God casually. Instead, as Jesus teaches (37), our words are to be truthful at all times.

Among the great tragedies of our age is the departure of truthfulness from private and public settings. The word of presidents, business

leaders, co-workers, and friends cannot be trusted. Vows are broken as casually as disposable tissues are tossed in the garbage. Jesus condemns our generation along with all the people sitting at his feet on a mountainside in Galilee sometime in the early fall of 31 AD.

James, Jesus' brother, may have been among those who heard Jesus teach. Reflecting on the *Sermon*, he writes 20 years later about the importance of controlling the tongue (e.g., James 3.1-12). Jesus and James teach that our 'Yes' must be 'Yes' and our 'No,' 'No,' and that we must keep our vows.

Restraining Retaliation [April 15]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.38-42; Lk 6.27-31)

The Biblical principle of justice is that punishment should equal the crime. For example, to deal with theft, the Biblical model requires, in general, a double re-payment. The first part restores the property to its owner; the second provides the actual punishment. In the case of personal injury or murder an equitable punishment matches the crime and reproduces the effect of the crime, only in reverse (e.g., Ex 21.23-25; Lev 24.20, 21).

Jesus quotes this principle and then *appears* to overturn it. But is that what he does? Is he teaching that punishment should no longer fit the crime? Is he teaching that criminals should no longer be punished? Is he advocating, as some suggest, an extreme form of pacifism? If Jesus is teaching these things then his Apostles contradict him (e.g., Rom 13.1-4; 1 Pt 2.13, 14).

To understand this instruction, it is important to recall the context. First, he taught in the *Sermon on the Mount* how true believers are to live the Christian life. His address is to those who are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and pure in heart; and who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Second, he endorsed the OT Law and did not come to abolish it (Mt 5.17-19). Third, he overthrew the Pharisees' abuses of the Law (Mt 5.20).

Jesus is not dealing with governing authorities who have been established by God to punish wrongdoers (Rom 13.1-4). He is dealing with the corruption of the Pharisees who had twisted God's Law to make it into an excuse for personal retaliation. They also ignored the fact that the duty to punish was under the jurisdiction of the governing authorities, not individuals. They twisted God's Law and made it their 'duty' to get even.

Jesus teaches us not to use God's Law as our personal 'hammer' for striking anyone who offends us. He also teaches us not to take matters into our own hands through personal vindictiveness and retaliation but to leave place for God's wrath (Rom 12.17-21) that is exercised in this life through the governing authorities, and ultimately at the final Judgment.

Jesus in this section of the *Sermon* is restraining personal retaliation, the spirit of revenge, and the tendency to lawlessness that infects us all.

The intent of God's Law is that civil order be maintained and that criminals be punished. Jesus does not abolish this intent. We are to lock our cars, discipline employees who steal company property, and punish criminals. But in personal relationships Christians are to display the fruit of a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.20), by:

Forgiving Insults – Jesus certainly includes personal physical injuries in his first example. But these are in fact quite rare. He includes all general 'injuries' to our character, role, and pride. People may slight us, challenge our authority or responsibility, treat us as stupid, or say things that hurt us, but we are to forget these injuries and not look for ways to get even. Two of the biggest problems in the Church are an unwillingness to forgive and holding grudges. By showing a truly forgiving spirit, by "turning the other cheek," we show through our lives that we have been forgiven by God and are willing to forgive others (Mt 6.13).

Avoiding Unjust Lawsuits – The second example Jesus uses deals with

unjust lawsuits. He uses a cloak as an example since the Law (Dt 24.10-13) had specific protective provisions in this area. People often use legal procedures to gain unwarranted advantage over others. There are many examples today of absurd litigation. Obviously Christians are not to rush to court at every provocation (1 Cor 6.1-11), but we are also not to overreact when someone takes proceedings against us (for example by counter suing). We are to let the situation unfold and trust that the judges, and ultimately God, will vindicate us.

Giving More than Required – We are going to be placed in situations where we are required to do things that we feel are unfair. Jesus uses the practice of Roman soldiers who could ask anyone passing by to carry a burden between milestones along the highway (e.g., Mt 27.32). Our boss may ask us to do something that we feel is someone else's job or he might assign us a dull task. Jesus says that we are to do the assigned work, not insisting that it is beneath us or appealing to privilege. We are also to go beyond the request and do our work exceptionally well.

Christians are to have a generous attitude that shows concern for others (Mt 5.42; Dt 15.7-10). We are not to demand our rights but to defer to others in humility. We are to display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22, 23) and live with the objective of making the fact that Jesus is our Lord real to our associates, neighbours, friends, and family. We must overcome our innate tendency to selfishness and revenge. We must restrain personal retaliation.

Christian Love [April 16]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 5.43-48; Lk 6.27-36)

Christian love is perfect; it leaves no room for personal hatred.

The Jewish interpreters of the OT understood that they were to love their neighbours (Lev 19.18). They then assumed the opposite – those who were not their neighbours, that is people who were not Jewish, were to be hated. In fact, to the Jewish mind at the time of Jesus, hatred of the nations had become almost a duty, and revenge a guiding 'principle' of

life. This is not the teaching of the OT. Rather, the OT teaches that we are to be kind and generous to the alien and foreigner (e.g. Ex 22.21; Lev 19.10). Jesus challenges the Jewish misunderstanding of the OT and teaches us:

The Necessity of a *Gentle Spirit* – The examples that Jesus has given to this point in the *Sermon* focus primarily on our attitude. In this section, he continues by giving examples that illustrate the attitude we are to have. In this section, he goes beyond his previous instruction about restraining personal retaliation (38-42). Previously he taught that we are to respond *passively* to the abuses others may heap on us. In this section, he teaches how we are to respond *actively* with love to all those around us, including our enemies (e.g., unbelievers who hate Christ and Christians). This is one of the hardest teachings we will ever encounter.

How to Apply the *General Stipulation* – Jesus provides illustrations of the general requirement to love our enemies. These are not exhaustive, but give general directions for our love. We will find specific opportunities for loving our enemies in the situation that God has placed us. Jesus is encouraging us to keep thinking of how we may love, do good to, pray for, and bless, them. Our treatment of our enemies must not depend on who they are or what they do to us. We are not to play favourites with those who are outwardly friendly to us, but consistently to treat all men alike in love. We should show our enemies the love of Christ because we are Christians. We can hope that our love will bring them to repentance. But if not, then our love for them will increase their guilt before God.

About God's *Gracious Sustenance* – The example of God's providing sustenance for all mankind is the model for how we are to love our enemies. God graciously sustains his enemies by providing good things for them (such as rain and sunlight) to make their crops grow. While men blame God for the consequences of evil in this world and don't thank him for the good things he gives them, he continues patiently to provide food for them. He even goes beyond his gracious general provision and displays a greater love. He provides eternal salvation for his enemies by

sending his Son as the saviour of the world.

It is in this context that we must understand God's judicial actions against mankind. God is both a God of mercy and of judgment. He pours out mercy as a witness against those who hate him (Acts 14.17), and promises destruction if they do not repent. He both loves and punishes. When the Psalmist declares his hatred for God's enemies (e.g., Ps 31.6; Ps 139.21), he does so in the context of this balance between God's love and judgment. Jesus shows this same balance when he declares judgment on his enemies (e.g., Mt 23.1-39) and yet desires that they repent and be saved (e.g., Mt 23.37).

Evil must be punished. By asking God to punish his (and our) enemies, we declare that there is a universal standard of justice. It is not wrong to ask God to do what is right and to praise him for it. This is not personal vengeance, but asking God to shine forth (e.g., Ps 94.1). It is a false love that ignores the retributive justice of God. We must love our enemies and pray for their conversion at the same time as we pray that God will judge their wickedness. But, we are never to pray with a spirit of private vengeance.

The Need for *Greater Service* – God's requirement is that our service be greater than the ordinary. It is not enough to do what natural man will do anyway. If our love is to exceed that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.20), then it is certainly to exceed that of the lawless, ungrateful and wicked. We are to be considerate to those who are clods and boors, and kind to those who scorn and ridicule us; to love those who are unlovely (a modern equivalent of a Roman tax-collector could be an abortionist); and to provide food and shelter for the needy (e.g., drug addicts and people dying of AIDS).

The Perfection of *God's Standard* – God is perfect; so his love is perfect. Jesus holds this perfect standard before us (see, Lev 19.2; 1 Pt 1.15, 16). As sons of God, we are to have perfect love like our Father's. Although we cannot meet the standard in this life, with the help of the Holy Spirit it should be our desire to press on toward this goal (see, Phil

3.12-14).

What is Christian love? It *does* include specific actions (e.g., the examples Jesus gives), and therefore is ethical. But it is more. It is an attitude. The measure of Christian Love is how we treat our enemies.

Christian Worship [April 17] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.1-18)**

Jesus continues his commentary on the Ten Commandments. However, in the *Sermon* he does not provide an exhaustive commentary on each command. Rather, he provides illustrations for a few of the commands to show how Christians are to apply correctly the commands. In chapter 5 (Mt 5.21-48) he dealt with commands from the second portion of the Law (commands 6-10). In chapter 6, he changes focus and provides examples of how to apply the first portion of the Law (commands 1-4). As he looks at these commands, he teaches how we are to worship God:

Worship is Regulated by God – The second commandment teaches that God is to be worshiped only as he directs. Jesus reinforces this command by showing that the definition of proper worship falls under his authority. By providing examples of proper worship he teaches that we are to worship God only in the way we have been shown on the ‘mountain’ (Ex 25.40). NT worship is to be only as Jesus and his Apostles have directed.

Worship is Attitude in Action – Without a doubt worship is to be performed with a proper attitude. Jesus shows this in each of his examples. But worship is **not** just a state of mind or an attitude. Worship consists of specific actions that God has required. Jesus shows that this is the case when he tells us how to perform ‘acts of righteousness.’ In context, the specific acts of righteousness that he is referring to are **acts** of worship.

Worship is Multidimensional – Jesus teaches about three acts of worship (giving 6.1-4, praying 6.5-15, and fasting 6.16-18). His choice illustrates three dimensions of worship: outward, upward, and inward.

The outward dimension of worship is shown primarily through our giving tithes and offerings, although there are aspects of *outward* worship when we sing Psalms together and when we fellowship together around the Lord's Table. Our *upward* worship is given to God through the offering of sacrifices in Psalm singing (Heb 13.15) and the incense of prayer (Ps 141.2; Rev 5.8). Jesus illustrated this dimension with his instruction about prayer. In the OT, *inward* worship was symbolized by the sprinkling of blood from a hyssop stalk. In the NT, cleansing is illustrated by baptism and fasting.

There is one dimension of worship that Jesus does not explicitly teach about in the *Sermon*—the *downward* dimension. Downward worship includes reading the word of God and listening meditatively to his messengers proclaim his word through preaching and teaching. Jesus does not need to give explicit instruction on that dimension. The *Sermon* is a model of how the Scriptures are to be explained and applied.

Worship is for God's Glory – Through his examples, Jesus shows that the object and audience of worship is God, not our neighbours or ourselves. We are not to perform our acts of worship with the intention of being seen and honoured by men (Mt 6.2, 5, 16). We are to live our entire lives before God and for his glory (1 Cor 10.31). If it is the case that eating and drinking are to be done for God's glory, then how much more should it be the case with the homage that we bring before the ruler of the universe?

Our acts of worship are not to be performed for our pleasure or to satisfy our desires. Just because we *enjoy* a (supposed) act of worship or because we *feel* that it will honour God, does not mean that it will (e.g., Is 29.13). Many acts of 'worship' seem to be spiritual, magnificent, or inspiring. But 'feelings' are not the measure of proper worship. Worship is homage offered to God as King. It must be in the currency of the realm, and not counterfeit. If Jesus has not required a particular act or form of worship, he will demand to know the source of our authority (e.g., Lev 10.1-3).

An example of counterfeit currency in worship is singing the words of a human poetic composition not given by the breath of God. Because God does not seem to punish those who sing these compositions, many assume that they please him. Both the logic and the conclusion are false. God does not punish many sins immediately but holds them in store for his day of wrath. In redemptive history, God punished (visibly) acts of false worship only at the inaugural points of new eras of worship (e.g., Cain, Nadab & Abihu, Uzzah, Ananias & Sapphira) to restate his authority over worship.

Worship is Rewarded – Invalid worship receives its reward (Mt 6.1, 5, 16)—self-satisfaction, honour before men, and self-congratulation in autonomy. Valid worship—consistent with the attitude and form directed by Jesus (Jn 4.24)—will be rewarded by God (Mt 6.4, 18). We are not to offer acts of righteousness (worship) to gain rewards, but for God’s glory. Yet, when we worship God as he directs, we are rewarded as a by-product. Our reward in this life is a sense of peace God gives when we walk in union with the Spirit. Our rewards in Heaven will be revealed.

Christian Worship – Example 1: Giving [April 18] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.2-4)**

In our previous meditation we noted that Jesus gives three examples in the first part of Matthew chapter 6 that teach how we are to worship God. The examples show that worship is: regulated by God, not just an attitude but specific actions God has required, multidimensional in focus (outward, upward, and inward), for God’s glory, and subject to reward.

The example Jesus provides of the outward dimension of worship is *giving* to the needy. We are not to understand this as the tithe of our income that God requires (Dt 14.28-29; Mal 3.10; 1 Cor 16.2), but rather voluntary giving. A tithe is required by God’s law, therefore the payment of it is not something to boast about (2), nor is it worthy of reward (4). A freewill offering goes beyond the tithe.

The Bible directs us to help the poor (Prov 14.21; Is 58.6, 7). But, the

primary Biblical model for helping them is through interest-free loans (Dt 15.7-11) and work-based provisions (Dt 24.19-22; Ruth 2.2) to assist the poor to support themselves. Giving money, food, or clothing directly to the poor is reserved for extenuating circumstances; giving to:

- older widows (Acts 6.1; 1 Tim 5.3-9),
- orphans (James 1.27), and
- those unable to work due to severe disabilities (Acts 3.2-10).

People supported by giving are to be those who have no family members to help them (1 Tim 5.8). The Biblical model of welfare requires a person to work for what he eats (2 Thess 3.10) and not to be put on the ‘dole’ or to support himself by begging.

It is significant that in Biblical society begging is almost non-existent, and is considered to be a curse (1 Sam 2.36; Ps 109.10) and not a tolerated way of life. The reason is not because people didn’t care for the poor but because they generally dealt with poverty the way God had instructed.

What can we learn from the teaching of Jesus about the way we are to give freewill offerings? He presents an extreme contrast focused on the outward actions of giving to teach about proper motives. This contrast is between ‘gaudy giving’ and ‘secret service’:

Gaudy Giving (for the Glory of Men) – On one extreme is the man who uses trumpets to proclaim his gifts. The different kinds of trumpets that people use include: having their names engraved on plaques, having a building or university chair named after them, holding a press conference to announce their generosity, or having their names included in the annual report of a charitable organization. There is a more subtle way of blowing a trumpet. It occurs when a person gives money to an organization (such as a congregation) so that he can have an influence on, or control over, the policies or direction of that organization.

Secret Service (for the Glory of God) – On the other extreme is the man who gives so that his left hand doesn’t know what his right hand is doing. Jesus teaches that our giving is to be so inconspicuous that we

don't let others know what we are doing. But he also teaches that we are not even to congratulate ourselves. When we think about what 'righteous' creatures we are because we have given something secretly, we announce our giving with trumpets that only our ears hear. It doesn't make any difference whether the audience of our giving is our neighbours or ourselves. In either case the audience is man and not God. Our giving is to be done to please God who has given us far more than we can ever give him

Giving has its rewards. The rewards are either given by men or by God:

Hollow Honour – Those who give so they can be seen of men get their reward. It is what they want, but not really what they think it is. They get a feeling of superiority—their pride is massaged, and they get puffed up. They think their giving has impressed men. Outwardly, men pretend to be impressed by those who give large sums of money. But inwardly they are not. Inwardly they burn with envy. They don't like people who strut about boasting of their philanthropy. A man who gives to be seen of men gets nothing more than self-adulation.

Righteous Reward – In contrast, those who give secretly out of love and duty to God, and do not look for rewards from men or self, or even from God, will be rewarded by God. God is keeping just accounts (Acts 10.4; Heb 11.6). He will give rewards to his people in ways that we don't fully understand and cannot imagine. Sometimes the rewards are physical, such as prosperity (Prov 11.24, 25; Prov 19.17) and freedom from poverty (Prov 28.27; Ps 37.21, 25). However, it is at the resurrection that the reward of eternal riches will be revealed (Luke 14.14), including holiness in the presence of God forever.

Christian Worship – Example 2: Prayer Principles [April 19] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.5-15)**

We noted that Jesus gives three examples in the first part of Matthew chapter 6 that teach how we are to worship God. The first, *giving*, deals with the outward dimension of worship. He then turns to the upward

dimension of worship—*prayer*—that places us as close to God as we can come in this life. He assumes that every true believer will pray (5), and that we all need instruction in how to approach God correctly. He teaches us about:

Prideless Prayer – He continues to contrast true Christian behaviour against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mt 23.13). They followed precisely the outward ritual of their ancestors and stopped their work at the set times for prayer. But they didn't follow the example of a true man of God like Daniel who went to his room to pray (Dan 6.10). Instead, they made sure that their daily activities brought them near the intersection of two main streets at the time of prayer so that they would have to stop their activity and pray in the view of others. They received their reward: the puffing up of their own pride, but their prayers bounced off the heavens.

Today most of us aren't tempted to pray at the corner of Yonge and Bloor. But that doesn't mean we don't need to heed this instruction. We can just as easily pray to men rather than to God. We can pray out of an attitude of self-confidence, with a desire to be known as a people of prayer, to have our 'piety' in prayer noted, or to have people congratulate us for the elegance of our words. When we pray in the assembly of believers we must try to shut them out of our minds and turn and face God alone.

Private Prayer – The true measure of our prayers is how we offer them to God in private. The essence of this instruction is not the place, but the attitude with which we pray. Do we offer real prayers of sincere passion to God, the only hearer? Do we avoid rushing through our private prayer? Do we focus our minds so that we don't drift away from dwelling on God and his providence? Then our prayers will be heard and rewarded.

Sincere prayers of God's people will be rewarded through: 1) assurance that God hears them (Jn 1.48), 2) answers in God's time and way (Ps 34.15), and 3) recognition with Christ in a glorious eternity (Mt 25.34).

Purposeful Prayer – True prayer does not consist of verbal formulas like incantations or of words offered as superstitious chants (Jer 7.4). True prayer consists of meaningful words offered to God with a purpose (7). But do not misunderstand the purpose. It is neither to inform God of our needs (8) nor to change his mind about things he has already decided. The primary purpose is to honour God and humble us. Prayer proclaims God as the creator and reminds us that we are dependent on him.

We must not think that we are excused from hearing this instruction. We may not offer up repetitions to accompany beads on a string. We may not babble like those who claim to be praying in tongues. This does not excuse us. If we use the same ‘pious’ or trite phrases from one prayer to the next (e.g., before each meal) without consciously thinking about what we are saying, our prayers are no better than those of pagans and they are barren. We should use our natural language, as a son speaking to a father (9).

Pointed Prayer – True prayer does not consist of many words (7). It is clear that we don’t have to list every need in every prayer. God knows our needs before we ask (8). Consider how short the model prayer is that Jesus gave his disciples (9-12), and yet how much content it includes! It is true that, at times, Jesus prayed all night; and he also repeated his words (Mt 26.44), as do many of the Psalms (e.g., Ps 42.11 with Ps 43.5; Ps 136.1-26). It is *meaningless* repetition that Jesus condemns. However, most of the prayers recorded in the Bible can be read aloud in five minutes or less. Since these should serve as our model, then we learn that our prayers should be short and offered often.

Prayer’s Prototype – Jesus provides a model for prayer (9-13). In our next ‘meditation’ we will consider this model prayer in more detail. For today, we should note that in this model he teaches us about both the form and content that our prayers should have.

Powerful Prayer – If our prayers lack power it is because we have sin in our hearts that we have not dealt with. We cannot have fellowship with

God if we have conflicts with our neighbours. A major challenge for us is forgiving others (14, 15). Jesus uses this particular sin as a fulcrum on which he balances prayer. If we want to have our prayers heard and we want them to be effective, then we must come to God with pure hearts (Ps 24.3, 4). If we come to him asking for forgiveness, and with a forgiving attitude, this indicates, or symbolizes, that we desire to purge out all sin from our hearts. This is at the root of powerful prayer.

Christian Worship – Prayer’s Prototype [April 20] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.9-13; compare Lk 11.2-4)**

Jesus provides in his *Sermon* a model for prayer that teaches us about both the structure and scope of prayer. Since much has been written about the Lord’s Prayer and many sermons have been preached on each petition in it, it is hard for us to do justice to its depth in a short meditation. Calvin, for example, dedicates 20 pages of the Institutes to a discussion of this prayer. We will therefore note only a few lessons about how we should pray.

Priorities – The *Prayer* is structured like the Ten Commandments. It first deals with God’s honour and then with man’s needs. It puts the things of heaven before those of the earth. In general, our prayers should praise and thank God before they focus on ourselves. In our prayers we remind ourselves that we are creatures dependent on God.

Praise – Within the scope of a few words (9) Jesus teaches us how we are to offer praise to God by declaring him to be the:

- 1) *Transcendent Creator* – God has chosen to make Heaven his dwelling place (Ps 103.19; Ps 115.3). Heaven is a created place. But, being ‘above’ or outside of the universe, it stands as a symbol for God’s infinity. God is not just a god of a river, forest, or nation; he is the highest God above all gods who holds together all creation. To our pagan culture we declare that God is the transcendent creator when we call upon him in Heaven.
- 2) *Holy One* – God’s name stands in the place of God himself. It is holy

(Ex 20.7) because everything associated with him is holy. Thus, we desire that his name be proclaimed throughout the world as holy so that all men will know who he is, and reverence him.

- 3) *Personal Saviour* – The word ‘father’ is not being used in the sense of God being the creator of all people (Acts 17.28). This prayer is for believers. God becomes our Father when he adopts us into his household through Christ. When we declare God as our Father it encourages us by reminding us that we belong to an everlasting, perfect family.

We must bow down before the God in heaven with praise and declare him to be the holy creator who saves.

Providence – When we ask God to reveal his sovereign reign among men (10) we do not ask that he *become* a king, he *is* the King! Rather, we confess that no other person’s will (whether man or devil) is to be the measure and motive of mankind. Jesus himself desired that only the will of God would be done (Mt 26.42). Our desire is to be the same. So, we ask God to make his laws and worship known on this earth until the day they are fully and correctly observed in his heavenly kingdom.

Provision – Jesus teaches (11) that it is proper to pray for our physical needs as they arise. This is not inferior prayer. If we don’t ask for God’s provision, we act as if we are independent of him. By asking for his help we acknowledge that he sustains (Acts 17.28) and cares (Mt 6.25-34) for us, and we learn to trust him more. But we are to pray that our needs are met – the *bread* we need from day-to-day – not that our desire for luxuries will be satiated. As God supplied manna on a daily basis in the wilderness, so he will supply what is necessary for us. We are to be content with what he gives us. If we are not, then we deny that he knows what is best for us.

Purification – As we are to ask God to sustain us physically, so we are to ask him to sustain us spiritually (12). We need, daily, to go before his throne and confess that we have sinned, and he will forgive us (1 Jn 1.9). However, there is a condition. If we go before him with a bad attitude

(for example an unforgiving heart or a pride that holds grudges) he will not hear our petitions. If we cannot forgive others who have hurt and offended us, we have to question if we are truly Christians. It is very sad if we claim to be Christians and are less forgiving than our pagan neighbours. We need to ask God to make us holy, as he is holy.

Protection – God himself does not tempt us to sin (James 1.13) but he does put us into difficult situations to test our faithfulness (13). Satan, his assistants, and the remnants of wickedness in our hearts exploit these situations to pressure us to sin. We need to recognize our weaknesses and ask God to help us avoid temptations and overcome them. When we are confronted by evil, God will protect us if we ask for help (1 Cor 10.13; Jude 24). Our challenge is to put aside pride and admit our need of help.

If we can learn to offer God prayers modeled on this Prayer, they will go up as the sweet smell of incense (Ps 141.2; Rev 5.8) and be pleasing to our Father. They will declare him worthy of all honour, proclaim his sovereign reign and almighty power into the ages, and assist us to know our place as he provides only good things for us (Rom 8.28; James 1.17).

Christian Worship and Forgiveness [April 21] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.12, 14-15)**

In the Prophets (e.g., Is 1.10-17; Is 66.2-4; Mic 6.6-8) we learn that God despises a person who offers polluted sacrifices. A spiritual equivalent of offering sacrifices of pig meat or crippled sheep is going to worship God with a heart that holds a grudge against a neighbour, harbours resentment, or is unwilling to forgive. God requires that our worship be accompanied by mercy (Hos 6.6; Col 3.13, 14) or it is not true worship.

We cannot draw close to God through the upward dimension of worship—*prayer*—if we are dragging a 50-tonne weight. We must cut the chain that ties us to our bad attitude and leave behind our grudges, anger, hate, and self-righteousness. This is why Jesus adds an ‘appendix’ (Mt 6.14, 15) about forgiveness to his instruction on prayer.

Jesus does not list the specific sins we are to forgive. This implies that it includes all sins. We can classify *all* sins that we are to forgive into three categories; they are sins against our:

- **Person** – People attack us and cause personal injuries, or through their wilful neglect (e.g., drunkenness or inattention) they hurt us.
- **Pride** – We are offended when men say unkind things to our faces, or spread gossip about us or slander us.
- **Property** – Someone forgets to repay a small loan or to return a book, or he steals from us or maliciously destroys our property.

In all these instances we must be willing to forgive. But what does it mean to forgive those who have sinned against us? This is one of the most difficult questions to answer in the area of Christian ethics. Does it mean that we are to let someone take all our possessions and leave us destitute? Does it mean that we are to become pacifists and ignore a madman who threatens to kill our children? Does it mean that we are never to take legal action, even in clear cases of negligence?

We cannot develop a complete ethic of forgiveness in a single meditation, but we can consider a few principles that might help us understand our duty to be forgiving:

- **Forgiving is *not* abdicating** – We have a responsibility to stop people from sinning where it is in our power. Having a forgiving attitude does not mean that we will permit people to plunder our possessions or destroy our families (1 Tim 5.8).
- **Forgiving is *not* approving** – If God could have forgiven sin without dealing justly with it, there would have been no need for Jesus to die. We are to overlook personal insults, but when truth or justice are assailed we have an obligation to act, as Jesus did when he confronted injustice (Jn 18.22, 23). The challenge for us is to maintain a balance. We have an obligation to seek justice, but we must never be vindictive.
- **Forgiving is patient** – Jesus tells us that we are to be willing to forgive continually (Mt 18.22; Lk 17.3ff).
- **Forgiving is impartial** – Whether the sin committed against us is wilful or done in ignorance, committed by a friend or enemy, or the

person asks for forgiveness or does not, we are to forgive (Lk 23.34).

- **Forgiving is generous** – God has forgiven us far more than we will ever be required to forgive (Eph 4.32). We must be willing to forgo our rights (1 Cor 6.7) to bear witness to the Holy Spirit living in us.
- **Forgiving is forgetting** – Many people say “I will forgive you, but I cannot forget the hurt.” This is not forgiveness; it is a shallow excuse for revenge. True forgiveness forgets the sin and never dredges it up again (Job 14.16, 17; Ps 51.9; Ps 103.12; 1 Cor 13.5; 1 Pt 4.8).

Jesus tells us that we must have a forgiving attitude in order to approach God correctly in worship. He then teaches that there is a causal relationship between our own attitude and our state. If we forgive others, God will forgive us. This seems to imply that a person can earn merit with God. We know that elsewhere (e.g., Eph 2.8-10) the Bible teaches clearly that we cannot earn our salvation. Then what does Jesus mean?

We have noted previously that in the *Sermon* Jesus teaches how to live the Christian life. He does not teach how to become a Christian. If we, as Christians, are forgiving, we walk in communion with God and display evidence of true conversion. If we are unforgiving we wallow in our sin, are out of fellowship with God, and cannot expect God to forgive us or hear our prayers.

Christian Worship – Example 3: Fasting [April 22] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.16-18)**

When was the last time you fasted as a religious observation and not because you had to have a blood test? Why has fasting largely disappeared from Protestant, evangelical worship? Is it because we have overreacted to the abuses of fasting associated with Lent and abstaining from meat on Fridays? What place should fasting have in our worship?

Jesus provides guidelines about the proper way to fast. This is his third example that teaches us how we are to worship God. But it is almost irrelevant for us to consider *how* to fast if we don't practice fasting. Therefore, we should first consider the purpose of fasting before we

address the method.

OT law required a fast once per year. The only prescribed fast is the one on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16.29; Lev 23.27; Num 29.7). The Jews appear to have added other annual fasts later (Zech 8.19). In addition, special times of fasting were called during national emergencies (Judges 20.26; Joel 1.14) and individuals fasted at times of personal distress (2 Sam 12.22; Nehemiah 1.4). Typically, the Pharisees went beyond the requirements of Scripture and required fasting twice per week (Lk 18.12). They changed the observance of fasting from a time of intense worship associated with the confession of sin or a special call for God's help, into a hollow ritual of sanctimonious outward display.

There is no specific command in the New Testament that states that we must practice fasting. We could conclude, since Jesus says he will never leave us (Jn 14.15-21), that there is no need for us to fast (Mt 28.20; Mk 2.19). However, Jesus assumes that his disciples will fast ("when you fast"), and he says that there will be a time for fasting (Mk 2.20). Also, we are provided with examples of fasting in the NT (Acts 13.3; Acts 14.23) that indicate that it was an accepted practice among the Apostles. Their practice in worship is to be a standard for us.

Fasting is not *required* of Christians. Nevertheless it pleases God when it is offered as a special offering of private worship. We should consider fasting when we are in any of the following circumstances:

- To facilitate grieving over sin and (personal or corporate) confession (Judges 20.26; Neh 9.1, 2; Ps 69.5-12).
- To obtain guidance and help from God (Ezra 8.21-23; Neh 1.4; Est 4.16).
- To heighten our appeal to God, for example, asking him to save a friend; when we are setting out on something new and extraordinary (Ps 35.13; Mt 17.21; Acts 13.2, 3; Acts 14.23).
- To remind us that man does not live only on natural bread (inference, Mt 2.1-4).
- To curb the desires of the sinful nature (inference, Titus 2.2).

What do the instruction and examples of true fasting provided in the Bible teach us? That it is not to be performed as a duty for its own sake but as an inward (silent, personal, and private) form of worship that advances our outward, corporate worship and our visible walk of obedience before God. It is a humbling of the soul that makes us desire to obey God and follow the example of Jesus (Is 58.6-14).

In most instances in the Bible fasting appears to consist of complete abstinence from food and drink (other than water) for an entire day. But sometimes a fast may have consisted of taking only a small amount of bread and water (Dan 10.3) so as to abstain from legitimate physical pleasures for a time. The fast that God delights in is the one that raises our souls to Heaven, not one that causes physical pain (e.g., a headache) and makes us irritable (Is 58.4, 5).

Fasting is an inner act of worship that is not to be made visible to others (Mt 6.17-18). It is a private matter between a Christian and God. We cannot, and should not, know if another person is fasting. Therefore, we must never judge the apparent behaviour of others when it comes to the matter of fasting. Nor can we assume that if there are no signs of fasting that our fellow Christians lack sincerity or commitment to Christ. Our own views about the frequency or ‘proper’ manner of fasting are not God’s standard. What others do about fasting is simply not our concern.

Nor should we ever feel that we are more righteous than other Christians if we do fast regularly. The false righteousness of the Pharisees is shown by the irony of their denial of the flesh so that they could glory in the act of fasting by drawing attention to themselves.

Fasting is a neglected aspect of worship in our hedonistic age. I suspect that many of us need to think seriously about how we should apply the teaching of Jesus in our lives and how we can honour God through fasting.

Heavenly Treasures [April 23]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.19-24)

In the preceding three examples of false righteousness Jesus says that if we offer ‘worship’ as defined by men we will receive our reward (Mt 6.2, 5, 16). The ‘rewards’ of false worship are available in this life and they consist of self-congratulation and a false sense of superiority.

Most people in the Church today would be appalled if I were to accuse them of offering worship as the Pharisees did. They would reply by saying that their only desire in offering worship is to honour God. But is this in fact the case? When men offer acts of homage to God that he has not required, or in a form that he has not specified, they establish themselves as the standard for defining worship, rather than God. The Pharisees placed their own will above God’s and obtained their rewards.

Jesus teaches, in contrast, that those who offer true and correct worship, with a desire to please God and not men, will receive rewards from God (Mt 6.4, 6, 18). He goes on in the *Sermon* to tell us what those rewards are. They are treasures in Heaven. He uses three illustrations, that build upon one another, to show that the rewards that God gives for true worship are not of this world.

Storage – Reading verses 19-21 in isolation most people think that Jesus is speaking *only* about worldly possessions. It is true that we are not to put our hope in the riches of this world. Thieves, not just burglars but also illness, economic collapse, and death will take them from us. However, the previous instruction about worship and rewards indicates that Jesus uses a metaphor (physical objects that decay or rust) to illustrate the insubstantial nature of the praises of men, status, self-esteem, and self-determination in worship. True worship does not consist of our inventions or what we *think* will please God. In true worship, we offer homage to the great King in the manner and form that he desires and demands.

Those who invent ways to worship God and introduce their own practices store up treasures on earth. They may be true believers, but their rewards will perish. In contrast, those who worship God in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4.24) store up eternal rewards in Heaven.

Sight – Idolatry comes in many forms. A person does not need to lay flowers in front of a statue of Buddha or kiss a crucifix to be an idolater. We are idolaters when we place anything in our focus that displaces God. Our eye is diseased (literally ‘evil’) when it looks greedily for money or popularity, flattery, and a reputation among men; or focuses on earthly philosophies, beauty, art, inventions, ideas, or political systems. Whether we make *things*, *ideas*, or *self* the object of our devotion we are idolaters; we worship something other than God. The eye that is healthy is the one that fixes the thoughts and intentions of the heart on God and his glory (2 Cor 4.18; Heb 12.2). What we focus on becomes our god.

Service – What we focus our thoughts and sights upon is what we serve. Jesus completes his rebuke of the Pharisees with a transition from their focus on temporal rewards that built up their self-image, to their desire to have explicitly physical rewards in the form of money (a translation of the Aramaic word *mamona* that means “wealth or property”). We are not to put our hope in treasures on this earth, including money (1 Tim 6.17-19) because where our hope is, there will be found our service. We cannot have divided loyalties when it comes to serving God or the things of the world (Josh 24.15, 19, 20; 1 Ki 18.21; Rom 6.16-22; James 4.4).

If we worship and serve God with un-divided loyalty we won’t focus our sights on earthly things and won’t store them up as if they can save us. Instead, we will serve God with an eye focused on his glory. The result will be rewards of eternal treasures in Heaven. What are these treasures? Jesus does not tell us here or anywhere else in his teaching (Mk 9.41; Mk 10.21), nor do the Apostles tell us what they are (Eph 1.18; 1 Pt 1.4).

We are not told what the heavenly rewards will be so that we will:

- Obey out of love for Christ, not because of the reward (Mt 20.1-15).
- Not use service for Christ as a cover for prudent self-interest.
- Resist summing the rewards as men do their worldly investments.
- Not have any claim on God as if we could earn merit or favour.
- Avoid assuming our reward will be better than our brothers.’
- Believe that every reward we receive will be a gift of God’s grace.

- See reward, not as tacked onto the service, but in the service itself.

Jesus promises eternal rewards to those who are obedient to God's will without thought of the rewards. The proper way to store up treasure in Heaven is to walk humbly before God and to trust him to reward you in his way (Rom 8.28; Eph 3.20). Do you completely trust Jesus?

Worldly Worry [April 24]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 6.25-34)

Jesus says "Therefore ... do not worry ..." What is the logic that leads to this conclusion? Jesus creates a thought-bridge from worship to worry, through wealth. He teaches his disciples how to worship correctly (Mt 6.1-18). Then he shows them that those who worship correctly will inherit eternal wealth – treasures in Heaven (Mt 6.19-24). Those who present false worship receive nothing more than the wealth of this world – whether it be physical objects that decay or fading praise from men. The conclusion of his logic chain is that if we are worshiping God correctly, we are his children and have no need, or right, to worry. Jesus is addressing this *Sermon* to believers and teaching them how to live the Christian life.

Before we consider what Jesus teaches us about worry, let us note what he does NOT teach. He does not say that we can live irresponsibly with no thoughts or plans for the future. We are to take effort to provide for our next meal. Farmers who do not plow and plant will not harvest. People who are not willing to work do not deserve to eat (2 Thess 3.10). We are to work as hard as the birds (26). His teaching is not a licence for laziness.

What we are not to do is worry! Jesus repeats this injunction three times (25, 31, 34). He wants to drive home the point. We had better listen! The Greek word for "worry" used by Matthew can also be translated "be anxious." It refers to something that consumes our attention or distracts us (Lk 10.41) and focuses our attention exclusively on earthly priorities and possessions. Jesus tells us that we must get our priorities correct (33)

and gives a number of reasons why we must not worry:

Worth – Man, the image bearer of God (Gen 1.27), is *worth* more than the rest of the creation, whether animate or not (Mt 12.12). God’s breath (Gen 2.7) gave man the gift of life (Acts 17.25) and we live by his will (Acts 17.28). Since he takes care of the lesser portions of his creation he will certainly take care of the most valuable part. In addition he is speaking to his disciples. God’s adopted children can trust him not to abandon them (Ps 37.25). Note, however, that Jesus is speaking in general terms and is not dealing with the specific consequences of sin that bring about hardships, such as war and famine, that sometime affect Christians.

Waste – It is a *waste* of time and energy to worry. God has the length of our lives and the very instant of our deaths determined. We are to act responsibly, and not to take stupid risks or tempt God (Dt 6.16). But whatever actions we take cannot add one minute to our lives.

Weakness – Faith is a gift of God. But, like muscles, it must be exercised to grow strong. The *weakness* of “little faith” is our fault, not God’s. Note that Jesus addresses those with *some* faith, not those with *no* faith. When Christians have weak faith they fail to see life as a whole before God. They trust God for their eternal salvation but they don’t trust him to provide their daily bread (Mt 6.11). They believe *in* him but fail to believe *him* when he says he will care for them. A weak faith in God’s power leads us to trust in the uncertain riches of this world (Mt 6.19) and makes us prone to anxiety.

Worldliness – The ‘modern’ pagans in our society run after earthly ‘treasures’. From their perspective without God, they have no hope and no light. Life is ultimately futile. If we follow in their paths filled with worry, we are dragged down by *worldliness*. Instead we should respond to events from an eternal perspective, as children of the Great King who rules all things by his Providence. We do not have to run fast to elude fatalism or anticipate chance.

Welfare – It is a sin to be anxious or to worry. God is our heavenly father and therefore has our *welfare* in mind. Everything we need will be given to us when we need it. What is best for us he will provide (Rom 8.28). In the *Sermon*, Jesus speaks to all people who are worldly. The rich worry about material things as much as the poor. All worldly people worry either about storing up treasures and make them into an idol, or about not having enough of “these things” to store up. Worry about the things of the world is obsessive and oppressive. It pleases Satan because it takes our focus away from God.

Wait – Jesus concludes by answering the obvious question: “Yes, but what about tomorrow?” God will provide for our needs each day. Therefore we must work and worship, and not worry. To walk with God means we will *wait* on him by seeking his kingdom first. Instead of worrying we are to trust that God is near us and in everything (by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving) we are to present our requests to God (Phil 4.6, 7).

Just Judgments (Part 1) – Clarifying the Command [April 25] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.1-2; Lk 6.37-40)**

To Judge or Not to Judge? – As is often the case in the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus makes a statement that appears to be absolute: “Do not judge.” Yet, elsewhere, we find Jesus teaching that we *are* to make judgments, act with discernment, and express opinions about others.

For example, in the following section, he tells us to remove the ‘plank’ from our own eye before we remove the ‘speck’ from our brother’s (5). We can’t remove a moral ‘speck’ without making a judgment that there is something to be removed. Paul and John also teach that we are to judge others (1 Cor 5.12-6.5; 1 Jn 4.1).

Those in positions of authority such as elders in a church or judges in a court (Rom 13.4) are called upon to judge the actions of those accused of doing wrong. However, they are to weigh evidence carefully, avoid prejudices (Lev 19.15) and passions, and judge with God’s honor in

mind.

Judicious Judgment – Since we are to make judgments, what does Jesus mean when he says “Do not judge?” If we only considered the account in Matthew we might have difficulty understanding what he means. However, the parallel account in Luke helps to clarify the meaning. Jesus uses a form of Hebrew instruction that illustrates one idea with two parallel thoughts. In this instance the parallel of judging is *condemning* and having an *unforgiving* attitude (Lk 6.37).

Jesus teaches that we are not to judge others with harshness or with a vengeful spirit of hatred and spite (Rom 12.19). We are not to judge our neighbours by speaking against them with slander (Jam 4.11). We are not to judge by appearances (Jn 7.24) or apparent motives or intentions. God alone can judge the heart (Heb 4.12-13). And we are not to form hasty judgments about their condition based on a single failure on their part.

The extreme statement of Jesus teaches us not that judgment itself is wrong, but that there is the necessity of making right, or just, judgments. Jesus condemns illegitimate forms of judging and teaches us how to judge righteously (with a right attitude).

Measure for Measure – Jesus warns us that if we are unfair and casual in our judgments we will be visited with the consequences. God will judge us with the level of justice we have used with our neighbours, in two ways:

- **Temporal** – Not every sin that men commit is punished during their lives. But often God does ‘even the accounts.’ People who are bitter and suspicious, are quick to get even, and jump to conclusions about others often find that they are treated the same way.

Sometimes people who are generous, forgiving and fair, and think the best of others are taken advantage of. But more often other people treat them with respect and are quick to help them when they have needs. God fills their laps with overflowing blessings for their

generosity.

- **Eternal** – Jesus anticipates the eternal judgment of God. People who judge others unjustly in this life are threatened with the consequences of their injustice and will be condemned. God judges fairly and holds us accountable for our actions (Rev 20.13). He will ensure that true justice is displayed in the Day of Judgment.

It is true that if we are Christians we won't be eternally condemned (Jn 5.24; Rom 8.1), even if we have been judgmental. However, this is no excuse for injustice on our part. And from the Bible's teaching we can conclude that those who are true believers in Christ will not display injustice (1 Cor 13.4-7; Gal 5.22-25). We may seriously question the profession of someone who claims to be a Christian and who is consistently unjust.

Divine Dispensation – Jesus continues his instruction on judging justly by telling us that we are not to usurp divine judgment (Lk 6.39, 40). We are not God, and therefore we are to leave eternal judgment in his hands (Rom 12.17-21). We do not really know how evil the sin is that remains in our own hearts; so we cannot claim the right to make judgments. This is why Jesus says elsewhere: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone ..." (Jn 8.7)

Instead of throwing stones in judgment we should be like Jesus, our teacher and master. When he was falsely judged and condemned by the Pharisees, he turned and asked God to forgive his persecutors (Lk 23.34). We should follow his example and be graciously forgiving and entirely just in all our judgments (Rev 15.3).

Just Judgments (Part 2) – Speck Picking [April 26] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.3-5; Lk 6.41-42)**

In this section (Mt 7.1-6; Lk 6.37-42) of the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus teaches how to judge justly. He says:

- **Command** – do not judge quickly, harshly, or unjustly

- Consequences – because you too will be judged instead
- Comparison – consider your own sins, they block your view and make it hard for you to see the sin in your brother
- Caution – do not cast your ‘pearls’ of hypocritical judgments; you might be trampled by those you judge.

As we noted in the previous meditation, there are times when it is necessary for us to make judgments. However, our judgments must be made in the right way and with the right motives or we will be hypocrites. How can we avoid hypocrisy when we make judgments? Jesus uses a graphic *comparison* between a plank and a speck to teach us the three principles of just judgment:

- 1) **Do not Judge if You Cannot See Clearly** – We are not to charge anyone, let alone a brother in the Church, with a sin or fault when we are guilty of the same thing (Rom 2.1). For example, there are many people in the Church who condemn gossiping in others—yet they are quick to ‘share’ information because they think it is important that everyone have the ‘facts.’

Do not think that the ‘plank’ in our eye is only the *same* sin or fault that we find in our brother. We are not to condemn others of sins when we are just as guilty but the sins are *different*. For example, we might think it proper to counsel a brother to repent who lost his temper in anger. Meanwhile we might be just as guilty because we are storing hatred against someone and hoping for his downfall.

We often are unaware of our own sins, faults, and prejudices. And worse, when we are aware of our sins, we excuse them as justified in our circumstances, or we just do not care about getting rid of them. We have all kinds of ‘planks’ in our own eyes, including pride, envy, lust, and hatred, and we are often unforgiving, unkind, and unloving. All heart sins—and outward sins—grieve God. But the sins of those who judge others are actually more grievous because those people set themselves up as a standard and example. Therefore, our own sins should seem much larger to us than those of our brothers. When

theirs appear larger they block our sight and make just judgment impossible.

- 2) **Clear Your Vision Before You Judge** – If we are not willing to judge ourselves severely, we have no position from which to judge others and have no right to condemn. If we are concerned about righteousness and God’s glory, we will spend more time judging ourselves than all the time we spend judging our neighbours. If we do not judge ourselves, we are hypocrites, along with the Pharisees whom Jesus condemns.

We must pull the ‘plank’ from our own eye and clear our vision through a three-step process:

- **Self Examination** – Through reading and meditating on the Bible—especially the Psalms—and through prayer we expose our sins.
- **Confession** – Through confession and repentance we clear the fog of sin from our hearts and heads so that we can see clearly.
- **Walking Consistently** – By obeying the Law of Jesus, we guard ourselves from the charge of hypocrisy.

If it becomes necessary for us to reprove a brother in the Church, we must meet the qualification placed on anyone in a position of authority, such as elders in a church or judges in a court, who are required to judge sin: we “must be above reproach” (1 Tim 3.2).

- 3) **Judge with Extreme Care** – A time will come when it is necessary for us to remove a sin or fault (‘speck’) from our brother’s eye through reproof or correction. But we must remember that his eye is very sensitive. Just as we would gently use a cotton swab to remove a speck of dust from another person’s eye, so we are to be gentle when we remove a ‘speck’ of sin from our brother’s eye.

Often we judge another based on personality rather than on principles of justice. We don’t deal with the specific sin with gentle care (Gal 6.1) but take delight in finding fault as we jab a hot poker into his eye. We are

haughty in our judgments and quick to condemn, and we don't love our brother as we should (1 Cor 13.4-7). Let us remember that we are dealing with a *brother* with a speck of dust in his eye, and thus never forget that we also are sinners who have been saved by God's grace.

Just Judgments (Part 3) – Pearls and Pigs [April 27] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.6)**

This proverb presents us with an interpretation challenge. What are the sacred pearls that Jesus refers to, and who are the 'dogs' and 'pigs?' The most common interpretation teaches that we are to understand that Jesus is providing a balance to his extreme position on judgment in the preceding lesson (1-5). He seems to be concerned that people might not be willing to form *any* kind of opinion out of fear that their attitudes might be wrong. So he gives a balancing statement to ensure that there is the correction of heresy in the Church and the means for controlling lawlessness in society.

Some important conclusions that flow from this interpretation are:

- The pearls Jesus refers to are God's truth or holy ordinances.
- We are not to give these 'pearls' without discernment, lest we give them to those who are unworthy.
- We must learn to distinguish between different types of people: those who are worthy, and those who are not.
- Not everyone is worthy of receiving the truth or ordinances of God; some he has determined to destroy (2 Chron 25.16; Acts 13.46; Acts 18.6).
- Not everyone is fit to be judged or reproofed by Christians, since godly reproof is a holy 'pearl' of God (Prov 25.12; Ps 141.5).

It appears that Luther applied this parable to the 'truth of God.' He wrote a letter to Henry VIII exhorting him to pursue the reformation of the Church. After Henry replied arrogantly, Luther wrote: "Who knows? Perhaps I may find one lucky hour to gain the King of England. I therefore laid my humble epistle at his feet; but alas! The swine have torn it."

The problem with this interpretation is that it requires us to read into the parable a meaning that is not supported by the context of what Jesus teaches about judgment. For example: one writer tells us that it “probably refers to the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel,” whereas another (the *Didache* 9:5) applies it to the elements of the Lord’s supper that are to be withheld from the profane, and another wonders if it means that we are not to give the Scriptures to unbelievers if there is no one to explain them.

There is nothing in the proverb itself or in its immediate context that will help us determine whether the ‘pearls’ are the word of God, gospel preaching, or his ordinances. Therefore, interpretations that follow this line of reasoning merely guess at the meaning of ‘pearls.’

Another problem is that this interpretation requires us to identify some people as moral ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs.’ For us to consider someone a ‘dog’ or a ‘pig’ is to make a very strong judgment. To the Jews a dog was a dirty scavenger (Philp 3.2; Rev 22.15), not a household pet; and a pig was the essence of everything ceremonially unclean (Is 66.3). Does this proverb refer to the heathen and pagans who will laugh at the truth and despise it? It cannot, or we would never preach the gospel to *any* unbeliever.

It is necessary to narrow the application of ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’ to those who have shown themselves to be so far gone in their wickedness that they are irredeemable. But who are these people? Paul puts to rest the false view that there are some men who are better than others (Rom 3.9-18). Are there any people whom God could not save? Impossible! No one is beyond his saving power. He can save the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1.15, 16). Can we know whom God will save and whom not? No! Election belongs to his counsel alone (Eph 1.4-14). The truth is, **every** unbeliever is unworthy to receive the word and ordinances of God. We cannot decide otherwise.

In the context of Jesus’ teaching about just judgment it appears that he seals this portion of his *Sermon* with a sarcastic proverb against those

judging. He rebukes people who think they are in a position to make judgments. They are the ones who look for a speck in their brother's eye when they have a plank in their own. They consider themselves holier than other people, despise them, and think of them as moral 'dogs' and 'pigs.' These people are in no position to offer their 'pearls' of correction.

This proverb may teach the opposite of how it is usually interpreted. It may not teach that we are to make careful judgments about different types of people; to judge some and not others; and to protect holy things. Rather it may teach us to keep our hypocritical concern ('pearls') for the reformation of others to ourselves no matter how 'precious' or 'holy' they seem to us, since we are in no position to rebuke them. If we don't, our judgments will come back on our own heads (measure for measure).

Simply, Jesus may be saying: "Do not give dogs [in your eyes] what is sacred [your 'holy' correction] ... do not judge ... if you do they will turn and tear you to pieces ... for in the same way you will be judged."

Ask, Seek, Knock [April 28]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.7-11; compare Lk 11.9-13)

It is obvious that Jesus is not teaching that we can ask for absolutely anything and we will receive it. We cannot ask to have our sinful desires satisfied and expect God to hear us. What we ask for, in prayer, must be according to the will of the Father (1 Jn 5.14), sought in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8.26), and requested in the name of Jesus (Jn 16.23). Since this passage does not teach that we can ask for everything, there must be limits. Therefore, we need to determine what is included.

From the context, it appears that we are to ask for two things:

Wisdom in Judging – Immediately prior to this teaching about how to ask God for what we need, Jesus has told his hearers how to judge others properly and has warned of the consequences of judging unfairly. It is

therefore likely that Jesus is telling us to ask God for wisdom when we make judgments. We need to be like Solomon who understood his need and pleased God when he asked for wisdom (1 Ki 3.9, 10).

Grace to Live as Christians – We have noted previously that in the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus teaches his disciples how to live the Christian life. In this context, we are to ask God for all the grace that he can provide to us so that we can:

- live as those who are poor in spirit, mourn over sin, be meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, etc. (Mt 5.3-9);
- live as salt and light in the world (Mt 5.13-16);
- keep the Law with a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.17-48); and
- worship him properly (Mt 6.1-18).

This passage is often directed by preachers to those who do not know Jesus as their Saviour. They encourage their hearers to ask, seek, and knock in order to obtain salvation. Although it is absolutely true that sinners are to seek salvation from God (e.g., Is 55.1-7), this passage is not really addressed to unbelievers. It is addressed to those who are already children of God. Jesus goes on to tell God's children, and his disciples, the manner in which they are to ask God for what they need:

With Urgency – It is not necessary to try to find a distinction between the three actions of asking, seeking, and knocking. The emphasis of Jesus' teaching is not found in the subtle differences among the actions. Rather, it is found in the repetition of three parallel activities. To the Hebrew mind, a two-fold repetition of an action indicated an intensity in the action. For example, if someone said "weeping he wept" we could translate this as he "wept bitterly." A three-fold repetition of an action or descriptive term tells us of the superlative nature of the action or object under consideration (e.g., Is 6.3; Rev 4.8; Mk 12.30; Col 3.16; 1 Thess 5.23). Jesus uses this Hebrew thought-form to emphasize the urgency with which we are to keep on approaching our Heavenly Father with our requests. God welcomes prayer that shows sincere persistence (Lk 18.6, 7).

With Confidence – There were probably some of his hearers who were thinking: “Why do I have to ask more than once?” We need to remember that the purpose of prayer is not to inform God of our needs but to remind us of our dependency on him. When we pray in faith, we will be heard. That is why Jesus goes on to assure his disciples that God hears their prayers. He uses an illustration of an earthly father who cares for his children and responds to their requests. He argues from the lesser to the greater: a human father who is filled with evil tendencies can still be kind to his children; therefore, God, who is good, will certainly be kind to his children and give them good gifts, especially the Holy Spirit (Lk 11.13).

You may respond and say: “I have prayed hundreds of times for something that is in the will of God (e.g., the salvation of a friend, grace to keep my tongue under control, healing for a family member, etc.) but God hasn’t answered my prayer. How can I pray with confidence that my prayers are heard?” The solution to this ‘problem’ is not what we think it is. If we are truly God’s children, our Spirit-led prayers are heard by our Father. But the *way* he answers may not be what we want to hear or what we expect. God alone sees the ‘big-picture’ and knows what is best for us. He alone gives us “good gifts” and works out all things for our good (Rom 8.28).

When you are perplexed by the answers you are given to prayer, turn to the example of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed to have the cup of suffering taken away (Mt 26.39). God heard his prayer, but he did not answer it by removing the cup. Jesus had to go to the cross and suffer death on our behalf. Just like Jesus, we should pray that God’s will would be done in our lives, and have confidence that he hears our prayers and will “give good gifts to those who ask him.”

The Golden Rule [April 29]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.12; Lk 6.31)

The Golden Rule is not unique to Jesus. It is found in various forms in Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Judaism. It is reported that

Rabbi Hillel taught the Rule. He was a teacher when Jesus was twelve years old and may have been present when Jesus was found asking questions in the temple (Lk 2.46). Hillel apparently answered the challenge of a student to provide a summary of the whole Law by saying: “That which displeases you, do not do to another. This is the whole Law; the rest is commentary.”

Most people today are happy to accept as their guide for moral behaviour the Golden Rule: “do to others what you would have them do to you.” They accept this rule as their standard for behaviour because in their view it does not place any specific requirements on them and allows them to define moral behaviour with great latitude. For example, they can say: “what consenting adults do in a bedroom is no one else’s business.” Or, “I would let other people use drugs, therefore, I can.”

Does the fact that Jesus quotes a generally accepted aphorism mean that he endorses the religions of the world or encourages moral latitude? Of course not! Then why does he use the Golden Rule as a summary of the Law and the Prophets? And what does he want us to understand by this teaching?

The fact that the religions of the world teach the Golden Rule does not mean that they invented truth. All truth, whether in the Bible, or repeated by an unbeliever is still truth, and as such is God’s truth. When a person states that $2+2=4$ he states truth, not because he invented the truth but because it is true. When a false religion proclaims something that is true, it is not because the human creators of the religion invented the truth but because they have taken truth from God. When Paul spoke to the Athenian council he quoted God’s truth from the mouth of their worldly poets (Acts 17.28). Jesus does the same thing when he repeats the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule is true, not because many religions of the world include it in their teachings or because many people believe it to be true, but because it is God’s truth. Jesus teaches the Rule because it summarizes the attitude with which we must apply the Law and the Prophets.

The emphasis of Jesus' teaching in the *Sermon on the Mount* is not on what we should *believe* about God but rather on what we should *do* as believers who have been saved from the guilt and power of sin. We have noted previously that the *Sermon* is a commentary on the OT Law, showing how it is to be applied properly by Christians. Yet many Christians will say that the OT laws have been abolished. They will then point to the *Sermon*, and specifically the Golden Rule, as the standard for directing the life of a Christian. The irony is that in the *Sermon* Jesus specifically says that he did not come to abolish the Law—instead he endorses it (Mt 5.17-19). Also when he gave the Rule, he explicitly said that it was a summary of the Law and the Prophets (i.e., the OT). Thus, if we want to know how to live the *Sermon* and the Golden Rule, we have to turn to the OT for guidance.

We are not left to our own judgment for interpreting and applying the Golden Rule. The application of the Rule is not determined by what we think is 'reasonable.' Nor can the principle of equity taught in the Rule be lived in the abstract; it must have specific content or it is purely subjective. That specific content is defined primarily by the Ten Commandments, and secondarily by the examples of how to apply the Ten Commandments given throughout the Bible as specific laws. Jesus teaches that how we want others to treat us, and how we treat them, is to be guided by the laws we find throughout the entire Bible.

As a summary principle for applying the Bible's commands, the Golden Rule cannot be practiced consistently by a natural person (Rom 8.7, 8). Only people who *are* righteous can truly practice the Rule and display the Holy Spirit living in them. If we possess the righteousness Jesus requires (Mt 5.3-10, 20), we will live the Rule and conform to God's standards.

In the immediate context of the *Sermon*, we should understand the Golden Rule as summarizing how we are to make judgments. We should judge others as we want to be judged: against the standard of God's Law, fairly, consistently, with compassion and gentleness, and with a desire to

build up through correction rather than to tear down through censure and rebuke. If we judge in any other way, we are being arbitrary and should expect to have our harsh judgments measured out on ourselves (Mt 7.2).

If we do not apply the Golden Rule, we have no right to expect our prayers to be answered (Is 1.15-17; Mt 7.7-9) or to receive the good gifts that our Father in Heaven gives (Mt 7.10-11). Rather we should expect those we judge to turn on us and tear us to pieces (Mt 7.6).

The Narrow and Wide Gates [April 30] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.13-14)**

Contrast – We have reached the concluding section of the *Sermon on the Mount*. It consists of three contrasts: narrow/wide gate and road (13-14); good/bad fruit (15-20); and wise/foolish builders (24-27).

The first contrast sets before us two gates, two roads leading from those gates, and two final destinations at the end of the roads. If you are familiar with *The Pilgrim's Progress* you know that the metaphor of the gates from this *Sermon* is used by John Bunyan. When Pilgrim meets Evangelist he is directed to a small gate through which he must enter to obtain eternal life. Later, when Christian meets Goodwill, Goodwill reminds Christian that the right way is straight and narrow and that he must not depart from it.

Commencement – Bunyan understood the teaching of Jesus correctly. The narrow gate is not the gate to Heaven at the end of life; it is the gate that is entered at the *beginning* of the Christian life through conversion. After passing through the gate, the Christian is to follow a straight and narrow road that ultimately leads to Heaven.

Command – Jesus commands his hearers to enter through the narrow gate and follow the narrow road. By this, he tells them that they must be saved through himself since he is the gate (Jn 10.7, 9) and the road (Jn 14.6).

Although Jesus does command his hearers to enter the narrow gate and be saved, he does not tell them (in this sermon) *how* to be saved. He doesn't even include guidance such as Paul gives when he says that God now "commands all people everywhere to repent." (Acts 17.31) It is clear, again, that Jesus is not addressing this sermon to unbelievers to tell them how to become Christians. He is teaching those who have repented of their sins how to live the Christian life by following the narrow road.

Compass – We should note that the road does not start out wide and grow narrower, nor does it start out narrow and grow wider. It starts out narrow and continues the same width throughout the Christian life. This implies that we are constrained by an invariant standard for belief and behaviour.

The rest of the *Sermon on the Mount* is an exposition of the OT Law that teaches us how to walk the narrow road. Modern Christians do not want to hear about the strictness of the Law—they want salvation without service and opportunity without obedience. But if we are going to walk the narrow road that will please our Saviour, we will leave behind the worldliness, materialism, pride, and moral latitude that plagues the Church today. We will be scrupulous to keep even the least commandments of God (Mt 5.19), with a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees (Mt 5.20).

Jesus commands each of us to follow the narrow road. But he does not tell us to walk along the shoulder of the road carrying a long stick that we can use to prod others back onto the road. In fact, as we have noted, we are to be very careful when we judge others lest we be judged (Mt 7.1-6). We are to be narrow in our obedience but generous in our attitude to others. We are to follow the narrow road ourselves but leave room for other Christians who may find it wider than we do.

Companions – Few find the gate and enter (14). Not because the gate is hard to see—God's righteous requirements are known to all men (Rom 2.15) and Jesus is preached in every country. The gate is hard to see because men and women turn their backs to it. They suppress the truth

(Rom 1.18) by walking in the opposite direction, or they shield their eyes with the dark glasses of sin and the theories of this world.

Even though few find the road, it is not a lonely way to travel. When we look ahead, we see many people who are approaching the end. Beside us are our traveling companions. With them we sing the Pilgrim songs (e.g., Psalm 122.1-9). When we look behind, we see the road becoming more and more crowded. In each generation more are walking along the road.

How many have traveled the road, or will travel it? Jesus does not answer the question (Lk 13.23-24). Instead, he points us to the end where there is a great multitude which no one can count (Rev 7.9).

Consequences – What is at the end of the narrow road? As we walk along it, we may be taken into valleys or over mountains. Often it will be hard to see the end. But it is straight and will eventually lead us home, to eternal life (14) in the Kingdom of Heaven (21).

Enter through the narrow gate! If you don't, following the broad way of lawlessness will lead to intellectual, moral, and eternal destruction.

A Tree and Its Fruit [May 1]

(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.15-23; Lk 6.43-46)

Context – After exhorting his hearers to enter through the narrow gate Jesus warns them about false prophets (teachers) who will lead them from the gate. The way of salvation was not found in the teaching of the Pharisees, but only in the teaching of Christ. Today it is no different, salvation is not found in a myriad of religions or 'miracles', it is found only in the teachings of Christ given in the Bible (Acts 4.12). We must not be fooled by false teachers, prophets, religions, or philosophies.

Caution – Jesus says we must *watch* (Mt 7.15). This implies that it is hard to see false prophets. They are wolves in sheep clothes (e.g., Mormons). In the Church, the teaching of false prophets appears valid (2 Pt 2.1; 1 Jn 4.1). Their false teaching is often not blatant heresy, but

subtle. It starts with absent teaching. What they teach is often not wrong but they ignore specific doctrines. For example, they are vague about the judgment and Hell; they do not challenge personal sins; or they neglect to condemn sins like abortion, homosexuality and Sabbath breaking. Then they absorb the myths of neutrality, plurality and tolerance. For example, they teach that science is neutral and that its interpretation of the ‘facts’ (e.g., the supposed long geological ages) must be reconciled with the Bible. Jesus expects his hearers to be discerning and to think critically. If false teaching were not subtle, Jesus would not need to warn us to watch. Therefore watch for false presuppositions and faulty logic. They are all around us.

Classification – How can we tell when a person is a false teacher? Jesus says that by their fruit we will recognize them. He illustrates this with a series of contrasts (vines *vs* thorn bushes; figs *vs* thistles; good *vs* bad trees). He shows that there are only two classes of teacher. There is not a continuum; a teacher is either true or false. We are to judge the mature fruit of their teaching to see the difference between the true and the false. We are not to judge just by appearances such as we hear in fine sounding sermons (2 Tim 4.3), but to examine the fruit of their teaching closely. True teaching will produce salvation (Acts 2.42 & 47), obedience to God’s Law (Mt 28.20), righteous lives (Mt 5.3-10; Gal 5.22, 23), and sound doctrine (Titus 1.9).

Contrast – Jesus warns (Mt 7.21) that fervency is not a definitive sign of a true prophet. Some who call Jesus ‘Lord’ are excluded from Heaven. Even those who are fervent in their profession can be ‘devils.’ There are many ‘amens’ cobbling the road to Hell! Intellectual and emotional belief in Jesus is not sufficient to validate a teacher. The devils know that there is one God (James 2.19), they believe that Jesus is Lord (Lk 4.34), and they have an emotional reaction to him (Mt 8.29). Yet, they do everything they can to undermine his authority. Confession with the mouth, that Jesus is Lord, is necessary (Rom 10.9), but it is not sufficient. The necessary condition of a true teacher is a heart confession based on a personal belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Claim – False teachers claim to have three gifts (Mt 7.22):

- 1) **Prophecy** – They pretend to be able to predict the future. They spend more time telling us when the Rapture or the Antichrist will appear than teaching obedience to God's will (Mt 7.21). The gift of foretelling the future ceased when the Bible was complete (1 Cor 13.8-10).
- 2) **Exorcism** – They go through rituals to cast out demons. Demons do exist, and it is possible that they still possess people. However, it is more likely that with the defeat of Satan by the Cross and the end of the Apostolic age, Satan's forces no longer can take direct possession of humans. Even if demon possession exists today, this does not mean that exorcists are necessarily true teachers (Mt 12.27; Acts 19.13-16).
- 3) **Miracles** – Counterfeit miracles (2 Thess 2.8-11) may be performed today. Real miracles had the purpose of validating the ministry of Christ and his prophets and Apostles. True miracles ceased with the end of the Apostolic age and the completion of the Bible.

Open your eyes and watch for the claims of *many* (Mt 7.22) false teachers who in Christ's name ask you to put your hope in signs rather than in Jesus. God does not ask you to seek sign gifts; he requires a holy life.

Condemnation – On the Judgment day what will the false teachers say when asked by God why they should enter Heaven? Will they list their false claims? God will not be fooled or mocked. He will ask them why they did these things and who required them. (Is 1.12) Jesus as the judge will say "I *never* knew you." (Mt 7.23) They *never* belonged to him. They may have been members or leaders in the Church, but they were nothing more than evildoers! There are many who deceive themselves and think that they please God with their acts of worship, sign gifts, and teachings. But they are evil (Mt 7.23); not just mistaken, evil! They will go away into eternal punishment. Don't let them fool you. Stick with the simple message of belief in Jesus, repentance of sins, and obedience to God.

The True Foundation of Faith [May 2] (A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.24-27; Lk 6.47-49)

Follow-up – From beginning to end the Bible teaches that hearing without doing is worthless, words without a corresponding walk is futile, and faith without works is dead (Jam 2.17). Jesus at the conclusion of this *Sermon* reminds his audience that all the wonderful teaching they have just received will be of no value if they don't put his words into practice.

Jesus sets up a contrast between those who claim to have done great things for the Kingdom (Mt 7.22) and those who do the will of the Father (Mt 7.21). Self-works do not lead to *life* and Jesus will not acknowledge them. Rather, it is a Holy Spirit-filled *life* that leads to good works. Only those who have placed their faith in Jesus and repented of their sins can do works that please God. Jesus defines the great divide between all false religions and the **only** true religion. All other religions claim that good works lead to life; Christianity teaches that a life based on true faith leads to good works.

The result of faith is hearing; the result of hearing is doing; and doing is obeying the commands of Jesus (Jn 14.15)—in action and attitude. As we have seen throughout the study of this *Sermon*, the commands of Jesus include all those given in the Bible through his Prophets and Apostles. And, as he has taught in the *Sermon*, putting his words into practice is not just outward actions, but actions with the proper attitude. The practice that Jesus expects is a follow-up to hearing, based on true faith.

Foundation – Faith is the foundation of true practice. But we must never be satisfied with an abstract faith or a false faith; a faith in faith or a faith in self or any created thing. True faith rests on one ultimate foundation—Jesus Christ (Is 28.16; 1 Cor 3.11). The wise person is the one who has dug through all the layers of human philosophies, theories, imaginations and rationalizations and has placed his faith in Jesus (Lk 6.48). There are four areas in which Jesus must be the foundation of our faith:

- **Mortality** – Jesus is the creator of all things (Col 1.16) who alone is worthy of worship (Rev 4.11). If we question the literalness of his creation account (Gen 1.1-31; Gen 2.1-25) and accept the claims of pseudo-science (e.g., the supposed geological age of the earth or a cosmological theory of the formation of the universe) we build our house of faith on sand.
- **Message** – Jesus is the Word (Jn 1.1), final prophet of God (Heb 1.1-3) and ultimate communication from God (Col 1.15). If we accept any source of meaning (e.g., rationalism or empiricism) other than his self-attesting revelation (the Bible), or are selective in the doctrines we believe, we deceive ourselves and build our house of faith on sand.
- **Morality** – Jesus is the Lawgiver (Mt 5.17-20; Jn 14.15). If we look anywhere else (e.g., natural law, pluralism, or majority opinion) than to his Word for moral standards we build our house of faith on sand.
- **Messiah** – Jesus is the Saviour who died to save his people from their sins (Mt 1.21). If we try to find salvation in any other religion or in ourselves we build our house of faith on sand.

True faith is not just assent to the existence of Jesus or God (Jam 2.19), it is relying on Jesus in every area of life. There are many who hope to go to Heaven but despise the foundation—Jesus the Rock (Ps 19.14; 1 Cor 10.2).

Flood – In Palestine the winter rains could quickly fill the river valleys and cause them to overflow their banks with destructive floods (Lk 6.48). Jesus uses this illustration from nature to remind us that storms (e.g., illness, unemployment, or death of a spouse) will come into our lives and sweep away our faith if it is not founded on Jesus.

Future – At the end of life an even greater flood faces each of us. God's judgment (Heb 9.27) will sweep us into the eternity of Hell if our faith is founded on anything in this world; whether it be self, an idea, another person, or a material object. Ample warnings are provided throughout the Bible and specifically in this *Sermon* (Mt 5.22, 29; Mt 7.13, 23). We will be without any excuse if we ignore the Bible's warnings. This *Sermon*

opens with blessing but ends with destruction. Blessings are the reward of a righteousness founded on Jesus. But we must have no false hope. God does not ignore unbelief and disobedience. A ‘great crash’ will come upon those who build their hope on anything other than Jesus.

Every person is building a house of faith, a hope for eternity, and places his or her faith in *something*. From outward appearances one person’s faith may look similar to another’s. The ultimate question is: What is the foundation of your faith, on what have you placed your hope for eternity?

The Message and the Man [May 3] **(A Mountain in Galilee, early Fall 31 AD. Mt 7.28-8.1)**

Message – The *Sermon on the Mount* is not intended to show an unbeliever how to be saved. Rather, it gives instruction to the disciples of Jesus (Mt 5.1, 2) who have already accepted the evangelistic call, and shows them how to live out their faith as citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven. The *Sermon* does provide a lesson in applied ethics, but it does not provide either a complete ethical model or a new law; nor does it replace the OT Law (Mt 5.17) or call for a moral revolution based on love. The OT Law is based on love (Dt 6.5; Lev 19.18). The *Sermon* teaches us how to apply *correctly* the OT Law delivered through the prophets.

We have seen that the *Sermon* teaches us the following:

- Character of a Christian (Mt 5.1-12)
- Challenge of mission as salt and light in the world (Mt 5.13-16)
- Context of living within the OT Law (Mt 5.17-20)
- Correct application of the OT Law (Mt 5.21-48)
- Call to worship: giving (Mt 6.1-4); prayer (Mt 6.5-15); fasting (Mt 6.16-18)
- Confidence in God’s provisions for eternity (Mt 6.19-24)
- Calm acceptance of God’s provisions for this life (Mt 6.25-34)
- Compassionate, non-judging relationships with our neighbours (Mt 7.1-6)
- Crying out for wisdom to live fairly by the Golden Rule (Mt 7.7-12)

- Contrast between the narrow and wide gates (Mt 7.13-14)
- Caution about false claims of being in Christ (Mt 7.15-23)
- Commitment to faith in a proper foundation (Mt 7.24-27).

In sum, the *Sermon* shows how a Christian, whose life is ruled by the Spirit, will interact with his neighbours and walk faithfully before his God.

Marvel – The crowds were amazed and astonished at this teaching. It wasn't so much the content that amazed them as it was the *way* in which the message was delivered. The rabbis appealed to traditions and gave endless quotations. Jesus, in contrast, delivered his message from his own authority with confidence, and gave a fresh application from God.

We should marvel at the *Sermon*, but not just for its form and, in unbelief, miss the importance of its message or the man who delivered it.

Man – Notice how often Jesus says “I tell you” (Mt 5.20, 22, etc.) and makes specific references to himself (Mt 5.11, 17; Mt 7.21-24, 26). In these statements we see Jesus declaring himself to be the Messiah in his three-fold office of Prophet (Dt 18.15; Mt 5.20), Priest (Ps 110.4; Mt 5.17-18) and King/Judge (Ps 110.1; Mt 7.21-23). He claims through these statements the right to speak with authority. His commission is direct from the Father; his authority does not come from man but from God.

Jesus speaks with the same authority as when he created the universe (Col 1.16). Sitting on the side of the mountain he delivers the Law with a greater authority than Moses who brought the Law down from Sinai. The rabbis and scribes may have sat in Moses' seat (Mt 23.2), but Moses sat in Jesus' seat! The words of this sermon, along with the entire Bible, have authority **only** because they come directly from the God-man, Jesus.

There are many people who are happy to admire (marvel at) the words in this sermon, but who are unwilling to embrace the man. Mahatma Gandhi said “I have never been interested in an historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved ... that the man called Jesus never lived ... For

the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me.” But without Jesus the *Sermon* has no meaning. We must look beyond the message to the man. The message has no meaning without the man. Why is the message important? Why is it to be believed and practiced? Because of the man. We must put the words of this sermon into practice, but we must also honour and worship the man who delivered it. This is the essence of Christianity, we cannot, and must not, make a distinction between the message and the man.

Mission – “When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.” They were drawn to *him* and his message. Some later went away because they found the message too difficult to accept (Jn 6.66). But those who stayed were more than followers—they were disciples (Jn 6.60). Jesus gave them a mission: to follow him into the world (Mt 28.18-20).

Today we must have a desire to learn all we can from Jesus’ teaching (the Bible). But that is not enough. We are to be more than mere followers who are pleased to have our ears tickled by the fine words of Jesus, or by the words of one of his preachers. We are to be his true disciples. We must come to know him personally and to have a personal relationship with him. He must be our master, our saviour, and our friend—as well as our teacher. We must love him and be ready to follow him wherever he leads us, until he calls us home to glory.

Growing Fame; Preaching Repentance

The Centurion’s Faith [May 4]
(Capernaum, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 8.5-13; Lk 7.1-10)

Matthew tells us that the crowds were amazed at the authority with which Jesus taught (Mt 7.29). He follows this statement with a series of miracle accounts (Mt 8.2-9.8) that further validate Jesus’ authority as the Messiah, or more specifically, validate the ‘tree’ by its ‘fruit’ (Mt 7.16-20). He does not provide, in this instance, a chronological record of the work of Jesus. So we turn to Luke’s account to identify the specific

miracle that followed the completion of the *Sermon*. We are confronted with a man of faith and authority (a Roman centurion) who cares for those under his command. It appears that Jesus turns away from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees to a humble Gentile to show how the *Sermon on the Mount* is to be applied.

Suffering Slave – We encounter this man sending messengers⁷ to Jesus on behalf of his servant (or more accurately, ‘slave’) whom he valued highly. This would surprise the Romans of his day. Slaves were generally treated as nothing more than chattel. Sadly, it probably also surprised the Jews. They were supposed to treat their slaves with compassion (Ex 20.10; Lev 25.43). However, the fact that God had to remind them of this indicates that they followed the cruel practices of the nations around them. It is interesting that all the centurions mentioned in the Bible showed attributes to be admired (Acts 10.2; Acts 23.17-18; Acts 27.43). The centurion’s behaviour is a simple model of how to show mercy (Mt 7.7).

Sympathetic Saviour – Jesus honors the centurion’s request and goes with the messengers to heal the man in his home. Just as the centurion behaves in an unexpected way by showing concern for his slave, so also Jesus does the unexpected. It was not ‘proper’ for a Jew to enter a Gentile’s house since (according to the Pharisees additions to the Law) he would become ritually unclean. Jesus, in the *Sermon*, told his hearers that true worship does not consist of man-made outward rituals, but in the proper observance, with a pure heart, of what God requires (Mt 6.1-18). Jesus puts into practice his teaching by showing his hearers that we are to love our enemies (e.g., the Romans to a Jew), and to give to those who ask of us (Mt 5.38-48). Christ’s behaviour is also a model of true mercy.

Suppliant Soldier – The centurion continues to surprise us. He is a man of authority in the dominant Roman army, but he does not expect Jesus to bend to his will. Rather, he shows respect for Jesus as he tells him, via

⁷ Matthew: the man himself went; Luke: his messengers went. Compare Mt 27.26 lit: “he flogged him.”

his messengers, that he is unworthy to have Jesus enter his home. This Gentile honors Jesus as *Lord*. His words are not given out of pretense hoping to gain a favor from Jesus. His approach to Jesus is sincere. We are reminded by his action and words that all men, great and small, must bow down before Jesus as Lord and King (Phil 2.10, 11).

Surprising Sentiment – The centurion understood that Jesus’ power and authority came from Heaven. He asked Jesus just to “say a word” and heal his servant. Jesus spoke with authority when he taught the *Sermon*; the same authoritative word created the universe (Gen 1.3; Col 1.16), and the same word would heal his servant from a distance.

Jesus is astonished to find this level of understanding and faith in a Gentile when it was so evidently missing among the Jews. Only twice in the Gospels is Jesus in amazement. The first is at the faith of this Gentile, the other is at a lack of faith among the Jews (Mk 6.6). Jesus uses the example of this man’s faith to remind them that the promise to Abraham includes the Gentiles. There is a universal gospel-outlook throughout Matthew’s Gospel; starting with the appearance of the Magi (Mt 2.1-12), continuing with the parable about the world as a field (Mt 13.38) and the faith of a Canaanite woman (Mt 15.21-28), and ending with the Great Commission (Mt 28.18-20). The other Gospels have the same vision (Jn 4.1-26; Jn 12.20ff; Mk 7.24-30).

Solemn Sanction – He also uses the man’s faith as an opportunity to apply his sermon and continue challenging the Pharisees’ interpretation of the OT. Just as they misunderstood the true meaning of much of the Law, so they misunderstood the promise of the Gospel. By faith a Gentile could gain the title of true Israel (Gal 3.7; Gal 6.16) which the Jews forfeited by their unbelief in the Messiah (Mt 3.9, 10). Gentiles will be found eating at the Lord’s Supper with Abraham in Heaven (Is 25.6; Rev 19.9). But the natural descendants of Abraham, the Jews, who reject the Messiah, will perish forever in Hell (Mt 8.12).

Strengthened Soul – At Jesus’ authoritative word “go!” the servant was healed. We are to understand not only that Jesus can heal the body and

restore a soul to health, but also that at his authoritative word dead spirits can be brought to life through the new birth. This is the ‘hour’ of healing for all those, Jew or Gentile, who are in Christ Jesus.

Raising a Widow’s Son [May 5] **(Nain, late Fall 31 AD. Lk 7.11-17)**

The authority of Jesus was demonstrated by the healing of the centurion’s servant (Mt 8.5-13; Lk 7.1-10). But sceptics existed in Jesus’ day, just as they do today. Many would claim that the healing was nothing more than a coincidental recovery or a cleverly planned con. They would dismiss the sign as authenticating Jesus. So he went to Nain, about 40km southwest of Capernaum, to meet people carrying a bier and to raise a dead man to life (the first of three times; Lk 8.41-56; Jn 11.1-44). With this miracle he removes the possibility of a natural explanation. He presents a challenge to their scepticism by, in effect, saying: “If you won’t believe me, at least believe the miracles. They show I come from the Father.” (Jn 10.38) We see in this miracle God’s:

Timing – Nothing happens by chance (Prov 16.33). Everything that occurs in the universe, from the vibration of molecules to the return of comets, is in accordance with God’s timing. Every event of history occurs precisely when he planned it (Gal 4.4). So it was that just as Jesus “approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out.” God also arranged for two large crowds (one following from Capernaum, and one accompanying the bier) to arrive together. These numerous witnesses to the miracle could attest to the divine authority of Jesus (16).

Tenderness – Jesus, by his actions, reminds us of the love and mercy of God. His heart went out to the widow who had lost her only son, and he upheld her cause (Is 1.17). He approached her with words of comfort. We see Jesus later comforting his disciples in the upper room, and from the cross comforting his mother. We can be comforted knowing that he cares for us with the same compassion.

Touch – Jesus extended the scope of his authority over the interpretation of the Ceremonial Law by touching the coffin of the dead man and becoming ritually unclean (Num 19.13). He showed that compassion overrules the strict observance of a ceremony, just as he taught that acts of necessity and mercy overrule the prohibition against work on the Sabbath (Lk 6.1-11). By this example, he displays, in a practical way, what he taught in the *Sermon on the Mount* about the spirit in which the Law is to be observed.

Triumph – Then he spoke, and the man came back to life. This is a display of the same power by which he created the universe. Why should we marvel that Jesus can raise the dead? This is hardly a challenge for the one who spoke and brought everything into existence (Ps 33.6, 9). But this miracle teaches more than his authority over physical life and death, and therefore his right to teach with authority (Mt 7.29). It reminds us that he can give eternal life to a person who is currently on the way to Hell; he can create a new heart within a person and raise the spiritually dead. Also, the raising of the widow's son is a sign of the promise that Jesus will raise the dead on the last day (1 Thess 4.16).

Testimony – There are a number of ways in which this account provides God's testimony to Jesus as his Son. He is the Messiah because of his:

- *Title* – Luke refers to Jesus as 'the Lord' (13) for the first of many times (Lk 10.1, 41; Lk 11.39; Lk 12.42; Lk 13.15). He uses the equivalent of one of the OT titles for God, declaring Jesus to be God (Ps 110.1).
- *Speech* – The dead man sat up and began to talk, indicating that he was truly alive. So it is with us: we become alive and speak because God first spoke to us. Paraphrasing Augustine, we *speak* God's thoughts after him. In the spiritual realm we confess the name of Jesus with our mouths because God has called us to be part of his household.
- *Office* – The people called Jesus a "great prophet" (Dt 18.15). Their response to the miracle put him in a class with Moses, Elijah and Elisha, the great spokesmen for God. Notice the parallel between this account and that in 1 Kings 17.17-24 ("and he gave him to his

mother” in the Greek NT is taken verbatim from the Greek version of the OT).

- *Presence* – The miracle pointed to Heaven. The people knew that the ability to raise the dead comes only from God, and thus Jesus was a messenger from Heaven. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Immanuel (Is 7.14; Mt 1.23)—“God with us.”
- *Respect* – The people were filled with awe (lit. *fear*). They were in the presence of God and offered him the respect he deserved (Ps 2.11).

Tidings – The news about the miracle spread throughout Galilee and into Judea. But the buzz of excitement died down and many people started to become skeptical again, asking “is this man really the Messiah.” Even John the Baptist wasn’t sure (Lk 7.19). In just over a year, the people of Judea would send Jesus to the cross as a lunatic and deny that he was the Messiah. It doesn’t take long for the flame on the candle of truth to die out. We must continually remind ourselves that Jesus as the Son of God has all authority, and we must declare his authority to the world.

John the Baptist – In the Kingdom [May 6] (Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 11.2-15; Lk 7.18-28)

Raising the widow’s son (Lk 7.11-17) seems to trigger John’s query (Lk 7.18-20) and provides the context for the interchange between John and Jesus.

Doubt – Why did John ask Jesus if he was the one who was to come, or the Messiah (Ps 40.7; Ps 118.26)? Was there doubt in his mind about who Jesus was? Was John thinking that Jesus wasn’t the Messiah because he had not heard him claim it publicly? Was John prodding for a public declaration? Was the problem that Jesus didn’t fit John’s image of what the Messiah should be like? Or, did John need reassurance about his own role in the Kingdom since he was discouraged by his imprisonment (Mt 4.12)?

Jesus tells us that John was a firm believer (Lk 7.24) and, knowing his

character, we can be assured that his question was sincere. But it is difficult to determine what was the reason for the query. Regardless of the reason, it appears that this example of John's doubt teaches us that there can be times when those who believe need help to overcome latent doubts (Mk 9.24) or discouragement. Even great champions of faith like Abraham (Heb 11.8-19) need encouragement at times (Gen 15.6, 8).

Jesus' response is almost as perplexing as the reason for the query. Notice that he did not visit John in prison even though he teaches that this is a proper thing to do (Mt 25.36) or send him a personal letter of reassurance. Rather he sent him a message that was essentially a quotation from the Scriptures and a challenge not to doubt.

We might think that Jesus' response to John is harsh. But this cannot be! Jesus knows perfectly what we all need and what is the best way to draw us to himself. So when we encounter situations that might discourage us and we feel that the Lord has deserted us we should remember that Jesus re-assured John in the way that was best for John. Jesus will do the same thing for us. He will encourage us in the way that will build our faith and increase our trust and dependence on him.

Demonstration – Jesus did not answer John with a direct yes or no. Rather he sent him a list of actions drawn from the sign-miracles he had been performing. These works (including the recent raising of a dead son) and his words, through preaching, validated Jesus as the Messiah (Is 29.18-19; Is 35.5-6; Is 61.1). Jesus then warned John that he should not fall away because he might be expecting something the Messiah was not intended to be. For example, John might have expected a messianic kingdom of vengeance on Israel's enemies. Jesus' model for revealing the Kingdom was based on works and words that brought physical and spiritual blessing.

Jesus' warning is generic and applies to us also. We have the record of what Jesus did and taught written down in the Bible so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), the Son of God, and have life in his name (Jn 20.31). We must not think that Jesus will manifest his

kingdom in a manner that will conform to our expectations. For example, we must not look for sign-gifts such as speaking in tongues or visions, depend on God to meet particular timetables we have developed from our personal interpretation of Revelation, or expect answers to prayer in the way we think proper. If we put our faith in these things we will be scandalized by the way that Jesus works out his plan of redemption and the way he makes us holy.

Delegate – There likely would have been some among Jesus’ disciples who wondered about the reliability of John’s commitment. So Jesus uses John’s query as an opportunity to teach the people about his role as the forerunner of the Messiah. He waited until John’s disciples had left so that they would not take back flattering words to John. Then he commended John for being a true prophet who was not swayed by the winds of opinion or influenced by worldly power or luxury. It is sad to see how unlike John many leaders in the Church are. They are blown about by the opinions of sinful men. They accept myths such as evolution or the assumed ancient cosmos as scientific fact; swallow sociological theories about human nature; and act as though worldly power and status are God’s measures of true merit.

As the second Elijah (Mal 4.5; Mt 11.14) John was the greatest of all the OT prophets because he did not deal with distant promises in shadows but the physical presence of the Messiah. Yet, a NT believer is greater than John because he has a fuller understanding of the prophecies as they were fulfilled in Christ. This should serve as a warning to us. We have no excuse for ignorance with respect to what we are to believe and what duty God requires of us—we have the complete revelation of God in the Bible. Therefore, we should be among those who heed the words of John the Baptist when he points to Jesus as the Messiah and grasp tightly the truths that Jesus proclaimed, as recorded for us in his written word, the Bible.

The Paralysis of Indecision [May 7]
(Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 11.16-19; Lk 7.29-35)

“I don't want to go to Hell or Heaven!” No one wants to go to a place as dreadful as Hell—with continual pain, eternal weeping, endless gnashing of teeth. But from the viewpoint of man, Heaven isn't much better. Why would a sinful man want to spend eternity worshiping God or conversing with Jesus? Why would he want to give up the romance, adventure, and excitement of this world, and deny sinful pleasures—to sit around the throne of God? For most people, Heaven is one of the last places they would want to be. This is one example of moral and spiritual paralysis—the paralysis of indecision.

Jesus speaks of this mental confusion when he uses an analogy of children playing. Have you seen children like this? They didn't know what they wanted to do but they sure didn't want to do anything suggested to them by their playmates. He applies their indecision to his generation's view of the lives of John and himself. They didn't want religion as represented by John or Jesus. They didn't know what they wanted. But they knew that they didn't want anything from God. Their situation was one of moral and spiritual paralysis.

They did not want the lifestyle of John. It was too Spartan and removed from their world. It is as if we were to say, in today's terms, that he lived in a one-room apartment with few personal possessions: a dozen books, a desk, a reading lamp; wore out-of-style clothes purchased second-hand; didn't own a car; and he never went to movies or baseball games or watched television. Instead, he went around telling people not to be so concerned about material things, to repent, and to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness. Most people thought he was eccentric and argued that believers can live like the rest of the world just so long as they don't get caught in outward sins.

Then along came Jesus. Imagine what it would be like if he were here today. We would find him at Sparky's bar, the baseball game on, confronting the patrons with the message of the Kingdom. Another day he would attend a church service and discuss the sermon with the congregation afterward. Then we would find him in the AIDS hospice walking among the dying. Next day he would be in the city detention

centre holding a Bible study. He would attend the mayor's dinner with the cast of the *Lion King*, and engage one of the actresses in a discussion about her love affairs and lifestyle.

Appalling, isn't it? Too casual; not walking clearly separated from the world. If you cringed, even a bit, at my description then you know where the Pharisees were. They were unwilling to accept either the lifestyle of John (of whom Jesus said there was no one greater) or that of Jesus. They didn't know what they wanted. But they knew that they didn't want the life of the ascetic or that of the involved challenger. Jesus was speaking to church-goers of his day. So how do we respond? Do we say: "They were Pharisees who didn't really believe, so it's not too surprising that they rejected the things of God?" But are we really any different? We all have a degree of pharisaism in us. We all, to a degree, replace the things of God with the things of man.

In the Church, people show the paralysis of indecision. They try many things in worship, swinging from contemporary to traditional: rock bands, liturgical-dance routines, the pageantry of liturgy, multi-media presentations, and organ music by Bach, to 'bring in the crowds'. They may not know what they want. But they truly know they don't want worship regulated by God.

In the same way almost all Christians (true believers!) want salvation from the consequences of sin (guilt, misery and Hell) but they don't want to be kept from sinful acts. They find God's Law and man's laws oppressive, look around and see how often Christians ignore the rule of law, and give rationalizations for their actions. Do we find excuses for stepping around the law? Simply: Christians, with the world, desire happiness without holiness.

Christians find one preacher too challenging, direct, and specific; another too abstract and general. One uses too many illustrations from the world; another not enough. One is too practical, another not practical enough. We are just like the Pharisees who didn't like either John's or Jesus' style. Will we ever be happy? Not if we go with our tendency to resist anything from

God.

The paralysis of indecision is a chronic infection in the Church. We all carry the disease. What is the answer? Jesus tells us: “[W]isdom is proved right by all her children [deeds/works].” This wisdom is not surviving in uncertain economic times, gaining worldly experience or friends, eating carefully, exercising regularly, or the ability to discuss the intricacies of the theory of relativity. None of these are true Wisdom! These have been made foolish by God (1 Cor 1.19, 20).

The truly wise are the children of Wisdom—the children of God who have received Jesus’ teaching, acknowledged that God’s ways are right, been baptized (Lk 7.29), and walk in the way of his commands. They are spiritually discerning, decisive, and directed.

Woe Upon Unrepentant Cities [May 8] (Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 11.20-24; Lk 10.12-15)

Places – Jesus is the great and final Prophet (Heb 1.1, 2). In this capacity he follows the tradition of the OT prophets and denounces cities of the earth (compare, Is 21.1-17; Is 23.1-18; Ezk 27.1-36; Nahum 2.1-3; Nahum 3.1-19). The cities he denounced were Jewish cities that had been honoured (Is 9.1) by his presence. They were the cities in which he conducted most of his teaching and preaching, and in which he performed most of his miracles. It appears that he chooses these Jewish cities for condemnation because they had the same human pride and wickedness that infects all the cities of the earth.

- *Korazin* – was a city a few kilometres from Capernaum that had one of the oldest synagogues in the entire region. Jesus may have denounced this city because the people in it based their hope on their synagogue made of black basalt. Jesus’ denunciation warns us that mere *outward* observance of religion is useless if our hearts are not right with God.
- *Bethsaida* – the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (Jn 1.44) was a

fishing village (thus its name ‘house of the fisherman’) on the NE shore of the Sea of Galilee near where the Jordan River flows into it. It was raised to the dignity of a ‘city’ by the tetrarch Philip and renamed ‘Bethsaida-Julias’ in honor of the daughter of Caesar Augustus. Philip died in the city in 34 AD. Jesus’ denunciation teaches us that worldly honours are worthless before the judgment seat of God.

- *Capernaum* – with a customs-post (Mk 2.14) and military detachment (Mt 8.5-13; Lk 7.1-10) on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee, was in the midst of an area of highly productive land. It was the center of Jesus’ Galilean ministry (Mt 4.13). In this city he healed the centurion’s son (Mt 8.5-13; Lk 7.1-10), and taught and performed other miracles (Mt 17.24-27; Mk 2.1-12; Lk 4.23, 31-35; Lk 6.16-24). In spite of this, the people of Capernaum rejected him. Jesus’ denunciation reminds us that worldly power and riches cannot make a person righteous before God.

Jesus condemns these Jewish cities by comparing them with ancient cities that were a curse in the ears of his hearers. The twin cities of Tyre and Sidon, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, were among the great maritime cities of the ancient world. They were the focal point of all trade from Asia and India to Europe and North Africa. So they serve as the symbol for all of man’s commercial activities. Sodom is the symbol of all forms of false religion and hedonism.

We are warned by these denunciations (that place ‘religious’ Jewish cities in the same class with cities built on man’s ambitions and lusts) that there is no hope to be found in the City of Man (Rev 18.1-24).

Problem – Why did Jesus denounce these cities so severely? Much like people watching a hockey game may ignore the commercials, so the people in these cities ignored the message of the signs and wonders that were performed in their midst. They accepted the miraculous healings but did not want anything to do with the man, Jesus, who performed them. It is clear that miracles alone are not sufficient to bring people to

faith and repentance. Those who seek miracles in the Church are mistaken—God’s primary way to bring people into his kingdom is through preaching (Rom 10.14-15; 1 Cor 1.21) applied by the Holy Spirit, not through miracles.

A second reason for their condemnation was that these cities rejected God’s messengers (implied in Mt 11.18, 19; Lk 10.10) and message. So it will be with any person, city, or nation that rejects the preaching of the Gospel.

Thirdly, it is a greater sin to commit an action that we *know* is wrong. A pagan who has two wives may be excused somewhat if he has no access to the revelation of God. But a person who commits adultery in a country where the Bible provides the foundation for law is doubly guilty. More is required of him who has more light. But the greatest sin is to commit an action known to be wrong and then not to repent of it; this is triple guilt!

Punishment – They were condemned also for their complacency. They were not watching for the Day of Judgment or fleeing from the wrath of God. This wrath does not result in a fine and a few demerit points or a time of recovery in a spiritual rehab centre. God’s wrath is displayed by nothing less than the eternal fires of Hell (the ‘depths’), symbolized by the burning sulfur that rained down on Sodom. Yet even the Sodomites saw nothing compared with the eternal and unalterable doom (Mt 13.50; Mt 25.41) that will be poured out on all those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We must not make the City of Man our permanent residence. We must be aliens and strangers in that city (1 Pt 2.11), traveling to the City of God.

Praise to the Father [May 9]
(Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 11.24-27)

Response to Prophecy – After denouncing prophetically the City of Man and those who place their hope in it (Mt 11.20-24; Lk 10.12-15),

Jesus responds to his own words by turning to God in prayer. We can become discouraged facing the willful rebellion of men who hate God's righteous requirements and his way of dealing with sin through Christ. The antidote is to turn to God with thanksgiving because he reveals his truth to men and is saving many (Rev 7.9).

Reason for Praise – The message about Jesus cannot be discovered by logical inference starting from man's mind reflecting on the material realm. Ultimately **all** truth is known only by revelation. It is true, as Augustine said, that we think God's thoughts after him, as he reveals his mind in nature and word. Only in his word (the Bible) do we find God's will for mankind.

God is worthy of praise because of who he is and what he has done (Ps 7.17; Rev 4.11). We see this in the titles Jesus uses to address the Father:

- *Father* – The relationship between the Father and the Son is unique. But God is our father since we are his creatures (Acts 17.29) and, if we have placed our faith in Jesus, because we have been adopted into his household (Eph 1.5). We should praise him in prayer, addressing him as father (Mt 6.9), thanking him continually for all that he has done for us and given to us—especially salvation (Col 1.12).
- *Lord of heaven and earth* – As the creator, law-giver, and master of the universe he deserves all praise. We can praise him confidently knowing that **all** things are being worked out according to his perfect plan, for his glory and our good (Rom 8.28). We can trust him to control evil and man's schemes, and supply our needs in this life and into eternity.

The truth of God's lordship is not hidden from men and women, but they suppress that truth in every way they can (Rom 1.18-20). God leaves many of those, who think they are wise, in self-imposed ignorance, superstition and error as a witness to his justice (1 Cor 1.20, 21, 28; Acts 28.26, 27). But as a witness to God's love, the Holy Spirit converts the hearts of many others and brings them out of their ignorance. These are the ones deemed to be fools by the world (1 Cor 1.26) because they have a simple faith (like that of children) and believe that God is the creator

and law-giver.

Revelation makes all the difference; it is a great reason to praise God.

Righteous Pleasure – There is nothing in us that leads the Holy Spirit to reveal the way of salvation to us. The source is totally, and only, in the will of God, or as Jesus calls it “your good pleasure.” God’s sovereign choice is worthy of praise, not of condemnation. It is the foundation upon which we can place our hope for eternity. If God has chosen you to be part of his household, you are guaranteed a place (Rom 8.28-39; Jn 14.2, 3).

Relational Pact – There is complete agreement and harmony among the persons of the Deity. Each is fully committed to, and shares in, the work of revelation and redemption, although Jesus is the person through whom God directly reveals his person to mankind (Jn 1.1-5; Col 2.9; Heb 1.1, 2). Jesus claims that he is this source of revelation and that he has a special relationship with the Father (27).

Jesus has all authority (Mt 28.18) to execute judgment (Jn 5.22) and to reveal himself lovingly to whomever he chooses. This is an awesome responsibility. He executes it with absolute perfect justice and love. He will save everyone for whom he died on the cross; not one of them will be lost (Jn 18.9). And everyone who comes to him will be saved (Jn 3.16; Acts 2.21; Acts 16.31; Rom 10.9, 13). Because all authority is his, we can go to him for anything we need.

In his role as Covenant Mediator, Jesus has been commissioned to save his people from their sins. For all people who are saved, the process began with their election in eternity past. The process continues when Jesus acts in love and sends the Holy Spirit to reveal truth directly into their hearts and minds. This is called conversion, and results in their repenting of sin and believing that Jesus paid their debt of sin to God on the cross.

Responding Properly – How should we respond to these things?

- 1) When discouraged by the results of rebellion that we see around us we should thank God that he is in sovereign control of all things.
- 2) Praise God that he has revealed to us the way of escape from sin. Ask Jesus to reveal himself to those whom we love who do not know him as their personal Lord and Saviour.

Invitation to the Weary [May 10]
(Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Mt 11.28-30)

There are few words in the Bible that provide more comfort for God's people than these words of Jesus. They are the conclusion of the chain of thought that began when Jesus was asked by John the Baptist's disciples if he was the "one who was to come?" He responded by listing some of the signs of his ministry (Mt 11.5, 6). Once John's disciples had left, Jesus compared his own ministry to John's (Mt 11.7-19) and denounced those cities (and their Jewish inhabitants) that had rejected his ministry (Mt 11.20-24). He then thanked the Father that he reveals himself to those deemed to be fools by the world (1 Cor 1.26) because they have a simple faith (like that of children) and believe that God is the creator and law-giver (Mt 11.25-27). It is to these 'simple' people among the Galilean inhabitants that Jesus offers the privileges and benefits of the covenant of grace.

Requirement – He tells them to come to himself. Without question this is an invitation (e.g., Rev 22.17). But it is more; it is a requirement. Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not just offer salvation and leave it to our whim; they work it out in the lives of those whom they are saving. We cannot ignore the imperative that is implied in the statement. It is a command! If you will have eternal life you must go to Jesus. Note also, it is to *Jesus* that we must go. He uses 'me,' 'I,' and 'my' seven times, reminding us that "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4.12). We cannot go to anyone or anything else. Salvation is found only in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reason – Who should go to Jesus? Everyone who is weary from

carrying his or her burden. Jesus is speaking about sin—its guilt and its effect. But there are some who don't fully experience the weight of this burden. They are those (implied by the context in Mt 11.20-27) who have proud hearts and are self-righteous. Only when we have been made aware of the weight of our sin through the Law (Jn 16.8) can we understand how really heavy the burden is that we try to carry. The necessary preparation for pardon and peace is conviction of sin through the Law.

Restraint – The Law is the yoke that Jesus speaks of. By nature, we do not want to carry the yoke of the Law. We want to cast off all restraint and live lawlessly and, so we think, 'free.' Our thinking has been perverted by sin, and we think that the restraint of the Law will only increase our burden. But Jesus tells us, twice, that what men think is bad is in fact good. The yoke of the Law is a much lighter burden than the guilt of sin and, in the end, eternal punishment. Think of a very large beach ball placed on your back. It has some weight; but it is mostly air, and you can easily carry it. But while it is on your back no one can place a packsack with rocks on your shoulders. This is how the weight of the Law works. As long as we are carrying it faithfully, through obedience, we cannot be weighed down by guilt and the eternal consequences of sin.

The restraining power of the Law keeps us from committing sin that will cause us to hurt ourselves and others. It directs us in the way that pleases God and obedience to it shows that we are disciples of Jesus. The Law is designed by a loving God as the means of conforming us to his character.

Revelation – In our sinful natures we suppress the Law that we know as creatures of God. So we need to be taught the Law. This is why Jesus tells us to come to him and learn from him. The way we do that, today, is by reading his words in the Bible and by listening to those he has appointed to go into all the world and teach everything that he commanded (Mt 28.20).

One of the key lessons that we are to learn is to be like him—gentle and humble in heart. He mentions these attributes specifically because of the

ruthless pride exhibited by the Pharisees whom he confronted throughout his teaching ministry. Because he is humble he takes the time, through the Holy Spirit and his appointed teachers, to instruct sinners like us in the way of life. When we sin he is gentle in his correction and leads us toward holiness. We must cast off our pride and be instructed by him (Ps 25.9).

Rest – When we learn to live within the restraint of the Law we are given rest. The way of obedience is the way of rest. This rest applies to our whole beings. When the Bible uses the word ‘soul’ it often means man as a living being (lit. soul)—body and spirit (e.g., Gen 2.7). When people on a sinking ship send out an SOS they are not asking for spiritual salvation, but rather want their lives preserved. When we come to Jesus and learn to live by his laws we are given rest—spiritual and physical; temporal and eternal. We are given this rest: peace of mind in a pure conscience as the guilt of sin is lifted, removal of worry about how we will be provided for in this life, a sense of purpose as sons and daughters of the King, and the promise of the consequences of sin being removed forever in glory.

The True Prophet Who Forgives Sin [May 11] **(Galilee, late Fall 31 AD. Lk 7.36-50)**

This account demonstrates that Jesus is the saviour of the world (Jn 4.14).

Prostitute – An uninvited ‘guest’ showed up at a Pharisee’s dinner party. Imagine the surprise and consternation when this woman of the streets barged into Simon’s home and went right up to the guest of honour—Jesus. Simon may have started to protest but just as he raised his hands to direct her from the dining room he noticed that she had positioned herself behind Jesus while he reclined on a couch at dinner. Simon probably swallowed his words of rebuke to see how Jesus was going to handle the situation.

Jesus remained silent as the woman continued to surprise everyone present. She had brought expensive perfume in a carved bottle, but she did not pour it on the head of Jesus as might have been expected. Rather, she let her tears of repentance fall onto his feet, humbly wiped the dust of the street off them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oily perfume on them.

We cannot explain these actions as just something from a different culture. What happened that evening would be unacceptable in any ‘polite society’. We can only conclude that her daring actions resulted from desperation. She had probably heard Jesus teaching in Capernaum and was convicted of her sin and convinced that without the salvation he could provide she was doomed to damnation. She made a complete fool of herself because she knew that she had no other hope for salvation than Jesus (Acts 4.12).

We may not have to perform public acts of debasement to be saved, or break social norms to get Jesus’ attention. But we must *really* be willing to humble our hearts before God and *truly* love Jesus. If we hold our heads high in pride, we will sit with the Pharisees in this life and in eternity!

Prophet – Notice Simon’s inner sneer: “How could Jesus let this prostitute touch him? He must not really be a prophet or he would know how ‘unclean’ she is!” But the one who touched the dead and lepers isn’t going to stand back from a sinner who comes to him on knees of repentance. Oh Lord preserve us from being condescending toward anyone who comes to you with zeal and an emotional display that embarrasses us (Is 65.5).

Parable – Jesus proved that he is more than a prophet. For which mere human prophet has ever been able to read our inner thoughts? Jesus challenged Simon about his attitude to this repentant sinner with a parable. Jesus is gentle with Simon by not being direct, but he drives home his point more effectively than if he had dismissed him as a hypocrite.

It is obvious that a person who has a debt cancelled of two years' worth of wages would be more grateful than one who had a debt cancelled of two months' worth of wages. Even so, Simon is hurt by the rebuke and says only: "I suppose ...". Jesus gently commends him for a correct answer.

Polarity – Then he challenged Simon by contrasting her actions with his. The Pharisee was so proud that he didn't show Jesus even the normal courtesies of the Middle East—he didn't wash the dust off the feet of his guest, greet him with a kiss on the cheek, or allow him to refresh himself with oil. Jesus implies that his lack of courtesy is an indication that Simon thought very highly of himself and considered himself not to need anything from Jesus—especially not forgiveness of sin.

The prostitute, in contrast, came to Jesus in true humility. She considered herself too unworthy to lift her face toward the face of the Messiah. She knelt down behind his couch and bowed her face to his *feet*. Through her display of humble love she demonstrated that she was truly repenting of the state of her heart and life before God. We must never think of ourselves so highly that we are unwilling to bow gratefully before Jesus (Phil 2.10).

Pardon – The woman was pardoned, not because of her anointing act—pouring oily perfume on Jesus' feet—but because she herself had been anointed by the Holy Spirit with faith. Her faith saved her, not her works. She loved because she had first been loved by the Saviour (1 Jn 4.19).

She knew her need of forgiveness and she received what she needed and sought. If you asked the average person walking down 'Main Street' what he or she could not live without, you would hear such answers as: "food," "my walkman," "my spouse," "money," etc. Even those who claim to be Christians fall into this material pit. Without forgiveness from sin your life is only a vapour. At your last breath you will pass out of this space/time realm into a damned eternity in Hell. There is absolutely nothing (!), that is more important than kneeling at the feet of Jesus—as this woman did, seeking forgiveness from him. This is why

Jesus came to earth—to save his people from their sins (Mt 1.21). He is the true Prophet who forgives sin.

Public Rejection by Pharisees

Travelling with Jesus [May 12]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Lk 8.1-3)

Luke tells us that, after having had dinner in Simon's house, Jesus went on a preaching tour around Galilee. At that dinner a prostitute had anointed Jesus' feet with perfumed ointment. Jesus used her act of worship as an opportunity to contrast the self-righteously religious with those coming to him in true repentance. He declared, by forgiving her sin, that he is the saviour of all kinds of people. It is appropriate that this declaration was followed by a preaching tour to call people into the Kingdom.

Preaching Salvation – Jesus did not content himself with preaching in the largest synagogue in the capital city of Palestine. His tour took him to the despised towns and villages of Galilee. He went out to meet the common people where they were. Wherever he went there were people who needed to hear the good news about the kingdom of God.

The good news has not changed one bit in 2,000 years. The same message must be taken to every person in every town and village on earth because it is both *good* and *news*. It is *good* because it provides true hope and meaning for mankind. The typical commuter looking in the mirror on a Monday morning, if he is honest with himself, has to admit an uncertainty about trudging off to work. He has nagging doubts about the significance of his work and the meaning of life in general. He is concerned about how his children will turn out, whether his wife really loves him, if he will be able to save enough to retire at age 60 or get laid off. The message Jesus brings puts all the mundane concerns and routines of life into an eternal context. If we have received the good news of the Kingdom, we know that we are serving a great King and our daily chores are part of that service.

The message is also *news*. In general, what passes for news isn't new. Accounts of wars, terrorism, lust, greed, power struggles, stock manipulation corporate takeovers, oil cartels, etc. shouldn't be called news, because they aren't new! They should be called *olds*. From the world's perspective it has been the same old story since Cain hated Abel and killed him. Solomon tells us that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1.8-10). The real news is that there is a solution to the problem of sin. In Jesus there is redemption from sin, reconciliation with God, and reformation of life.

Pastoral Students – Jesus had chosen twelve disciples to accompany him on his preaching tour to learn from him and be prepared to continue his ministry when he had completed his time on earth. These twelve were not drawn from the faculty of Jerusalem's 'Ivy League' nor from among wealthy heirs or from the media elite. Rather, his students included labourers, a despised tax collector and a radical protestor. Jesus chose wisely so that he could show the world that it is not the might of man that counts but the power of God (1 Cor 1.27). During this tour of Galilee Jesus will teach in parables (e.g., Mt 13.1-52) and after the tour he will send out the twelve (along with others) to apply, what they have learned (Lk 9.6, 10; Lk 10.1-17).

Providing Support – Luke is the only Gospel writer who tells us about the role of women in supporting the ministry of Jesus. He has a special place in his Gospel (and also in Acts) for the involvement of women in the life and work of Jesus (e.g., Elizabeth, Mary's song, Anna, the widow of Nain [7.11-15]; women at prayer [Acts 1.14]; Lydia). In this case, the women are commended for supporting the ministry of Jesus from their financial resources. Having these women accompany and support them would have been viewed as scandalous. But Jesus isn't concerned about false proprieties. He is concerned with doing what is right. He provides an opportunity for the women not only to hear the word but also to share in supporting the work.

Our culture has duped us into believing that unless a woman can do

anything that a man can do (e.g., fight fires, participate in commando raids, preach, etc.) she is less than human. It is ironic to hear some feminists of our age accuse Christianity of being a misogynist (women haters) religion. Some Orthodox Jews, when they ‘pray’, give thanks that they were not created as women; and some sects of Islam teach that women have no souls. Christianity is the only religion that liberates women from oppression and allows them to fulfill in confidence their God-given roles as mothers, home-makers, and nurturers. This is certainly not a popular teaching today, but it is Biblical (Prov 31.10-31; Ps 113.9; 1 Tim 5.10, 14; Titus 2.4-5).

Personal Stewardship – Our response to hearing “the good news of the Kingdom of God” should be:

- As we are supplied by God with gifts of teaching, preaching, exhorting, or evangelism, to carry on the work of proclaiming the good news to all nations (Mt 28.19); and
- Cheerfully to provide, from the gifts God has given us, resources that can be used to support those who are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ—the saviour of the world.

•

Jesus and “The Lord of the Flies” [May 13]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.22-29; Mk 3.20-27)

Jesus laid the foundation of his new kingdom with the appointment of the Twelve (Mk 3.13-19). Mark’s Gospel account follows with an incident that demonstrates that the kingdom of Christ will vanquish the kingdom of Satan.

Mad vs Ministering – Jesus was so intent on his mission to minister to those in need that he wasn’t able to find room or time to eat. We also see this intensity in other incidents—e.g., at the well at Sychar (Jn 4.31-34; see also Mk 6.31). Because of this, his family believes that he is “out of his mind”. The implication is that he is at least mentally unbalanced or a religious fanatic (e.g., Acts 26.24)—or even demon possessed (see, Jn 7.20; Jn 8.48). This sets up a tension. How will Jesus respond to the *implied* charge of demon possession? By challenging an *explicit* charge

of demon possession!

Magic vs Miracle – God’s timing is impeccable. To allow Jesus to defend himself in the face of doubts from his own family, a truly demon-possessed man is brought to him for healing. It is possible that the Pharisees brought the man to Jesus to see what he would be able to do (compare Mt 12.14 with 12.22). The case was difficult. Not only was the man demon possessed but also both mute and blind. Communication with him would be a challenge. Without any delay Jesus healed the man. The purpose of this case was not to test the reality of the man’s faith but to demonstrate Jesus’ power over Satan. When the people ask if Jesus could be the Messiah, the Pharisees accuse him of working ‘magic’ by casting out a demon with the assistance of demons.

Monstrosity vs Majesty – They went further in their accusation. It wasn’t that Jesus used ‘good’ demons (e.g., *djins*), as pagan mythology believed, to cast out ‘bad’ demons. Rather, they accused Jesus of calling on the most evil power of all, the prince of all the demons, the rival of Jehovah: “The Lord of the Flies” (Beelzebub)! Because of their jealousy, on hearing the people asking if Jesus was the Son of David, the Pharisees accused him of being in league with a Canaanite deity (one of the forms of Baal). This is a great blasphemy, and it turns Jesus’ majesty into a monstrosity.

Misinterpretation vs Meaning – Knowing their evil thoughts, Jesus didn’t call down vengeance from Heaven. He called them forward, and with three arguments reasoned with them to show them that they had misinterpreted his work. He graciously gave them a chance to repent.

First, he asked why Satan would work against his own goals. Why would he drive out a demon from a man that was already under his control? Satan isn’t foolish enough to act directly against his own interests—divided kingdoms cannot stand. This shows that Jesus’ authority wasn’t from Satan. The meaning of the miracle was to declare the power of God, not Satan’s!

Misunderstanding vs Mission – Second, Jesus asked them how their own exorcists were able to cast out demons. They believed that these exorcists (e.g., Acts 19.13) worked through the power of God. Why then would they attribute Jesus’ work to any other power than God’s? Ironically, the Jewish exorcists used complicated rituals, but Jesus merely *commanded* the demons to come out. Therefore, their own exorcists would be their judges—they could attest to the power of one who, with nothing more than a word, was able to expel demons. It was clear that Jesus spoke with the authority of God. His authority over the demons shows that God’s kingdom is present and that his mission is to call sinners from the darkness of Satan’s kingdom.

Mousy vs Mastery – Third, by driving out demons Jesus demonstrated that he was not a weakling. He proves that he is more powerful than Satan is. He doesn’t just call sinners out of Satan’s kingdom but he goes into Satan’s realm (the “strong man’s house”), ties him up and carries off (lit. ‘plunders’) the trophies of victory—those he saves from Hell. This parable teaches that Jesus has complete mastery over the demons and Satan, and therefore works by the Spirit of God.

Malice vs Mercy – The world continues to lie in spiritual darkness and sin, and remains under the power of Satan (e.g., Jn 14.30; Eph 2.1, 2; 1 Pt 5.8). Christ defeated Satan on the cross. However, his defeat was an event and is a process. It is just like sanctification in the life of a believer—an event and a process that is complete only when the believer enters Glory. Only when Christ returns to usher in his eternal glorious kingdom and redeem the created realm will the conquest of Satan be fully complete.

Christ’s mercy is directly opposed to Satan’s malice. While we wait for Christ to complete his conquest of Satan, we are encouraged by this account. Every time an unbeliever turns to Jesus in faith and repentance a ‘demon’ is cast out, Satan’s house is plundered (Acts 26.18), the unbeliever’s eyes are opened to God’s glory, and his lips are filled with eternal praise of God.

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit [May 14] (Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.30-32; Mk 3.28-30)

Jesus was accused, by the Pharisees, of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Mt 12.22-29; Mk 3.20-27). Because they claimed that he had an evil spirit (Mk 3.30), he challenged them to face the seriousness of their claim.

Failed Association – First, Jesus reminded them that it is impossible to work for two causes at the same time, or to serve two masters (Mt 12.30). He had taught this principle in the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6.24) and would come back to it a year later while teaching in Perea (Lk 16.13). Satan’s kingdom will not last if it is divided against itself with his followers casting out demons. So Christ’s kingdom won’t prosper if his followers act against its goals and purposes. Therefore, Jesus presents a challenge to those who had seen his miraculous signs and heard his teaching and says in effect: “Don’t stand on a middle ground between the two causes, choose whom you will serve” (see: 1 Ki 18.21).

We cannot have divided loyalties. We must be either with Jesus or against him. We should not claim to be on his side if we are, in practice, living and working for the cause of Satan. There are many ways that we, who claim to be Christians, support Satan’s cause:

- *Thoughts* – Our minds often bubble like a witch’s brew with lust, hate, and covetousness rather than being filled with good (Phil 4.8).
- *Talk* – Our tongues are cesspools of filth (James 3.1-12) that deny our Lord instead of being filled with grace and seasoned with salt (Col 4.5).
- *Tactics* – Our selfish and hurtful behaviour shows that we still live for temporal pleasure rather than God’s glory.
- *Trust* – Our trust is in perishable material goods and failure-ridden human associations rather than in Jesus who will provide for all that we need (Mt 6.25-34).

One millimetre of variance away from Christ’s side puts us in the camp of the enemy and makes us traitors against his kingdom.

Forgivable Actions – Since we all fail every day to stand firmly for the cause of Christ, is there hope? In the midst of challenging the Pharisees for their misunderstanding of divided loyalties, Jesus offered hope to all of us who want to live for the glory of God but in practice often fail. Every sin we commit can (and will) be forgiven if we repent—even the most grievous sin of speaking blasphemously against Jesus (Mt 12.31; Mk 3.28).

There would have been many among Jesus' hearers who would have found it difficult to accept that he was both God and man. They would have stated that he could not be the Messiah. But anyone who came to understand who he was, and believed, was forgiven of speaking against the Son of Man. This was the situation with one of the two robbers crucified beside Jesus. Initially he cursed Jesus, but then repented (Mt 27.44; Lk 23.40-43), and was taken into Paradise because Jesus asked the Father to forgive him (Lk 23.34).

Paul tells us that he was the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1.15, 16) and yet was saved because of the mercy and patience of Jesus Christ (to the glory of God!). He tried to earn his salvation by observing ceremonies, participated in the murder of a saint (Acts 22.20), and was a blasphemer of Jesus (1 Tim 1.13) in roaring persecution of his Church (Acts 22.19; Phil 3.6). No one has been a worse sinner than Paul—not even Hitler, Hussein, or Bin Laden.

In this challenge Jesus gives gracious assurance of pardon of all sin for those who turn to him in belief and repentance—no matter how grievous their sins.

Fearful Accusation – But as there is hope, there is also warning. After promising forgiveness to those who initially attributed Jesus' works to the Devil but repented, he challenged those who remained in their unbelief.

This section of Jesus' teaching is often entitled: *The Unpardonable Sin*. There have been many attempts to try to explain what the *unpardonable*

sin is. Most writers conclude, based on Mark 3.29, that the unpardonable sin is blasphemously attributing the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

The possibility of committing the *unpardonable sin* has distressed many. Some writers have tried to assure readers that if they worry about having committed this sin, then they probably have not (because of their very concern). Other say that this sin cannot be reproduced today—since Jesus doesn't perform sign miracles today through the Spirit's power.

It is probably the case that the *unpardonable sin* can be committed today, and regularly is. But it is not some obscure sin that we must be very careful to avoid. The rejection of God's work of grace in the heart is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Denying the Gospel message, remaining in rebellion against God, and dying in sin—these collectively are the *unpardonable sin*.

Fruit Bearing Trees [May 15] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.33-37)**

We believe, according to the Scriptures, in salvation through faith alone (Eph 2.8). We believe that our salvation is not dependent on our 'righteous' works (Eph 2.9). Yet our works, specifically those worked in words by our tongues, can result in our being acquitted or condemned (Mt 12.37). How can this be? Is this a contradiction? No! Good works (and words) are the result of salvation (Eph 2.10). Without good works, faith is dead (Jam 2.17). Good works are the *evidence* of true faith. In this context, Jesus confronted the Pharisees who had accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. He challenged them with respect to their hypocrisy. They gave evidence by their work and words that they were not children of God, but rather of Satan.

Offspring – Contrary to what evolutionists say, kind gives birth to kind. It is impossible in the natural realm for a plant or animal to produce fruit or offspring that is anything other than the kind that bore it. Never will an apple tree produce any other kind of fruit than apples. At no time will a bird lay an egg that will produce anything other than a bird. So it is in

the spiritual realm. That which is sinful by nature (i.e., a person who has not been transformed by the reforming work of the Holy Spirit) cannot produce good works or words.

Observation – Although we cannot read people’s thoughts or know their hearts, we do have a means of knowing what principles guide their thinking and motivation. It is by observing what they produce that we can know what people are really like. If they behave selfishly, act wickedly, and speak evil, we can be almost certain that they have not been converted. But what about the ‘Pharisees’ in our midst? Aren’t there some people, especially in the Church, who put on a good front and appear to be holy? How can we discern their real nature? Also by observation. But in their case we have to look for more subtle signs of a false heart. The signs are not what many might expect (e.g., attending movies, listening to pop music, or smoking, etc.). The Pharisees among us will be the first to avoid outward behaviours that they consider to be licentious. Rather, the evidence of the state of their hearts will be seen in such things as their haughtiness, complaining attitude, critical words, gossiping, unforgiving spirit, or vindictiveness. Thus the proverb is true: a tree is recognized by its fruit.

Output – Jesus indicates that the tongue is the flag that identifies the nation to which we belong. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being part of Satan’s kingdom (Mt 12.24) because he cast out demons. But, in contrast, it was their *accusation* that identified them as being part of Satan’s kingdom—they attributed the work of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to demons.

It is not what men take into themselves (e.g., what they eat or watch on TV) that makes them unclean (Mt 15.11). This does not mean that we can, or should, consume junk. We should be very careful to avoid things that are unhealthy for our bodies or souls. But the problem isn’t primarily with the things consumed, but with the consumer. The problem is in the heart. It is not that the things consumed make men sinful; it is that sinful men consume things that are bad for them—whether snacks or smut.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they could say nothing good about what was good (the work of the Holy Spirit). Instead they used their mouths to spit the blasphemous destructive poison of vipers. Their hearts were full of poison; the fruit of their lips carried the poison. Their hearts were polluted with sin; what spewed forth from their mouths was sewage. The output of their tongues was the evidence that their hearts were not right with God.

As with the Pharisees, our tongues reveal whether or not the root of our being is good or evil. From our lips comes either edification or destruction. There is no middle ground. If we have good hearts—that is, we have been converted—we will say things that build up others in the Church. Our words will be treasures of instruction, encouragement, and hope. But if we are evil—we have not repented of our sins—we can only cough up destruction. Our words will tear down others in accusation, criticism, and hatred. From sinful hearts proceed all manner of evil (Mt 15.18, 19). Our speech is the overflow of the heart that reveals our true character.

Outcome – Because our words reveal the true nature of our hearts, we will be judged by what we have said. Special consideration will be given to our careless words. These are not just trivial things we might have said without thinking. They are words that are not based on fact or truth, or were designed to hurt. We will be held fully responsible for our words—if careless we will be condemned; if seasoned with the salt (Col 4.6) of grace through the Holy Spirit, we will be acquitted. Since the power of life and death is in our tongues (Prov 18.21), we must be very concerned about what comes from our mouths. What fruit comes from our lips? Does it show to which kingdom we belong? Even now an axe is at the root to cut down an evil tree (Lk 3.9).

Only the Sign of Jonah [May 16]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.38-42)

Seeking Signs – The Pharisees were typical of people of all kinds and classes. They were unwilling to take Jesus at his word and accept him as

the Messiah (Christ). They had just witnessed a sign miracle when Jesus cast out a demon (Mt 12.22). But this was not sufficient to convince them that he was from God. Instead they attributed his work to Satan. Their request for another sign indicated that they wanted to determine the nature of the sign. It is as if they said: “Unless God does ‘x’ or ‘y’, I won’t believe that he exists.”

Men and women today reject the many signs God gives them to show his purpose and power (Rom 1.20). They know that God is the Intelligent Designer and that this universe did not really come into existence by chance. Yet they reject the natural evidence and say that creationists are only proposing a ‘god of the gaps’. When God overrules and hits them in the head with the 2X4 of clear evidence for his creation, they do not believe it because they want to define the agenda for determining how God should act.

Adulterous Asking – Jesus wastes no time in condemning their request. It is a disastrous sin to reject the evidence God gives to validate his Son. But it is even more wicked to reject the evidence he gives and then *ask* for evidence. Trying to tell God what is ‘good enough’ evidence to convince you that he means what he says is the height of rebellion. It is spiritual adultery like that of Israel in the OT (e.g., Jer 2.1-37; Jer 3.6-25; Hos 2.1-23). It is making your own will into a ‘normative standard’ by which to judge God.

Although Jesus is speaking to the Jewish leaders, he includes that entire generation of the Jews and, indirectly, all generations and nations that reject the evidence God has provided about his plan of redemption in the Bible.

Realizing Rejection – God will not give signs to those who demand them purely to reinforce their rebellion against himself and rejection of his Son. The ministry of Jesus was validated by signs such as miracles of healing, control of nature, and raising the dead. But the most important sign is that his life, ministry, and death fulfilled the prophecies of the OT. This is why he tells the Pharisees that they have their sign. Every

prophecy in the Bible about Jesus has been fulfilled, or will be when he comes again to this earth.

There is a double meaning in the choice of Jonah as the sign Jesus gives. First it points to the time that he would spend under the power of death—three days (Friday afternoon to sunrise on Sunday). Second it was a prophecy regarding the generation that rejected the signs that validated the Christ. In predicting that he would be in the “heart of the earth” for three days he indicated that he would be rejected by that generation and sentenced to death. When the fulfillment of their rejection was realized, the Jews would have given up Jesus as their king.

Jewish Judgment – In the place of the Jews, who as a nation were rejected by God when they despised their Messiah, the Gentiles were grafted into the Church. This in-grafting brought spiritual Israel to its completion (Rom 11.26). The men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba are OT firstfruits of in-gathering of the Gentiles. They pointed to the day when the Gospel would no longer be essentially an exclusive inheritance of the Jews, but would be available to every individual, regardless of racial or ethnic background, who repented of his sins and placed his hope for salvation in Jesus.

The repentance of the Ninevites and the interest in God’s wisdom shown by the Queen of Sheba are also signs that unbelieving Jews have been given over to judgment. The last generation of the Jews (as God’s special people) was blessed with the privilege of having God’s own Son in their midst. But they rejected him (Jn 1.11). As a result, as a nation, they were cast out for the final time. Their entire system of ceremonial observances was made of no effect, and the new, more universal, ordinances introduced by Jesus took their place. This judgment on the Jews was sealed by the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, which forever ended the sacrificial system that pointed to the coming of the Messiah.

Greater Gospel – The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of a mere man—Jonah. The Queen of Sheba came from “the ends of the earth” to hear the wisdom of a mere man—Solomon. But in Jesus one

who is greater than both Jonah and Solomon has arrived. He is “God with us” (Mt 1.23), the greatest prophet, and Wisdom itself (1 Cor 1.24, 30). He has also brought a greater kingdom than that which could even be conceived of by the Jews (Jn 18.36; Ps 45.6; Is 9.6, 7; Dan 2.44).

We have a more complete revelation about Jesus than the Jews. We have the entire Bible that shows the fulfillment of the OT prophecies, the record of the validating signs, and the eyewitness accounts of his resurrection. We must make sure that we do not reject him as the Pharisees did.

Return of the Evil Spirits [May 17] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.43-45)**

Each year many people make New Year’s resolutions. They resolve to give up smoking, to be more disciplined about their diet, or to be gentler with the kids. These resolutions seem to work for a few days, but often the person making them gives up in despair and returns to his old habits. Jesus in this parable speaks of something similar. But what he describes is far more serious as it affects the eternal state of men and women—demon possession.

Jesus notes that demon possession is a real phenomenon that afflicts people. He encountered demons and cast them out (Mt 8.28-34; Mt 9.32-33). When reading the accounts of Jesus’ confrontations with demons, people often ask about the possibility of demon possession today. There is a spectrum of views on this topic. Some hold that demon possession is nothing more than a psychological state or an illness like epilepsy. Others find demon possession ‘under every rock’ and are exuberant about calling in exorcists. Others believe that demon possession was prevalent in ancient times before Christ’s resurrection and was intensified while he was on earth, but since then Satan has been bound and he and his demons can no longer possess people.

Some argue that *real* demon possession occurred only at the time when Jesus and his Apostles were alive, and the power to cast out demons was

a sign that the exorcist was from God (e.g., Paul in Acts 19.12-15). But it does not appear to be a valid view. To state that all instances of demon possession occurred only when Christ and the Apostles were living seems to contradict the injunctions against mediums and spiritists in the OT (Lev 20.6, 27). If demon possession wasn't real these commands have little meaning. In addition it appears that the priests of false religions cultivated demon possession (1 Kings 18.26-29), and Jesus accepted that others cast out demons before him (Mt 12.27; Lk 9.49). But because demon possession occurred in OT times, does that mean it occurs today? The NT doesn't tell us explicitly that there is demon possession since Christ's day, but it seems to imply that there is (Mk 16.17; Rom 8.38). Therefore it is unwise to rule it out. However, I do think that since Christ crushed Satan (Col 2.15; Rev 20.2) through his death and resurrection, the power of demons to take direct control of human bodies has been severely limited.

How then are we to understand and apply this parable? It can be applied directly. Demons that have possessed a person may leave by their own wills, or may be cast out by means other than the converting work of the Holy Spirit (Mt 12.27; Acts 19.13). This, however, does not necessarily provide a permanent solution to the problem of demon possession. It is only the presence of the Holy Spirit that can guarantee that demons will never return and possess a person.

Jesus applies the parable with the words: "That is how it will be with this wicked generation." He explicitly indicates that he is speaking of the Jews who were given the privilege of spiritual enlightenment (through the written word of God and the ceremonial ordinances). Through this light the 'demon' of spiritual ignorance was cast out. The Jews after the Babylonian captivity rejected idolatry and seemed to be truly religious. But because they rejected Jesus—the living Word of God and fulfillment of the ceremonial system—as Messiah their end became far worse than their former condition. Now, as a nation, they are condemned to permanent 'demon possession' as implied by the statement: "seven other spirits"—the use of seven points to completeness or totality. This does not mean that individual Jews cannot be saved. Paul is explicit that by

God's grace there is a remnant that is saved (Rom 11.1-6). But it does mean that God has ceased dealing with the Jews as his special people (Mt 8.11, 12; Lk 13.6-9; 1 Thess 2.14-16). The Gospel is now the possession of all the nations and the true Israel is the Church (Gal 6.16).

There are three general principles we can derive from this parable:

- Rejection of the Gospel after having been enlightened with the truth is equivalent to a multi-fold demon possession. We have been blessed with the opportunity to hear the truth. Let's make sure we don't reject it.
- We can become smug in our theology, church connection, and pious practices just as the Jews of Jesus' day did. A 'demon possession' we especially have to guard against is deceiving ourselves into believing that we truly belong to Christ when our faith is in our own intellectual skills, family history, or works.
- There is always a danger of being caught up with false beliefs and practices. Paul warns us that there will be deceiving spirits (demons) who will lead people to abandon the faith (1 Tim 4.1). Through the Holy Spirit and prayer, we must be constantly on guard (1 Pt 5.8, 9).

Satan doesn't care what possesses us—whether one of his demons, paganism and immorality, or our own self-righteousness. Anything that fills our soul other than God, pleases Satan because it leaves no room for God.

The True Family of Jesus [May 18]

(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 12.46-50; Mk 3.31-35; Lk 8.19-21)

Why did Jesus' family come to the place where he was teaching and ask to speak with him? Various suggestions have been offered, such as: 1) they were jealous of what he was doing (e.g., healing and teaching others) and wanted to receive favours from him because of their family ties; 2) they didn't believe in him (Jn 7.50), were opposed to him just as the Pharisees were, and wanted to stop his teaching; 3) they came to take him away from the crowd for awhile because they were concerned that he would become overly tired because of his continual work; 4) they

thought he was mad (Mk 3.21) and requested a private audience with him to encourage him to stop his imprudent activities; or 5) they wanted to warn him against offending the Pharisees (e.g., calling them “a wicked and adulterous generation;” Mt 12.39) because they might abuse him.

Some interpreters see disrespect in the fact that they stood outside and asked him to interrupt his teaching in order to come out to them. They suggest that his family had no interest in hearing him themselves, and interrupted others who wanted to hear him. To suggest that they were disrespectful, appears to impose a motive that is not found in the verses we are considering or in the immediate context. His family was not able to get into the room where he was teaching because of the crowd pressing around him (Lk 8.19). Also, it seems inappropriate to suggest that Mary would show him disrespect. She knew that as the Messiah he had a ministry from God.

We should believe that his family was motivated by kindness and a desire that he be careful in the face of growing danger from the Pharisees. They probably thought that they could protect him from the dangers looming over him because of his inflammatory teaching. But Jesus did not come out to meet his family. Instead he went on with his teaching.

This encounter teaches two key truths:

- 1) When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed faithfully and truthfully, those who are its messengers will face dangers from the sinful world. Men and women will find offensive the proclamation of the Law as an absolute standard for moral behaviour, the wickedness and depravity of sin, the need of repentance, and the requirement for faith only in Jesus.
- 2) Although it may be out of kindness that friends or family encourage preachers to be more careful about what they say, this is not what God wants. The Gospel, by its very nature, will be offensive to the world and those who proclaim it must do so knowing this fact. They must be ready to bear the reproach and persecution that will result from their teaching. Note: I am not suggesting that they are to be

belligerent. The truths of God are to be presented with a humble spirit; it is to be *what* they say, *not how* they say it, that is offensive to the sinful world (1 Pt 3.15).

As a teaching technique, Jesus often answered a question with a question. His rhetorical question—“Who are my mother and my brothers?”—was not intended to dismiss natural family relationships. Jesus teaches that family relationships are to be honoured (Mk 7.10-13). Rather, the point of his question is to make his hearers, and us, think about what it means to be really part of his family. The emphasis in his question and answer appears to be qualitative: What *kind* of people can call themselves Jesus’ brothers and sisters, and therefore children of God?

Who are Jesus’ brothers and sisters? From the context, and from his own words, his true, spiritual, family members are those who:

- Do the will of the Father, just as Jesus came to do God’s will (Jn 6.38).
- Not only hear God’s word but do it, by habitually practicing it. Jesus’ half-brother, James was probably standing outside the house and heard Jesus’ teaching (Mk 3.20, 31). These words stuck with him, and later in his letter to the Church he stresses them (James 1.22-23; James 2.14-26).
- Are brothers and sisters through faith, not just by genetic affiliation. Not only does Jesus’ true family extend beyond the other children of Mary, but it also extends beyond those who are Jewish. The gospel was never limited to Jews only, but is for all who believe, including Gentiles.
- Don’t think that mere religion (Mt 12.43-45) or family connections (Mt 12.46-47) will prove of worth before God.
- Understand that natural family members must be loved less than Christ (Lk 14.26). For example, Moslems who come to Christ are often cut off from their families. The waters of baptism transcend the blood-bonds of family or ethnic background. Blood is in fact not thicker than water.

Pointing to his disciples he says: “Here are my mother and my brothers.” All true believers in Jesus Christ are able in turn to look to Jesus and say: “Here is my elder brother, and God is my Father.” What a great honour it is to be part of Jesus’ family. He invites us into his home (Jn 14.2) and to an eternal feast (Rev 19.9), and promises us a great inheritance (Col 3.23; 1 Pt 1.4).

Parables of the Kingdom

The Place of the Parables [May 19]

(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.1-3a; Mk 4.1-2; Lk 8.4)

Jesus resumed teaching large crowds (Mk 3.7-12) after appointing the twelve apostles and confronting the challenge of the Pharisees who accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. However, this time he did something that he had not done before (or at least is not recorded that he did)—he taught using parables.

What is a parable? The word comes directly from the Greek and is made up of two words that, together, mean: “to throw alongside.” A story, usually taken from the physical realm, is “thrown” out to illustrate a truth that is from the spiritual or moral realms. This technique is not unique to Jesus. Parables were used in OT times to drive home a moral (2 Sam 12.1-14; 2 Sam 14.1-11; 1 Kings 20.35-40). They appear to have developed from the proverbs and riddles that were used in the wisdom literature of the ancient Middle East. The use of stories in parables is an effective and pleasing way to attract and maintain attention to what is being taught. It leads hearers to understand a point that, at first, appears not to be immediately applicable to them. But on reflection, the message of the instruction is remembered and personalized.

In our next meditation we will consider the purpose of parables and the key principles for their interpretation. Today, we will consider the large crowds by the lake and the boat on the lake as mentioned in the scenic introduction.

Jesus had been teaching in a house (Mk 3.20) in a town in Galilee. But it was so crowded that he and his disciples couldn't eat, and his family could not get into the house to get his attention (Mk 3.31, 32). The large crowd, even from the surrounding towns (Lk 8.4), standing outside the house could not get in to hear his instruction. Because Jesus was so concerned that everyone could hear the Gospel of the Kingdom, he moved to a place more suitable for teaching a large audience. At other times he taught in the fields on the hills outside the villages and towns, but in this instance the place that provided the most convenient open space to accommodate the crowd was along the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Why do the Gospel writers want us to know the locale for this session of instruction in parables? It may be that they want to show how important it is that the Gospel be proclaimed to the largest number of people possible. It may also be that, through the Holy Spirit, they are giving the Church a warning about the emphasis it will place on buildings. The early church met in homes, open fields, caves, and catacombs; and only rarely in converted synagogues. During the Roman era, before Constantine, few buildings were built exclusively for congregational use. Church buildings, from chapels and monasteries to cathedrals, began to dominate the skyline during the Middle Ages. We need to consider seriously if we have forgotten the importance of what it means to be a 'church' in terms of the assembly of called-out-ones; as distinct from a bricks-and-mortar meeting place. The Church is found where Christ's people assemble, with him among them. The Church is not found in magnificent crystal cathedrals or congregational campuses, if Christ isn't there. Stately monuments may contain no true worship or instruction.

The crowd of people who came to hear Jesus' teaching was so great that they could not all get close to see and hear Jesus. So instead of sitting on a large rock or pile of fishing nets, he sat in a boat that was a bit of a distance from the shore. This permitted the people to sit on the sloped shore, almost like being in an amphitheatre, with Jesus at the centre. It also made it difficult for the people to crowd him, allowing a larger audience to see him clearly.

Apparently Jesus started this particular day's teaching with a confrontation with the Pharisees over Beelzebub. Then he continued teaching during the afternoon meal (which he had difficulty eating because of the crowds), and then he began a new round of instruction outdoors. He worked hard at teaching and shows, by his willingness to accommodate himself to the needs of the crowd, that he wanted to remove any barriers that might hinder the spread of the Gospel.

His use of parables also shows his concern for being heard and heeded. His teaching was not filled with abstract constructs and intellectual content; it was oriented to the capacity of his audience. Throughout his public ministry, his use of story-telling, illustration, metaphor, dialogue, debate, and probing questions indicates that he did as much as possible to help his true hearers understand his message. He cared less that those who sat in the chief seats in the synagogues would hear a sermon of fine rhetoric, and more that the common people would be instructed.

It is a shame when the Church puts a stumbling-block in the way of those who might hear the Gospel. This hindrance may be in the form of buildings, sermon style, theological language, or ritual. We need to be more concerned with how to accommodate and spread the eternal message of salvation to our generation than with ensuring that our particular traditions are preserved.

The Purpose of the Parables [May 20]

(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.10-17; Mk 4.10-12; Lk 8.9, 10)

When Jesus told his first parable about the Kingdom, the disciples noticed a marked change in his style of teaching and they asked him why he spoke in this manner. Jesus gave them four reasons for speaking in parables:

Delivering Propositions – The primary reason was to deliver propositional truth in a form that could be remembered. The truth Jesus

communicates in parables could be stated as a succinct proposition, for example: “heaven is the most valuable asset you can obtain.” But we remember that truth more clearly when Heaven is compared with a pearl or treasure of great value. Jesus wanted the secrets of the Kingdom of God to stick with his hearers and to be carried to the ends of the earth.

These secrets (mysteries) are not mystical formulas for transforming lead into gold or making oneself invisible. The mysteries are the truths of God that had not yet been fully disclosed through the prophets and writings of the OT and can be known only by revelation, not by natural research. These truths relate specifically to the work of Jesus. The Jews misunderstood many of the OT prophecies and were expecting an earthly kingdom of royal power and regal pomp. In Jesus, his rule and the Kingdom of Heaven were revealed more clearly than in the past. The essence of the truth of the *Kingdom Parables* is that God, through Christ, is building an eternal spiritual kingdom.

Like the disciples, we believe in Jesus as saviour. But we need to understand, through the parables, that he now reigns in Heaven and on earth and that at the end of time his kingdom will be revealed to its full extent and in all its majestic glory (Mk 4.8; Mt 13.44). Even as we hear this message, we will not understand it fully until we reach eternal glory.

Dividing People – Jesus did not use parables to withhold truth from anyone but to show the division between believers and unbelievers. Those who don’t believe in Jesus will never understand the true meaning of the parables (Mt 13.11, 12). They may be able to restate their factual interpretation, but they will not be able to apply them to their heart and soul.

Jesus began to speak about the Kingdom of Heaven in parables only after the leaders of the Jews had attributed his divine works to Satan (Mt 12.22-37). They were blinded by unbelief, and Jesus became a threat to their positions and power. So they heard only the bare words of the parables and were not willing to learn spiritual truths from them. In this way the parables concealed truth from them that explicit propositional

statements would not have. In their self-inflicted unbelief they rejected the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven. Even what they had previously known (about the coming Messiah) no longer made sense to them (Mt 13.12). Thus Jesus' use of parables included a dimension of judgment. God took away the light from those who had shut their eyes against it because they loved darkness rather than light (Jn 3.19).

Declaring Prophetically – Jesus' quotation from Isaiah (Mt 13.14, 15; Is 6.9, 10) reinforces his use of parables as a means of instruction, and teaches:

- In the Church (those with the sign of the Covenant on them), and in the wider audience for the Gospel: some hear and understand; some do not.
- Jesus came to fulfill all prophecy. His teaching in parables is the direct fulfillment of what Isaiah foretold.
- Jesus came in the spirit of Isaiah. Like Isaiah, he experienced unreceptive hearts that heard only the words but did not apply them spiritually.
- The need for modern translations of the Bible. This quotation follows the Greek translation of the OT, not the Hebrew. We see from the use of the contemporary translation of Jesus' day how important it was to Jesus and the disciples that the message be heard and understood, not hidden behind traditionally 'correct' language.

Demonstrating Privilege – For the OT saints, much of their understanding of the role and work of the coming Messiah was framed by the types of the ceremonial system. True believers longed to see the full revelation of what these types symbolized (Mt 13.17). Along with the disciples we are blessed (Mt 13.16) with seeing the fulfillment of the prophecies and the completion of revelation. It is a great privilege to have the complete Word of God.

Descriptive Principles – Based on this consideration of why Jesus said he used parables we can derive five key principles for their interpretation:

- Parables teach spiritual truth; the spiritual truth underlies the words.

- Each parable contains an essential truth that could have been presented in propositional form; look for the essence of what is communicated.
- The message is not in the details but in the whole; we are not to scratch every point in a parable to find hidden meanings.
- Parables are intended to be memorable and understood; they were not given to hide truth.
- We are to hear and apply the parables (Mk 4.3, 9, 23). They are intended to elicit a response and divide those who believe from those who do not.

Different Types of Soil [May 21]

(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.3b-9, 18-23; Mk 4.3-9, 13-20; Lk 8.5-8, 11-15)

Some of the parables are not easy to explain because we can't always determine which components are essential to the message or only support the lesson. Jesus explains the *Parable of the Soils* to his disciples, and tells us the meaning and application of most of the components. In his explanation of its meaning he shows us that we must be careful when we interpret the details of any parable. For example, he refers to a farmer going out to sow seed. In his explanation of the parable he does not tell us who is the farmer. Is it the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or a preacher of the Gospel? Since Jesus does not tell us who it is, it is not essential to the central message and inappropriate for us to focus on the one sowing the seed. The key to this parable is to understand how the different soils receive one kind of seed. What do we learn from this parable?

Seed – The seed is the word of God (Lk 8.11) telling about his kingdom (Mt 13.19). This seed is sown wherever the farmer walks. For our consideration today, it does not matter whether we understand the field to be the world at-large or the Church. The point is that the farmer spreads much seed in the prospect of an abundant harvest. The gospel message goes out to all parts of the world and to all kinds of people (Mt 28.19). It may appear to be just small, dry, and hard; but is in fact the seed that brings life (Col 1.6).

Soils – Wherever the seed is sown it falls on different kinds of soils. These soils are different kinds of hearts (i.e., human wills/minds). Jesus classifies the hearts of all men, women and children into four types by their response:

- *Hardened* – The pathways of this kind of heart have been trampled hard by following the ways of the world. No seed can take root because of a lack of concern for anything spiritual.
- *Hasty* – This kind of heart is like a thin layer of soil covering an outcrop of limestone. The seed seems to take root but quickly the person is away following another ‘spiritual’ guru or the latest self-help program— always seeking, never finding.
- *Hypocritical* – This kind of heart makes a good showing for a while, but in the end, there is no sincerity. People in this class appear to believe and then lose their salvation. But there is no sincerity and so nothing to lose.
- *Holy* – The soil of this heart has been well prepared: it is set apart by God, ploughed, fertilized, and watered. It is ready to receive the seed when it is planted.

In the context of the progress of Jesus’ ministry this parable speaks about the Pharisees who had rejected his message and accused him of being from Satan (Mt 12.24). Their hearts were not prepared soil ready to receive the seed. This reminds us that the difference is not in the seed, but in the soil. It is ironic that people in the Church today spend a lot of time trying to devise ways to make the Gospel more appealing to hearts (e.g., through 7 or 10-step study guides, music programs, drama, etc.) when the point Jesus makes is that it is the soil that is key. We must pray that God will prepare the soil of hearts.

Satan – When the soil is not prepared, an enemy of the Word comes along to prevent the growth of the seed. The Gospel writers use the terms ‘evil one’, ‘devil’ and ‘Satan’ to refer to the enemy. His tactics are varied. He convinces some, whose hearts are hardened against God and spiritual things, that the Gospel message is only a myth invented by silly and weak fanatics. These people persist in their intellectual snobbery, as

atheists, materialistic naturalists, or pragmatic pagans.

Satan uses other tactics against those who have softer hearts. He overwhelms some with concern about the pressures of life so that they collapse under the weight. For example, when a child in their family dies they blame God instead of man's sin. Satan leads others astray with worldly worries so that they focus on the temporal-spatial realm and have no concern for eternal matters; or he tempts them with false promises of possessions, power, and pleasure so that they are fooled into the belief that all that really matters is the 'here and now'. The lust for prosperity destroys the Word as surely as persecution.

Superabundance – Depending on the type of grain sown (e.g., oats, wheat, barley, etc.) the expected returns can vary. But a typical head of grain can produce about 20 kernels. Thus a twenty-fold increase would be considered a very good harvest. Jesus expects much more when the Word of life is planted in the prepared soil. He expects at least a thirty-fold increase and receives a hundred-fold increase in many cases. Jesus does not say exactly what is the harvest he expects. It could be the worshipful and obedient lives of those who are saved, abundant preaching of the Word, or the glorious appearance of his eternal kingdom at the end of time. Regardless of the meaning, Jesus does teach that through grace all of his people produce superabundant fruit.

Steadfast – The trials that drive some to hardened unbelief, strengthens those with prepared hearts. The concerns and temptations that deceive many, cause those of the good soil to turn to God for help. Through the perseverance (Lk 8.15) of the saints (the saved-ones), as Jesus conquers Satan, the kingdom of Jesus Christ will grow ever more fruitful and be revealed in its full glory.

A Visible Light [May 22]

(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mk 4.21-25; Lk 8.16-18)

What is the difference between a theology lecture on the parables of Jesus and a sermon on the subject? In both cases a man could stand in

front of an audience in a hall and talk for about 30 minutes. In both cases there should be communication of factual material in a clear and simple manner. There is, however, one essential difference. The sermon is intended to inform the mind *and* change the heart and life.

So it was with the sermons that Jesus delivered in the form of parables. His intention was not just to present facts but also to effect a necessary behaviour change in those who heard his teaching. In particular he wanted those who had received the light of the Gospel (the good news about the Kingdom of Heaven) to:

Lift the Light – The message of truth that we have received is not to be stored up in our hearts (e.g., like covering a lamp with a bowl) and kept there until the day we depart from this world. Rather, like the light coming from a burning wick in a shallow bowl of oil that is placed on a stand so that all those in the house can see, the little light that we have is to be used to show the way to Jesus to all those around us. Whether the light is to shine on those in the house (possibly Jews; Matthew) or on those entering the house (possibly Gentiles; Luke) is not an essential distinction.

Dispel the Darkness – Light by its very nature conquers darkness. It seeps through cracks, destroys shadows, reveals the concealed, and turns night into day. Jesus does not give us specific examples of what he is thinking of when he speaks of things hidden and concealed being made clear, but we can infer from elsewhere in his word that the following things are revealed by light:

- *God's Nature* – God is light (1 Jn 1.5; Jn 1.4). This means that any one who opposes God *is* darkness. A person who is not saved exists in darkness. Without repentance it is only a matter of time before he will be in eternal darkness with Satan and his devils (Jude 6; Mt 25.41).
- *Man's Sin* – The light of God exposes man's sin (Jn 3.19-20; 1 Cor 4.5). Men tend to commit their sins in physical darkness. Those who steal and commit sexual sins like the cover of darkness. Those who drink to a stupor, mainline, and snort tend to seek unlit alleys and

darkened corners. But with the coming of sunrise crime levels drop. So when the Law of God comes into men's hearts, society and nations, it rebukes their sin and there is a significant reduction in wickedness.

- *The Way of Salvation* – But external observance of the Law is not what God is seeking. The light of the Gospel is brighter than the light of the Law and reaches further into men's hearts and they are redeemed from spiritual darkness and walk forever in God's ways (Jn 1.8, 9; Jn 8.12; Jn 12.46).

Apply Attention – Wives often have to ask their husbands if they are listening, and parents have to remind their children to pay attention. So it is with the teachings of Christ. We have to be reminded that hearing words is not the same thing as really listening and then doing what we are told to do. More than a dozen times Jesus reminds those hearing his words to open their ears and really listen. We must not be like a husband who says “Yes, dear!” and then promptly forgets what he is to pick up on the way home from golf.

The first application of the principle of listening carefully is to be obedient to the commands of God—first by repenting (Acts 17.30) and then by obeying the instructions given in his Word (Jn 15.10; 1 Jn 2.3). But there is a second application taught specifically by this parable. Consider a crowd at the scene of a serious accident caused by a drunk driver. Most people will watch with a morbid curiosity and, after the bodies are lifted into the ambulance, will go to their shopping and forget the scene. Those who are more than disinterested spectators will take action. They will swear seriously never to drink and drive, join MADD and campaign for tougher penalties against drunk driving, or decide to become paramedics to be of service to society. This is how Jesus wants us to react—we are to make an investment in hearing and applying his teachings and bringing the light of the Gospel to the world.

Use It or Lose It – What applies in the physical realm applies also in the spiritual. If you don't exercise, your muscles will atrophy and the muscles you do have will become useless. So we are under an obligation

as servants and sons of the Kingdom to let the light shine more brightly through us.

This parable follows the parable of the sower (Mk 4.3-20; Lk 8.5-15). This makes Jesus' meaning very clear—if we don't measure up by producing more fruit ("light" in this case), the little faith we have will be taken from us. Don't use the excuse that you cannot lose your salvation. Luke clarifies the "faith" that we have in this case (Lk 8.18). It is only what we *think* we have.

The gifts and talents (of grace) that have been given to us must be exercised and applied. The "secrets of the kingdom of God" (Lk 8.10) have been given to us, not to be kept secret but to be revealed through us.

Invisible but Inevitable Growth [May 23] **(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mk 4.26-29)**

On buildings near the World Trade Centre site time-lapse cameras were installed to track the removal of the debris from the collapsed towers and the construction of the replacement buildings. As New Yorkers working on Wall St. went about their business from day to day, they saw progress at the site only as small steps. But a movie made from the film in the cameras on the adjacent buildings would show the real extent of the progress. Activity at the WTC site provides an analogy for what happens as God builds the Church (the Kingdom of God). From day to day, we on earth, see little progress. But from God's timeless and transcendent perspective the growth of the Church unfolds rapidly as a tribute to his amazing and majestic power.

This parable, found only in Mark, is the lens of a time-lapse camera that shows what is really going on in the Church. It exposes the invisible growth of the Kingdom and shows how inevitable that growth really is.

We should not attempt to map every component of this parable to analogues in the life of the Church. For example, if we try to assign a meaning to the person casting seed we can run into difficulties. It cannot

be God, because unlike the farmer in this instance God has a clear understanding of how the seed of the Gospel actually sprouts and grows. God does not ignore the seed and go about other business. He is intimately active in causing the seed to grow to maturity. Nor can the person who sows the seed be a preacher since he is not the one who harvests the grain at the end of time. The key to understanding this parable is not to identify the sower but to identify the place of the seed in good soil.

The seed germinates by itself. We get our word ‘automatic’ from the Greek word that is translated ‘by itself’. This is not spontaneous germination (i.e., life coming from non-life) since a *seed* was planted. But it does point to growth ‘without visible cause’. Jesus teaches that the agency of the one sowing is not the cause or the on-going source of growth, but rather he teaches that the seed has its own power to grow without any *human* agency.

The seed not only sprouts, but also forms a stalk and flowers, and produces seed. Jesus is not teaching that there are three specific stages in the Christian life. He is probably not even considering the growth of individual Christians, but rather the Church as a whole. This parable is not given as a picture of evangelism (seed scattering) or spiritual growth of an individual believer. It is a declaration that the growth of the Kingdom is a sovereign work of God.

Jesus is emphasizing the hidden agency that sets the pace and executes the program, for the growth of the seed into a mature plant that produces an abundant harvest. Ultimately, growth to full maturity does not involve human instrumentality but is dependent solely on the secret will and grace of God. This reminds us that programs or activities devised by men and women (e.g., concerts, evangelism campaigns, study guides, or drama productions) will accomplish nothing for the Kingdom of God unless they are executed for the glory of God, in the will of Christ, and blessed by the Holy Spirit.

But do not stretch his key point to an extreme. Each of the parables of

Jesus has a primary message, but they must be taken as a set. Jesus does not teach every aspect of the Kingdom in a single parable. We must not misunderstand his teaching in this parable and think that it doesn't matter what we do, or whether or not we proclaim the Gospel to our sin-filled world. We are not to think that God will save those he has chosen whether or not we do anything. We are not to be like John Ryland, a pastor, who is reported to have said to William Carey when he spoke about his vision of becoming a missionary to India: "Sit down, young man. When God decides to save the heathen, He will do it without your help."

We must balance the meaning of this parable with the teaching of other ones such as *The Hidden Treasure* and *The Pearl* (Mt 13.44-46) or *The Talents* (Mt 25.14-30; Lk 19.12-27), which remind us of individual responsibility to receive the Gospel message and the importance of using the gifts that God graciously gives us for full-hearted service for the Kingdom. God uses human instruments to build his Church (Mt 16.18, 19; 1 Cor 3.11-15). But so that no individual human can think that he is the real cause of the growth, or essential to the cause, the Church grows secretly under the power of God.

Jesus teaches primarily that although the Kingdom grows gradually and imperceptibly, it *grows*. While God carries out his work in a way that is almost invisible, it is inevitable. The seed of the Gospel will sprout, it will grow, it will give fruit, and it will be harvested for eternal glory. The point to remember from this parable is that the growth of the Kingdom is God's work, under his initiative and fulfilling his plan. It is the work of God—from beginning to end. Because it is not dependent on finite, fallible humans, we can rejoice that at the end of time "there will be a great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7.9).

Wheat and Weeds [May 24]

(By the Sea of Galilee and in a house, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.24-30, 36-43)

Requesting Disciples – Jesus delivered this parable beside the Sea. Later, when he had moved privately into a house with his disciples they asked him to explain its meaning. We should not be like those in love with this world who, at best, hear nothing more than words about the Kingdom of Heaven and depart to go about their worldly business. Rather, we should ask God to help us understand what we read in the Bible or hear in sermons (James 1.5). He has promised that he will teach us to know what is right (Ps 25.8, 9).

Redemption Defined – Jesus tells us that it is he himself who sows the seed of new life. He refers to himself as the *son of man*—a title that he took from Daniel (Dan 7.13) and which he used often to refer to himself (e.g., Mt 8.20; Mt 12.8; Mt 16.13, 27; etc.). Jesus is the one who redeems men from their sins. He is Lord of the field and Lord of the harvest. Whatever good seed (i.e., true believers) there is in the world, Jesus has planted it (Hos 2.23). He sows the seed where he wishes and saves whom he wishes. Salvation is by grace alone (Eph 2.8).

Rebel's Desire – Satan (the devil) will try anything to confound the saving work of Jesus. One of his tactics is to plant imitations in the Church. The weed seed that the enemy sowed apparently sprouts as plants that look similar to wheat but do not produce good grain. Satan sows imitations (hypocrites) in the Church. They are falsely professing 'believers' who are actually part of his realm (Jn 8.44; Eph 2.2). They often come in the form of false prophets (2 Pt 2.1; 1 Jn 4.1) who can lead astray those who do not yet have secure roots and cause great trouble for true believers (e.g., by stirring up conflict).

Right Discernment – The Donatists, an ancient sect in the Church, used their interpretation of this parable as a basis for their belief that it is possible to have a totally pure church in this world. They argued that since Jesus said that the field is the *world*, the mixture of true believers and hypocrites is in the world and not in the Church. However, the context of this parable (it is among the *Kingdom Parables*) and the fact that Jesus opens with the expression: "the kingdom of heaven is like ..." indicates that he is speaking of the Church. Calvin said that when Jesus

called the Church the *world* he was using synecdoche (a figure of speech in which the whole or the part are interchangeable). Calvin said that Jesus called the Church the *world* here because he was planting and harvesting in every part of the world.

When the servants in the parable suggest removing the weeds growing with the wheat, the farmer indicates that doing so could root out the wheat. God alone knows those who truly believe in Jesus; therefore, the separation should be left until the time of the harvest. It seems that Jesus is teaching that in the visible Church (the Church in this world) there will always be true believers and hypocrites. It is not possible for men to tell them definitively apart. This has a number of implications, including:

- Church officers are to accept a person's profession of faith at face value and not to become over scrupulous with requirements for admission to Church membership or the Lord's Supper.
- It will always be necessary to preach repentance unto salvation even to those within the boundaries of the visible Church.
- It is important always to be vigilant against false teaching; false teaching is the fruit produced by unbelievers in the Church (Mt 7.15-20).
- God tolerates evil in the Church, as he tolerates it in the world, so that his true people learn to rely on him in faith.
- There cannot be a perfect congregation or denomination, and to try to achieve one with zealous 'righteousness' is to challenge God.

Rewards Distributed – God never promised to set everything right in this world. But at the harvest when Christ returns on the Day of Judgment (2 Thess 1.7-10) he will, through his angels (Rev 14.15), separate true believers from hypocrites. On that day he will 'balance the books' and all the wicked, inside or outside of the visible Church, will receive their reward: endless spiritual and physical torment in Hell (Mt 25.42; Jude 7) where the fires burn hot because of God's anger against sin.

Those who are true believers will be gathered into the 'barn' of Heaven. This means that all the saints will be together. They will then be with

Jesus, all the holy ones (saints) from the past—from Abraham, to Rahab, and Zacchaeus—and with those of their friends and family who have gone on before them. It should always amaze us that we will have this fellowship together forever. Not only will we be together, but there will be no weeds in the barn. Never again will the *wheat* have to put up with the choking effects of the *weeds* that they had to live with throughout this life (Rev 21.3, 4).

Righteous Displayed – On that *Day* the real ‘who’s who’ will be published. Everyone—saint and sinner, angel and demon—will be able to distinguish clearly who are the true believers because they will shine brightly. They will reflect the glory of God and shine like Jesus (Mt 17.2; 1 Cor 15.49; 1 Jn 3.2) in the splendour of holiness in their perfect resurrection bodies. On that *Day*, and forever, the Church will be totally pure!

Spectacular Growth [May 25]

(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.31-33; Mk 4.30-32)

Small Beginnings – Jesus uses two illustrations from daily life to bring out different aspects of Church growth—a mustard seed and yeast. The mustard plant produced the smallest of domestic seeds that farmers planted in their fields. The small size provided the basis for Jesus’ proverbial statement about faith on the part of the disciples (Mt 17.20). However, in the parable we are considering today Jesus is not focusing on the size of the faith of individuals in the Church. Rather, his emphasis is on the small beginnings of the Church.

This principle has been displayed many times throughout the history of redemption. The Church began with three people: Adam and Eve and their son Seth. In Noah’s day there were only eight who formed the Church. Abraham and his family were called out of a pagan land. The returning captives at the time of Ezra represented an apparently insignificant tribe in the midst of a sea of nations. It looked unlikely that Peter and the other eleven Apostles before the Day of Pentecost could have had any influence on the impressive Sanhedrin and oppressive

might of Rome. Luther and his few companions looked like just another feeble attempt to reform a corrupt ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Covenanters who issued the *National Covenant* in 1638 appeared as grasshoppers (Num 13.33) before King Charles I and the bishops of the established episcopacy.

In the OT economy, in Jesus' teaching elsewhere, and in Paul's teaching yeast is used as an illustration for the pervasive effect of evil from which we are to be separated (Ex 12.15; Mt 16.6; Gal 5.8-9). However, in this parable (Mt 13.33) Jesus refers to yeast because its natural effect illustrates how a small amount of yeast, when mixed with even a large amount of flour (approx. 22 litres), will permeate the whole. Just like a small amount of yeast affects the entire lump of dough, so the small beginnings of the Church are guaranteed to have an impact on the entire world.

Jesus encourages his disciples through these illustrations. They had heard him teach the parable of the grain falling into different soils and might have thought that only a few people would enter the Kingdom. His message to them is that they should not be discouraged by appearances. Just like the growth of the church is invisible but inevitable (Mk 4.26-29), so it is that the Church must grow from small beginnings. We must not be discouraged because of the pressures and influences of life around us that appear to be overwhelming. The words of the prophet to Zerubbabel and the small band that returned with him from captivity seem very appropriate: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.” (Zech 4.6)

Spectacular Results – The mustard seed that Jesus refers to is from a Middle Eastern variety that produces a plant that, in warm climates, can grow to be 4-5m in height. Apparently, birds like the seeds and shade provided by the mature plant and flock to it. There may be a lesson in this component of the illustration. We might infer that the birds represent the masses of humanity that flock to the fruit and shelter provided by the Church.

We might also find special meaning in the fact that the yeast is *hidden* (NKJV/NASB) in the dough. The yeast works secretly and without visible means as it permeates the entire mass of dough. This could be understood as teaching that the influence of the Church on the world is carried on secretly as it works from the inside (e.g., in the hearts of people).

However, we should focus on the main point of the parable and be careful not to impose meaning where Christ may not intend it to be found. In both of these parables, Jesus seems to be concentrating on the spectacular results that arise from the small beginnings—a little seed and a small amount of yeast.

Once the mustard seed is planted it grows naturally into a great plant (Ps 80.8-11). The reference to the flock of birds may be included primarily to emphasize the size of the plant (Ezk 17.22, 23; Dan 4.12). Once the yeast is embedded in the flour its very nature causes it to permeate the entire lump of dough. The reference to the large amount of flour is likely included to demonstrate the amount of growth that occurs. Both processes, when they are left to operate naturally, cannot be stopped and produce spectacular growth.

Jesus said that he would build his Church (Mt 16.18). Everything that he does is perfect, and he does nothing by half measures. We should then expect the results of his work to be more than we can ask or imagine (Eph 3.20). The Kingdom of Jesus Christ will grow to include a great multitude from every nation on earth (Rev 7.9)—the large mustard plant. It will also grow in influence in every domain of man's operation as its citizens turn the pagan world, under the influence of Satan, upside down (Acts 17.6)—the yeast. This process will continue until Jesus returns to this earth to call all his people to himself. At that time every eye will see what he has accomplished and the full extent of his success. We can rejoice that from small beginnings come spectacular results.

Parables Reveal, Not Conceal [May 26]
(By the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.34-35; Mk 4.33-34)

Mark ends his collection of the *Kingdom Parables* by telling us that Jesus spoke (publicly) only in parables at this time. He notes, however, that Jesus spoke other parables about the Kingdom. Matthew also tells us that Jesus spoke only in parables and then adds three more parables (about the hidden treasure, pearl, and net), confirming Mark's assertion that Jesus' spoke additional parables. Jesus will use parables again in his ministry, but for now, he concludes this period of instructing in parables.

We have already considered reasons for why Jesus used parables (See: *The Purpose of the Parables*). We noted that Jesus used parables to:

- Deliver propositional truth in a form that could be remembered.
- Reveal truths (mysteries) about the work of the salvation that could be made known only by revelation.
- Create a division between believers who can see the spiritual application and unbelievers who cannot see beyond the material illustrations.
- Introduce a dimension of judgment, since God was removing the light of truth from those who had shut their eyes against it.
- Reinforce his position as the one who came to fulfill all prophecy.

As Mark and Matthew conclude their collections of parables about the Kingdom, they give us additional insight into the purpose of the parables. By speaking in parables Jesus fulfilled Scripture (Ps 78.2), as he taught truths not previously revealed. Matthew, more than any of the other Gospel writers, consistently shows that Jesus fulfils OT prophecy. But his use of Asaph's statement goes beyond pointing to the fulfilment of prophecy, it vindicates Jesus' *method* of revealing truth through parables. Jesus uses parables to teach things about the Kingdom which had been kept secret from creation.

Some of these key truths about the Kingdom are difficult for men initially to understand. They cannot be discerned by a study of natural phenomena or everyday human behaviour. For example: 1) the true kingdom is spiritual not temporal, but it has an impact in space and time; 2) those truly in the Kingdom may not be outwardly distinguishable from

hypocrites (e.g., by observance of a particular ceremony); 3) the growth of the kingdom is the result of invisible work by the Holy Spirit; 4) this growth occurs without human mediation; and 5) the end result exceeds everyone's expectations.

It requires a careful introduction for new ideas to be heard and understood. So Jesus, as the best teacher who ever lived, introduced new concepts gently to his hearers by using figures of speech and illustrations. The people's false expectations and misconceptions had to be moved aside before they could understand the full extent of the message he was bringing. Instead of their expectation that the Messiah would set up an earthly kingdom that would overcome Rome's authority, Jesus had to introduce them to a new concept: that a spiritual kingdom of servant-saints would replace not only the Roman rule of human might and the Greek path of 'enlightenment' but also the Jewish way of figurative ordinances.

Neither Mark nor Matthew assumes that the purpose of the parables was to conceal truth from outsiders. Jesus wanted all people to understand and believe his words. The parables are a form of revelation, not of concealment. But they provide an introduction to new concepts. Thus there will be some who are willing to accept the new truth. These had their eyes opened to the wonder of the Kingdom. To unbelievers, the truth remained veiled.

After using the parables to introduce these new concepts, he expanded them in more detail when he taught his disciples privately. We must not think that he wished to convey the meaning of the parables only to them, and to leave others in a state of ignorance. Rather, because of their faith in him, they were ready to receive a fuller explanation of the truth. As his teaching ministry progressed, Jesus expanded on many of the ideas introduced in these parables (e.g., Mt 25.1-30). He also used some of the disciples to whom he explained the meaning of the parables (Matthew, John, Peter; and probably James and Jude, his half-brothers) to communicate these truths in different ways as they wrote their letters to the growing church. He also used the Apostle Paul, whom he taught

privately (1 Cor 11.23; Gal 1.2), to complete the revelation about these truths (Eph 3.9; Rom 16.25; 1 Cor 2.7; Col 1.26). This approach was consistent with God's strategy of progressive revelation throughout the OT.

An example can help explain his use of parables. Many teachings are found in preliminary form in the OT. We find hints about the triune nature of God, the Messiah as the God-man and as a sacrifice, and the final Judgment and Hell. Jesus, however, didn't reveal these truths using the Rabbis' lecture style. Instead, he introduced the nature of the Trinity through illustrations and his prayers. Before we are given (limited) details about Hell we first see Jesus as the compassionate healer, raiser of the dead, and sin substitute. When we consider the reality of the Judgment and Hell in this context we can see God, not as a stern tyrant, but in a radiant holiness that must be kept pure. Without Jesus as a living parable we cannot understand God's nature.

The Hidden Treasure and The Pearl [May 27] **(In a house near the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.44-46)**

In the preceding parables Jesus has taught about the universal extent and glorious growth of the corporate Kingdom. He now turns to the particular and personal—the individual within the Kingdom. Both of the parables—the hidden treasure and the pearl—speak about a person who encounters the realities of the Kingdom and grasps those realities with all his being.

Some interpreters suggest that these parables speak about Christ; he is the man who sells all that he has (i.e., he leaves the glory of heaven) in order to redeem his people. This interpretation is mistaken, since it misses the point of the balance that Jesus establishes between the collective and the individual.

Stumblers and Seekers – The two parables teach essentially the same thing, but they approach it from the standpoint of two different kinds of people:

- *Stumblers* – These people pass through life with little conscious thought or care about their spiritual welfare or the prospect of an eternity without God. They rarely have any aspirations to answer the ‘big’ questions about the origin and purpose of life. Morality to them is little more than the teachings of pragmatism—if it works do it. But they are like ancient travelers or farmers who occasionally stumbled on a horde of coins and jewelry hidden to protect part of a rich man’s wealth during a time of invasion, war, or political unrest. But they trip over a treasure of far greater worth than silver and gems. They find the truth of the Gospel lying in the field of the world, and they realize its worth.
- *Seekers* – These people are restless and dissatisfied with the ‘answers’ provided by subjective morality and hedonism. They find the ‘pearls’ of pleasure, power, and prosperity to be as hollow and ephemeral as a soap bubble. They look for meaning in the byways of the world’s religions and philosophies. They move from east to west, trying Buddhism and Hinduism, and enlightened intellectualism and social activism. Each new ‘pearl’ of experience is like the bitterness of biting into a bad sunflower seed, and they cry with Solomon: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” (Eccl 1.2). But then they discover the ‘pearl of great price’ and know its value.

Precious Prize – The precious prize that both the stumblers and seekers find is, first, the truth that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Tim 1.15) But it is more than just knowledge of this truth. It is a package of blessings that includes:

- Faith to believe two essential facts: 1) God created all things, and 2) Jesus really did die on the cross to pay our debt and cover our sins
- Knowing real peace through forgiveness of sins and the removal of guilt
- Walking hand-in-hand with Jesus as our friend and older brother
- A cleaned-up life and an instruction manual for how to keep it clean
- A sense of the nearness of the Holy Spirit living in us and caring for us
- Conversations with the Father through prayer and reading his word
- The promise of living forever in Heaven and on the renovated earth

with God and all our friends who have discovered the Kingdom. What treasure is worth more than this?

Renounced Realms – Many people will go to great expense and endure much hardship to escape from countries with oppressive governments or bad economies. The men in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl are like refugees who leave their jobs, families, and homes; and renounce their citizenship in the country of their birth; and become citizens in their adopted country. They leave everything for membership in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In order to obtain membership in the Kingdom of Heaven, we don't have to give up our jobs (unless, of course, they are immoral), our citizenship in the nations of the earth, or our family associations and friends. What we are expected to give up is our natural lustful passions, pet addictions, love affair with pleasure, selfish attitudes, and lawless autonomy (Mt 16.24; Phil 3.7-11). We are to give up our dependence on worldly things and instead look to Jesus to see us through life and death, and into eternity. This is what it means to 'buy' the Kingdom (compare Prov 23.23; Is 55.1; Rev 3.18).

If refugees who come to our country continue to behave as if they are citizens of the country they have left, we begin to wonder why they left their former country at all. So it is with those who claim to be part of Christ's kingdom. We question their allegiance if they do not drop ('sell') everything that binds them to this world and 'buy' treasures in Heaven (Mt 6.19-21). Gaining access to the Kingdom is of such great importance that nothing should stand in the way of acquiring citizenship in it.

Don't miss the key point Jesus makes in these two parables. He is speaking about individuals buying into the Kingdom. Without a doubt there are corporate aspects of the Kingdom. But now he reminds us that each one of us, individually, must 'buy' and hold on tight to the realities of the Kingdom of Heaven through belief in Jesus and repentance of sin.

The Dragnet [May 28]

(In a house near the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.47-50)

It is quite likely that over the three years of Jesus' ministry on earth he used the same illustrations more than once—for example, with different audiences. However, in general, each Gospel writer does not record the same teaching more than once. So when we consider this parable, we should ask what it is teaching that is different from what we learned in the parable of the *Wheat and Weeds* (Mt 13.24-30, 36-43). The primary difference seems to be in their emphasis. Both parables deal with the presence of believers and hypocrites in the Church. Both also deal with the separation of the two groups on the Day of Judgment. However, the first parable focuses on the present realities, whereas this parable on the future realities.

Fishes – Jesus tells us that in the Kingdom there are “all kinds of fish”. This means that the Church brings into its scope those who are converted and others who, for many reasons, are associated with it but are not true believers in Jesus. While the net is in the sea no one can distinguish one species of fish from another. This means that it is not the job of those in positions of authority (i.e., the Elders), nor is it possible, definitively to separate these two classes. The Elders can, and should, make a separation between those who *profess* faith in Christ and those who do not (Mt 16.19). Beyond that, as this parable teaches, the separation at the heart-level belongs in Heaven.

Jesus does not tell us the meaning of the sea. Is it the world? Nor does he say what the net is. Is it Gospel preaching? Nor does he speak of the fishermen holding the net. Are they preachers? The fishermen are later (49) referred to as angels. We must be careful not to read into this part of the parable our own interpretations. Jesus is setting the stage for what comes later.

Fullness – Jesus spoke of a particular kind of net. It is a large one that can stretch behind boats for up to a kilometre. It has floats made of cork at the top and weights of lead at the bottom. The fishermen pulled the net

into a large U shape and dragged it toward the shore, gathering fish in its sweep. Once the net was full, the separation of good fishes from bad could begin. This teaches that once the full number of the elect—those for whom Christ died—has been brought to salvation (e.g., Rom 11.25), time and history (“the end of the age”) will be wrapped up on the shore of eternity in the great consummation of all things—the Judgment and restoration of the cosmos.

Filtering – Jesus speaks of a sorting process that filters out good fish from bad ones. The criterion for separation of actual fish is their suitability for eating. Fishermen separate out the inedible fish and throw them on a manure pile. Jesus applies this to the spiritual realm: “The angels will ... separate the *wicked* from the righteous.” Matthew uses a word that is usually translated as ‘bad’ (Mt 7.18; Mt 12.33) but can mean ‘corrupt’ or ‘harmful’ (Eph 4.29).

The determining factor for distinguishing good ‘fish’ from bad on the Day of Judgment will be their suitability for Heaven. This is represented by the state of the heart of each person. No one is fit for Heaven who is in essence corrupt (Eph 5.3-5; Rev 21.8; Rev 22.15). All the fish in the Church fall into one of two classes. There is no middle group between the two that are sort of Ok. The ‘fish’ who have repented of their sins and have believed in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, no matter how ugly they may appear, are kept in the container of Heaven. The ‘fish’ who appear holy to the world but are foul ‘tasting’ because they are puffed with pride, are thrown out.

Fear – Think of the scariest thing you can imagine. Maybe it involves hanging from a high balcony or having rats bite your face. People who have been really scared speak of dry mouths, weak knees, goose bumps, high heart rates, sweating, and even loose bowels. But they have felt nothing in comparison to what Jesus speaks of when he mentions the fires of Hell. These will bring “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—a fear so great that stout men become watery ‘Jell-o’.

Those who live outside the Church and reject Jesus as Lord and Saviour,

and those in the Church who depend on their own ‘righteousness’, may claim that they have no fear of Hell. They feign fearlessness because they are ignorant of the serious reality of Hell. They may appear fearless now, but once they face the reality of Hell, they will have a fear that will be ten times – one hundred times – no, more than a thousand times worse than any fear they could ever face in this life. But that fear will not end. The cause of the fear will never be removed, and even death itself will not end it.

Finality – We must be reminded of the truth of the reality of Hell’s torments. Look! The net is being filled now. The boats are moving quickly. The net is near the shore. Once it is dragged onto the sand at the world’s end, there are only two possible futures. Your future depends on what kind of ‘fish’ you are *now*. Just because you are in the net (a baptized or communicant member, or an adherent, in the visible Church) does not mean anything, in the end, unless you have Jesus as your Saviour—because as Paul says: “for not all the ones from Israel are Israel.” (Rom 9.6)

Learning and Teaching [May 29]

(In a house near the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.51-53)

Claimed Discernment – Teachers ask their students if they have understood all that was presented during the lesson. They provide an opportunity for the students to ask for clarification of difficult concepts or to have the key points reasserted. On completing his first series of parables illustrating the nature of the Kingdom, Jesus did the same thing and let his disciples ask for additional explanations of any area that might be perplexing to them. They had already asked for help to understand why he used parables (Mt 13.10; Mk 4.10) and about the specific meaning of the parables of the soils (Lk 8.9), and of the enemy who scattered weed seeds in the wheat field (Mt 13.36).

At this time the disciples said that they did understand what they had heard. On one level, they probably did understand. But if any of them had been asked ten years after the resurrection, “Did you understand all

that Jesus taught?” they probably would have responded, “No.” The truth is that the parables are at the same time both easy and difficult to understand. The difficulty arises not in understanding the key point of each parable or in fallacious attempts to attribute meaning to every aspect of the story in each parable. The difficulty is in the profound depth of each parable.

The disciples prove by their subsequent questions (Mt 15.33), lack of faith (Mt 16.8), and actions (Mt 18.1), that they did not really comprehend the incredible power of Jesus or the amazing way in which the Kingdom would unfold. But we must not judge them. We have much more light, with the complete revelation in the Bible; and we are just as faithlessly feeble.

We can understand that the kingdom will grow from something small like a mustard seed into a great institution, or that in the visible church there are both true believers and hypocrites, whom only God can tell apart. What we find difficult to understand is how truly magnificent the growth of the church really is, or how desperately wicked is the heart of even some of those who profess to be Christians and attend church faithfully, and even get involved in its work of ministry. We see all of present reality through a mist. It is only when we reach Glory and look at the spectacular sweep of what God has accomplished in redemptive history that we will be able to understand the true depth of what the *Parables of the Kingdom* teach. Then we will cry out, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power!”

We should learn from the question that Jesus put to his disciples that there is no shame in admitting that we do not understand what God is teaching in his Word. We should examine our understanding and ask God for wisdom when we don’t comprehend (James 1.5). Jesus invites us to turn to him for instruction.

Cohesive Diversity – In teaching the disciples Jesus prepares future teachers. He not only wants them to understand the content about the Kingdom but also to apply good methodology when delivering the content. He uses a parable to illustrate this. His own technique has been

to bring out of the storeroom of the mysteries of Heaven new and old treasures. In the parables he has just delivered, he presents truth revealed by the ancient prophets; but he adds new dimensions to that truth and enhances the revelation of truth.

We are to follow his example, but we do not add revelation. When we teach or preach we are continually to reinforce the solid foundations of the truth of the Gospel while adding to the superstructure. This means that we must never cease to present the ‘good old story’ that through belief in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as our substitute and through repentance of sins we will be saved. But we must not stop there. We must build on this as we teach and encourage one another to live out Christian lives of hope and obedience in the complexity of modern society. Jesus implies that we should:

- Use variety in our methods of presenting truth: dialogue, debate, stories, illustrations, figures of speech, probing questions, lectures, etc.
- Cover all aspects of the teachings of Scripture: over time, touch on every doctrine and subject in proportionate balance as found in Scripture.
- Include all parts of Scripture: OT, NT, law, history, wisdom literature, poetry, gospel, writings, apocalyptic. (2 Tim 3.16)
- Maintain the principle that in God’s revelation there is abundant diversity within the essential unity of the whole.

Controlling Direction – Jesus had a mission to fulfill; he had direction and purpose guiding every action. When he had completed teaching the *Kingdom Parables* he moved to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. This does not mean that each of us is to become an itinerant preacher and to stay in one place for only a week. But it does indicate that, like Jesus, we need to know where we are going. Individual congregations, and the Church as a whole, need to have an explicit direction. The Church is not to be composed of self-serving ghettos that wander through time until they die of irrelevancy. We are to challenge our times and our culture with the most important message it will ever hear—the Gospel of Jesus Christ who came into the world to save sinners. We are to take this

message to every rational creature on earth with authority, intensity, expectation, and urgency. (Mt 28.18-20)

Continuing Opposition

Powerful Preservation from the Storms of Life [May 30]
(On the Sea of Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 8.18, 23-27; Mk 4.35-41; Lk 8.22-25)

When Jesus had completed delivering a series of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven he was tired from the press of the crowds and asked his disciples to go to the other side of the lake. In doing so, he leaves Jewish territory and heads into Gentile territory where he performs three miracles: calms the sea, casts out a legion of demons, and heals an unclean woman. He then returns to Jewish territory and gives life back to a dead girl. The symbolism in these actions should not be missed. The sea in the OT often represented the nations (Is 17.12). Jesus declares that he is master over the nations. Through him there is spiritual and physical healing. But eternal life is only granted through the Jewish Messiah.

Rest – We read of Jesus praying through the night, but this is the only time in the life of Jesus where we find a reference to him sleeping. Although he had a divine nature he was not a superman; he had to rest. But the fact that we are told of his sleep in only this case must have significance beyond confirming his human nature. As with all that is recorded of Jesus, he slept to teach a lesson: in the midst of the (physical, spiritual, or psychological) storms of life we are to trust that God will care for us (Ps 3.5; Ps 4.8; Prov 3.24).

Request – The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills that make it subject to storms that often arise on the lake without warning. Even though a number of the disciples were fishermen who had extensive experience on the lake, this storm seems to have frightened them more than other storms they had seen. The Greek uses a strong word, of the nature of an earthquake, to describe this storm. It may be that this storm was far worse than any other previously seen. Whether or not it was the worst, it

was severe. God's providence was controlling not only the quality of the storm but also its timing. In response to this storm the disciples awaken Jesus and ask him to save them because they thought that the boat was going to be swamped and they would drown.

There is an irony in this request when compared with their response to the miracle that Jesus performed. They assumed that Jesus could save them, yet when he did, they were surprised at his power. It reminds us of the time that the disciples were praying for Peter when he was in prison (Acts 12.5) and they were surprised when he was freed by God. If we ask Jesus to act, we must believe that he can and will act, and that he can do so in amazing ways.

Reply – It is this irony that helps us understand why Jesus calls them 'ones of little faith' (Mt 8.26) and asks them, after they show amazement, where their faith is (Mk 4.40; Lk 8.25). Their request seems to indicate that they have faith that he can do something about the danger they are in because of the storm's severity. The problem is that their faith isn't *big enough*. Their view of God and of Jesus as the God-man is just too small. They may have called him 'teacher' but they had not really been listening to his teaching.

Do we really understand what it means when we say that Jesus is God? Do we really understand who God is and what he can do? By our little faith we often act like we can put God in a cardboard box and limit his power. No matter how bad our circumstances may appear, they are not beyond the power of God who controls all things. God has promised that he will never leave or forsake us (Heb 13.5). We must not let our little faith influence our trust in the God who can do the 'impossible' (Mk 10.27).

Rebuke – The disciples have not understood his words, so Jesus teaches them about his true nature—as the God-man—by acting. By a word of rebuke Jesus demonstrated the following:

- He acts with the authority of God (Ps 89.8-9; Ps 106.8-9; Ps 107.23-30).

- He speaks, as he did at creation, and the natural realm obeys (Gen 1.3).
- He proves that the pagan gods of the storm are nothing and the nations of the earth (represented by the sea) are subject to him (Ps 47.8; Ps 74.12-14; Is 63.12).
- He is greater than the prophets who had to use a rod (Moses), ark of the covenant (Joshua), or prophet's mantle (Elisha) to control the waters.

Response – Some critics of the Bible claim that God could not have stopped the rotation of the earth in Joshua's day (Jos 10.12-14) because the sudden effect of stopping the earth's spin would have thrown everything on earth into space. We have in this miracle, of calming the storm, a similar situation. The storms on the Sea of Galilee would often stop as suddenly as they started. But who could imagine that the effect of the wind on the waves would instantly cease?

It is not surprising therefore that the disciples are amazed and terrified (Mk 4.41) at what they experience; it is beyond anything they could even imagine. Note that their terror was not from the storm but resulted from what they saw Jesus do. They realized that the power of God was standing with them. But their questions 'Who is this?' and 'What kind of man is this?' indicate that they still did not understand how God could be present with them as a man. We must not underestimate Jesus. As the infinite and eternal God he can do anything—including preserving us from every 'storm' in this life.

Healing the Gerasene Demoniacs [May 31] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 8.28-32; Mk 5.1-13; Lk 8.26-33)**

Delivering Pagans – Jesus goes to the other side of the lake in order to get some rest away from the crowds in Galilee. As he arrives two demon-possessed men confront him. When Jesus began his ministry among the Jews, Satan challenged him with demon possession (Mk 1.21-28). In the same way his lordship is challenged as he arrives in the Gentile region of the Gerasenes (Gadarenes, Gergesenes). But just as he had calmed the

sea and declared his lordship over all nations (Is 17.12), so through exorcism he shows that his authority extends over the kingdoms of the world. Jesus came first to the lost sheep of Israel; but he is saviour of the world (Jn 3.16; Jn 4.42).

Demon Possession – The circumstances of the more violent of the two demon-possessed men is presented in detail. The account shows the extent to which Satan will drive people in order to keep them from finding joy, truth, and hope. We must not think that the pathetic condition of this man is exceptional. Many people today live like wild animals in sexual promiscuity; worship the demons of drugs and alcohol; rape, murder, and steal; or live on the streets as outcasts. They may not be directly possessed by demons because the restraining power of Christ, since his resurrection, has bound Satan and his demons; but they are still under the power of Satan until they are converted. In fact, any person who does not have the Holy Spirit living in him is full of pride, envy, anger, and hatred and is ‘demon’ possessed.

Defiant Provocation – The men were possessed by multiple demons who challenged the authority of Jesus as:

- *Lord* – The demons knew who Jesus was. They called him the Son of the Most High God. This is not a title that describes him as a son like Adam, but rather it sets him apart as the second person of the Trinity. As God, Jesus can do with his creation what he chooses. He sets the boundaries of space and time for each part of his rational creation—human and angelic/demonic. While the demons know that Jesus is God and has authority over all creation (Eph 1.21; Col 2.15), they do not want to accept his authority over *them*. They are rebellious creatures who hate him and his work and people.
- *Lawgiver* – The demons also know that their time of eternal punishment draws near. Yet, they still try to limit God’s right to establish law and to judge according to law. They attempt to put a box around God through their claim that it is not his time to punish them. God will punish sinful creatures when he chooses and in accordance with his holy standards.

Unsaved men are no different from demons. They reject Jesus as

sovereign today and deny that his laws have any relevance for life. They also reject his right to establish the standards for punishment (e.g., for capital crimes). The demons at least acknowledge Jesus as God, because they at one time were angels who walked in heaven. Most men, in contrast, think of Jesus as nothing more than a curse word.

Desperate Pleading – The demons’ ineffective challenge of the authority of Jesus is quickly replaced with desperate pleading. Their bombast is nothing more than hot air that becomes a whimper of dread. We must not think that their request to enter the pigs is just to avoid becoming disembodied spirits. There probably were demons who did not have control over physical creatures; thus the presence of legions in one pitiable soul. Their request is to avoid more than just being returned to their former state. They feared receiving their eternal punishment—torture in the abyss of Hell (Mt 25.41)—before the end of the age.

The demons by their pleading acknowledge that Christ is the only one who could provide a means of escape. It is not knowledge, however, that can save them from Hell. Nor is it pleading the knowledge of Christ that will save us (Mt 7.21-23). The only way of escape is through love of God, in Christ, and obedience to his commands (Dt 7.9; Jn 14.15). For demons there is no escape. They lost all hope of eternal bliss when they, as individuals, rejected their first estate in the presence of God by following Satan in his attempt to usurp God’s throne. For them there is no mercy. For mankind there is hope. We can escape the consequences of sin brought upon us by Adam, by believing in the finished work of the Last Adam—Jesus Christ. It is love and obedience that sets apart a disciple from a demon.

Dead Pigs – In the Ceremonial Law, pigs were unclean animals (Lev 11.7). By driving the demons out of Gentiles and allowing them to enter the pigs, Jesus seems to be indicating that the Gentiles, as a group, are now considered ‘clean’. No longer will they have to live in tombs of spiritual darkness and eat the unclean food of depravity (Is 65.4)—Jesus will save them. In contrast, there is no hope for the demons that are consigned to the pigs—they remain unclean. Note that the demons

pleaded to enter the pigs so that they could avoid destruction in the abyss. Yet, ironically, they met their doom in the abyss of the sea; and probably were delivered over to eternal punishment. This living parable teaches that all people who continue in rebellion against God's sovereignty and justice will destroy themselves in the abyss of Hell.

Reaction to the Healing of the Gerasene Demoniacs [June

1]

(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 8.33-34; Mk 5.14-20; Lk 8.34-39)

The Gospel writers report the reaction of three classes of people when the legion of demons were exorcised from the Gerasene demoniacs:

Herdsmen – After the pigs ran over the cliff into the sea, those tending them ran into the town to report what had happened. The reason they ran off is not supplied. However, we may infer that they were afraid. This seems to be supported by the fact that they *ran* into the town when they saw that their pigs had been destroyed. What was it specifically that they feared? It was not evil powers. Notice that the herders appear not to have been particularly afraid when they watched their pigs near the tombs. They may have been cautious around the demon-possessed men, but they seem not to have had a great fear of being near them. In contrast, when Jesus cast out the demons they ran off. What caused their fear? It was not the loss of material wealth. Their herds had already perished in the sea. Rather it was a fear of the person who had power to command even a legion of demons to leave a troubled man.

You might be surprised by their reaction. Shouldn't they rather have been attracted to Jesus? Men who have been raised in the darkness of paganism are truly afraid when they are confronted by the power of the true God. It is no different today. What do evil men fear? Ultimately, not war, famine, pestilence, disease, abuse, economic collapse, or loss of their worldly goods. What they truly fear is coming face to face with the living God who rules the universe. All men know that there is a God to whom they are accountable. They do not want to be reminded of this fact and they do everything in their power to suppress this truth. They try to

drive out God's laws and to expel his people from their communities.

The reaction of the herdsmen reminds us that God's power, whether in creation or exercised governing the destinies of his rational creatures, is not to be ignored. We are not to turn our backs on it in fear. Rather, we must bow in awe before the one who, with a word, creates or destroys.

Hearers – Those to whom the events were reported were likely curious about what they had heard. But even more, they were concerned about what further loss might be suffered by themselves and their community. They were not impressed or thrilled by the fact that the most pathetic of the demon-possessed men had been saved from destructive circumstances and from his sins. Their only concern was that the man who had perpetrated the works should leave their territory. They may have thought that Jesus was a *jinn*, or super-demon, who by taking on human form (see, Mt 12.24), could do more than take possession of a human. The irony is that that they in fact met with the one who had left the spirit realm to take on human form—the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Men today prefer pigs to the Prince of Peace. They are more concerned about their cottages or Cadillacs, finances or fingernails, and health or homes, than they are about the spiritual condition of anyone. When a person they know is converted by the Holy Spirit and leaves a life of degeneracy and debauchery they refer to his transformation as 'finding religion' or 'finding God' and dismiss him as loony. Rather than respond in wonder and awe to the greatest miracle of all—the salvation of a sinner—they relegate Christ and Christians to the garbage heap of history.

Jesus did leave their territory, never to return again. The demons achieved their short-term purpose—the work of Jesus was hindered and souls were damned for eternity. For the sake of property, paradise was lost.

Healed – Yet, the demons did not gain the final victory. We find one of the men from whom the demons were cast out, in his right mind, sitting

at Jesus' feet as a pupil, desiring to accompany Jesus as one of his disciples. Those who are truly sane are those who desire to learn from Jesus. They are not just curious about his works but also desire to hear his word. Jesus did not, however, accept the man's request to participate in formal training. That was not his calling; Jesus had other plans for him.

In Judea, Jesus generally commanded those who had been healed not to talk about his work until he had completed his teaching ministry (Mk 1.44; Mk 5.43; Mk 7.36). In contrast, in Perea, the region of the Gerasenes, he sent the man to his estranged family and community to proclaim the wonder of his healing. The man obeyed and spread the word, not only in his own town but also throughout the ten cities in the region (Mk 5.20). Jesus was not left without a witness even in the midst of pagan idolatry.

This man is a representative of the firstfruits of the Gentiles who were brought into the Kingdom and took seriously their obligation to spread the Gospel to the world. We are the heirs of their diligent efforts. We should be as eager to tell of what Jesus has done for us as was the Gerasene demoniac.

Responding to a Religious Ruler's Request [June 2] **(Capernaum, Winter 32 AD. Mt 9.18-19, 23-24; Mk 5.21-24, 35-36; Lk 8.40-42, 49-50, 52, 53)**

Jesus returned to the Jewish territory of Galilee from the Gentile region of Gerasa where he had cured the demoniacs. Immediately he was confronted by additional challenges to demonstrate his Messianic authority, through two requests for healing—one from a ruler seeking help for his daughter, and the other from a woman needing to be cured of a long-term hemorrhage.

Ruler's Request – Jairus, one of the rulers (elders) in the Synagogue, approached Jesus and knelt at his feet. He begged Jesus to place his hands on his only daughter, who was about twelve years old, and heal

her before she died. Jairus' request teaches:

- *Humility* – As a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus did not need to kneel before any man in the Jewish community. It was desperation that pulled him to his knees. But it was more: he knew that Jesus had greater authority than any man, and he came humbly before him.
- *Hope* – He came with a confident hope that what he asked for Jesus could perform. This hope was based on experiential evidence. Jesus had expelled a demon in his own Synagogue (Mk 1.21-28).
- *Healing Hands* – His request for “laying on of hands” for healing does not seem to be based on OT precedent. He may have seen or heard of Jesus using this method of healing (Lk 4.40). Regardless, it appears to symbolize the transfer of power or vitality to a recipient.
- *Hearing* – Jairus' request of Jesus contrasts with the hostility of many of the other religious leaders—especially the Pharisees. This indicates that Jesus was obtaining a hearing and that some people were beginning to acknowledge that he was the Messiah.

Clearly we should come before Jesus, the Christ (Messiah), in the same way. We must bow before him humbly (Phil 2.10), knowing that he can save us and provide for our welfare in this life and into eternity.

Redeemer's Response – Jesus agreed to go with Jairus without hesitation, but it was in his eternal plan to introduce a delay. In the crowd, was a woman who needed his attention. While he attended to her need, Jairus' daughter died. Men came from his house to report the death, and they told him not to bother Jesus further. Jesus refused to listen to their report and told Jairus not to be afraid but to keep on believing.

The delay resulted in a severe test of Jairus' faith. In the same way, there will be times in our own lives when sceptics or circumstances might cause us to doubt. We need to listen to Jesus and really believe that everything is unfolding according to his plan and will be set right in the end.

Rabble's Ridicule – When he arrived at the house where the girl lay dead, he found the crowd of hired mourners (Jer 9.17; Amos 5.16) participating in their elaborate rituals. Jesus rebuked them and told them

that the girl was sleeping. They responded with laughs of ridicule.

Jesus did not mean that the girl was in a coma, nor was he speaking of some form of intermediate state between death and the resurrection that some call ‘soul sleep’. She truly was dead (Jn 11.11-14) —her soul/spirit had left her body. What he was saying was:

- From God’s perspective, raising the dead is as simple as someone awakening from sleep. Our mistake is to think that it is difficult for God to raise the dead, and we miss the reality that even what seems simple—awakening from sleep—is amazing.
- From man’s perspective, it would appear that she had been sleeping. She would come out of her room refreshed, as if she had taken a nap.
- Her condition was not final and irrevocable. Death is not the end of existence. There is a resurrection for all people (Jn 5.28; Acts 24.15) and a continuing existence in eternity—either in Heaven or Hell.

The simple statement of Jesus, “the girl is not dead but asleep,” should be a great comfort to us. It teaches clearly that Jesus is master of life and death and it signifies that there is a resurrection yet to come. Our encouragement is that death is not final. Those Christians among our relatives and friends who have died are not forever lost to us. Their physical existence is, as it were, sleeping. We will all be reunited, in a refreshed awakening (1 Thess 4.14, 17).

Righteous Rabbi – While going to Jairus’ home, Jesus was *touched* by the woman with a haemorrhage. Luke mentions it four times (Lk 8.44, 45, 46, 47) to make sure we don’t miss it. This made Jesus ceremonially unclean (Lev 15.25-27). By allowing the ‘unclean’ Jesus to enter his home, Jairus showed that he had faith in the promise that his daughter would be restored to life. Once in his home, Jesus again defiled himself by touching the dead girl (Num 19.11). In one sense, Jesus cannot be defiled by sin, or its symbols of uncleanness. On the other hand, by touching our uncleanness he identifies fully with our need. As our perfectly righteous high priest, Jesus does not leave us in our unclean state, as the Levitical priests did (Lev 21.10, 11). He reaches out and touches us with the hand of eternal life.

A Remarkable Resurrection [June 3]
(Capernaum, Winter 32 AD. Mt 9.25-26; Mk 5.37-43; Lk 8.51, 54-56)

The remarkable circumstances relating to the resurrection of Jairus' daughter are seen in the following considerations:

Witnesses – Jesus permitted only three disciples to accompany him into the house as witnesses to the resurrection. Why did he not allow other disciples or all the mourners to enter? We could ask the question another way—why did he take any witness at all, if he was only going to permit three to attend? It may be that the three were selected to meet the requirement of the law—that there should be a plurality of witnesses if a murderer is to be put to death (Dt 17.6). But why would a provision related to murder be applied? Jesus turned death on its head. Instead of procuring witnesses before a person was put to death, he procured them to witness that the person was truly dead. It may be also that Jesus applied the concept of the three witnesses in a broader sense—when any matter required validation (see: 1 Jn 5.7, 8). He limited the number of witnesses to three, because that is all that is required to validate the truthfulness of an event or statement. He excluded the rest of the disciples because if others are not convinced by the testimony of the three they won't be convinced by the testimony of three hundred. He excluded the mourners because their hearts were hard and they would not believe what they saw.

We can apply the selection of the witnesses to the presentation and reception of the Gospel. Unbelievers need to hear the truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment from only three witnesses: an evangelist, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. More are not required, and in some cases two witnesses can effect the salvation of a sinner (e.g., the Bible and the Holy Spirit, or a concerned friend and the Holy Spirit). But the future of those who continue to reject these witnesses is sealed—like the mourners who were sent away. Where is our belief?

Word – Jesus spoke a command. He did not invoke a magical formula.

In this miracle Jesus unveiled his divine nature. At his command the girl came to life. The Word who spoke the universe into existence (Gen 1.1-31; Jn 1.3) can certainly, with a word, revive the dead to life. This has two applications for us. With the same voice of command Jesus: 1) revives souls dead in sin (Mt 9.2-6; Lk 7.48, 50), and 2) will awaken the dead on the Last Day (1 Thess 4.16). Where is our faith?

Wholeness – The girl walked around and Jesus commanded that she be given food. This simple statement indicates the compassion of Jesus—he cared for the girl’s welfare, and it also confirms that she was restored to full health. It teaches us that Jesus truly cares for our welfare and will provide everything we *need* in this life (Mt 6.25-34) and will, at the Resurrection, provide us with new bodies that will be entirely whole—they will be glorious and not subject to decay (1 Cor 15.42-58). Where is our trust?

Wonder – The parents and the three disciples were completely astonished at what they saw (Mk 5.43). What astonished them: the resurrection of the girl, the simplicity of the command, or that she was made completely whole? We are not told, but we can surmise that it was a combination of all three.

Have we become immune to wonder? With the technological advancements around us have we come to expect the unexpected? We flip a switch and light fills a room. We press a button and we see events happening in real-time on the other side of the world. We open our refrigerators and quantities of fresh food tumble out to satisfy our appetites. Have the reality and the prospect of the resurrection lost their impact? How do we respond when we read this account about Jairus’ daughter, or of the events that transpired in the Garden of Gethsemane on the third day after the crucifixion?

Do we really understand what the resurrection means? It is a first principle of the Christian life (Acts 4.2; 1 Cor 15.13, 14), the great hope of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ (Phil 3.11), and the gateway to a glorified eternity with Christ (Col 3.4; 2 Cor 5.1; Rev 20.6).

Where is our wonder?

Warning – Jesus ordered the witnesses to silence about what they had seen. He did not want the miracle to attract people to him for the wrong reasons. His earthly mission was not to awaken the physically dead—they would die again—but to put an end to spiritual and eternal death. Crowds coming to Jesus at this point, for the wrong reasons, would hinder his drive toward Jerusalem and the formal declaration of his office as the Redeemer of Israel (Jn 12.23, 31-33; Jn 18.33-37; Jn 19.14).

The parents of the girl, or the disciples, apparently did not obey Jesus' injunction, because news of the resurrection spread throughout the region (Mt 9.26). Ironically, the Church has been given a different injunction. We are now to go into the world proclaiming Jesus as the resurrection and the life (Jn 11.25; Mt 28.19, 20), but we seem to be very ineffective. Where is our obedience?

Healing a Haemorrhage [June 4] **(Capernaum, Winter 32 AD. Mt 9.20-22; Mk 5.24-34; Lk 8.42-48)**

At this point in the life of Jesus we find him performing a series of miracles that cover the spectrum of possibilities. He shows that the 'forces' of nature and the spiritual world are subject to his command when he calms the storm and casts out a legion of demons. He also shows that life and death are under his authority when he heals a woman of her bleeding and moves on to bring back to life a dead girl (Jairus' daughter).

While on the way to Jairus' home he is momentarily waylaid by the approach of the woman with a haemorrhage. We learn from the account of her case, about her:

Troubles – She must have kept her troubles secret since she had been afflicted by uterine bleeding for twelve years and no one seemed to know about it. We are not told this explicitly, but can infer it from the fact that if people had known about her condition they would have shunned her as

being ceremonially unclean (Lev 15.19-33) and not allowed her to be in their close proximity in the crowd or they also would have become unclean. In addition she approached Jesus secretly so that no one would know of her need.

It is not a stretch for us to apply her condition to our own. It is clear that we are to understand ceremonial uncleanness in the OT economy as a type or symbol of man's innate sinfulness (Num 12.9-15; Ps 51.7, 10; Is 35.8; Is 52.1). Therefore we can draw an analogy and application from her condition. At birth we are all afflicted with an internal bleeding of sin. Most of us do a 'good' job hiding most of the ugliness or our sin and we generally are too ashamed to let people know what we are really like.

Trials – The poor woman had spent twelve years looking for a cure. She was poor not only because of her condition but also because she had spent everything she had—all of her wealth. Most men and women do the same thing spiritually. They try desperately to find a solution to their 'bleeding' to death from sin. They try to patch the wound of sin with religions of the world—from mysticism and 'enlightenment' to works-based righteousness—ever searching and never finding. Or, they try to stanch the bleeding with possessions, power, or passions. They spend resources in a wild frenzy but the bleeding just gets worse.

Touch – Her faith mingled with superstitious belief drove her to one more desperate attempt at a cure. She reached out to touch the blue tassels (Num 15.37-41; Dt 22.12) on the edge of Jesus' robe. She may have heard Jesus teaching and had probably heard of his ability to perform miracles, but it isn't clear why she thought that touching the tassels would cure her. There may have been a general belief in the Jewish population that touching something that belonged to a prophet would heal them of their ailments (2 Ki 4.29-31; 2 Ki 13.20, 21; Acts 19.12). Ironically the tassels symbolized the Law (Num 15.39, 40)—the very Law she was breaking as she polluted everything and everyone she touched.

No matter how ugly and secretive our sin is, we can approach Christ and

he will heal us. Even if our faith in him is, at first, mingled with much superstition he will still provide a cure from the disease that is wasting us. The place to start is the Law. We must come to Jesus knowing that we have broken his Law and are sinners.

Her approach also teaches us not to be harsh and narrow with those who come to Jesus from within other traditions in the broader Christian Church. We will be pleasantly surprised at how Jesus will accept any who earnestly seek him even if their approach has been tinged with liturgical superstitions.

Transformation – She was healed immediately, and knew it. Jesus’ words indicate that he provided a healing that went deeper than stanching blood loss. She was healed to the root of her soul as Jesus:

- Informed her it was her faith in him (not her touch) that had healed her.
- Placed her in a new relationship with himself—calling her daughter.
- Blessed her with health and peace.

Jesus will heal anyone spiritually and eternally who reaches out to him.

“Tele-appearance” – Of course her actions weren’t on CNN. Nevertheless she became the headline news at six-o’clock throughout Capernaum. Jesus sensed her deliberate touch of faith and distinguished it from the jostling of the crowd. Jesus knew who it was but asked the question to draw her out in the same way God called Adam after he had sinned (Gen 3.9). But she, at first, was among those who denied that anyone had specifically touched him (Lk 8.45). So Jesus would not permit her to remain a secret believer. He made her approach him publicly, even in fear, and declare her faith and cure.

So it is with all who come to Jesus for salvation. We should not hope to touch him only in secret. We must not be embarrassed to let the world know the depravity we have been saved from. We must publicly fall at his feet and confess with our mouths (Rom 10.9, 10) that he has made us whole.

Healing the Blind and Mute [June 5] **(Capernaum, Winter 32 AD. Mt 9.27-34)**

Supernatural Disposition – As we go through each day we often lose sight of how God's providence unfolds in every event or action. All things that happen—a phone call, a decision about what to eat for supper, or a change in our route to a meeting—are interconnected in God's plan. There really are no *big* events or decisions since even what we deem to be small and insignificant could affect the direction of our lives and the course of history.

When we take this perspective it is interesting to note how, at this point in Jesus' ministry, he seems to perform one miracle after another in quick succession. Leaving the place of a remarkable resurrection (27), he was met by two blind men. As they left, healed, a demon-possessed mute was brought to him (32). It seems that what Matthew is conveying is not just the power of Jesus over the natural and supernatural realms but also the unfolding of God's eternal plan. Our focus should not be on the miracles themselves. For the God-man to cure blindness is not amazing, since he created the entire universe and holds it together (Col 1.15-17). What we should see instead is how God has woven the threads of our lives into the tapestry of his glorious governance. We should marvel not at the deliverances but at the disposition.

Solemn Declaration – Jesus performed miracles primarily to validate his claim as the Messiah. He was recognized as such by those who believed in him. We see this in the appeal of the blind men (27) to him as the Son of David (Ezk 34.23; Mt 21.9) and their acknowledgement of him as Lord (28). But in a town (Capernaum) near his home he was generally not accepted as the final Prophet (Dt 18.18). We will consider in our next meditation his rejection by his own people. It may be that Jesus performed these miracles not only to declare his deity but also to provide a solemn declaration of condemnation against those who would not believe in him.

Specific Devices – God's providences vary for all of us. He never deals

with one person in the same way as another. Some who are true believers and are powerful witnesses for the work of his kingdom are removed from the earth at a young age. Others live into their 90s. Some of his people seem to face one storm after another with no end, in this life, to their difficulties. Others seem to sail along facing nothing stronger than a fresh breeze. We must leave the disposition of events to God who knows what is best for each of us.

We are provided with an illustration of this principle in the means used by Jesus to effect the healings in these two miracles. In one case he demanded a confession of faith; in the other he healed a mute who could never have voiced his belief. Jesus in this instance healed the blind by touching them (29). In other cases he used spit or mud and washing (Mk 8.23; Jn 9.6, 7).

Some people attempt to bring faith, and a trial of faith (that some see in 28), to the forefront in miracles of healing. They say that without faith being evident God cannot perform miracles (29), quoting such passages as Matthew 13.58. Today 'faith healers' decry a lack of faith when there is no working of the Spirit. However, Matthew's juxtaposition of these two miracles teaches us that faith is a means, not the cause, of the healing. Faith is a gift of God (Eph 2.8) which once given must be exercised (28) but it is not required for God to work miracles of healing. We must not focus on the faith of the blind men and argue from this to a requirement that all healings are dependent on a credible outward profession of faith.

Selfish Disobedience – Do not applaud the blind men for disobeying Jesus' command to keep silent (30). In spreading the news about him (31), the ends, no matter how excellent, cannot be used to justify the means. When we proclaim Jesus and worship God we must never let our zeal, no matter how sincere, our opinions about what 'works', or our feelings about what is 'good', overrule our obedience to God's direct commands. If we really want to give glory to God, both our actions and attitudes must conform to his will (1 Sam 15.21-23; Jn 4.24).

Sceptical Darkness – Among the crowd of those who claimed to be enlightened, devoted to God and pious, were those who blasphemed Jesus by attributing his work to Satan (34). This warns us that even in the Church there will be those who will question God's power in creation and providence (Mt 7.15; 2 Pt 2.1-3). For example, they will attribute God's works to chance and allow 'science' to take precedence over revelation.

Spiritual Disabilities – Jesus performed these miracles to validate him as the Messiah and to point to the spiritual healing—salvation from sin—that he provides (Is 29.18; Is 35.6; Is 42.18; Is 43.8). The crowd was amazed (33) because they had limited vision. They could not see beyond this space-time realm. They were, if not by confession then by practice, materialistic naturalists. We must instead be Biblical realists who understand that the God-man who made the light shine out of darkness can not only bring light to blinded eyes but also shine the glorious light of salvation into darkened hearts (2 Cor 4.6).

Honourless Prophet [June 6] (Nazareth, Winter 32 AD. Mt 13.54-58; Mk 6.1-6a)

Hometown Preaching – Jesus had taught in his hometown over two years before this visit, and was rejected then by his own people (Luke 4.16-30). He returned at this time, with his disciples around him—students traveling with an itinerant Rabbi—to give his family and friends another chance to accept him as the Messiah before he commenced his final tour of Galilee. His reputation as a teacher and worker of miracles proceeded him. His teaching was too wise and amazing for the rulers of the synagogue to prohibit him from sitting in the instructor's chair at their assembly on the Sabbath.

Jesus may have hoped for acceptance this time, but it was not to be. The people of Nazareth rejected him again. Although they could not deny the power of his teaching, and validation of it through miraculous signs, they could not overcome their prejudices against a son of the congregation being their teacher. They listened, but they did not heed. Are we like these people? Do we just accept Jesus as a fine teacher, without bowing

to his authority?

Harmful Pondering – Doubt is the friend of unbelief. The people of Nazareth exhibit their unbelief through dismissive contempt masquerading as a series of questions. By their pondering, they accuse Jesus of being:

- *A mere man* – They realized that true wisdom and miraculous powers do not originate with men, yet they still rejected him. In the same way many people today willingly accept materialistic myths about the origins of the universe by chance, but will not believe Jesus' claim to be God.
- *A labourer* – Jesus didn't receive a Ph.D., write a book per year, or go on the talk show circuit. He worked most of his life in obscurity in his father's carpentry business. We must avoid the tendency so prevalent in our society to worship those from the right 'academies'. The secular and humanistic academies have led the charge to political correctness and intolerance of Christianity. We also must not despise Bible teachers who proclaim truth but who do not have a string of letters after their names.
- *Of questionable birth* – Their use of "Mary's son" was probably a veiled insult in Jewish usage (Judges 11.1-2; Jn 9.29). It implies that they knew there was something unusual about his birth. The implication is that they thought he was illegitimate.
- *Too familiar* – They question how Jesus could be anything special since they knew all his brothers and sisters—the children born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. His family were probably just ordinary folk with no prominence in the local synagogue. And, at this time, even his own brothers did not believe he was the Messiah (Jn 7.5).

Wilful unbelief never has difficulty finding excuses to justify itself. We must be very careful not to fall into the trap of believing that Jesus as an "ordinary" man is not also God. Paul says truly that "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." (1 Cor 1.27)

Hurt People – There were only two possibilities for Jesus' wisdom and

works: the power of Satan (Mk 3.22) or the power of God (Jn 10.37-38). This choice scandalized the people of Nazareth, and they refused to believe that he was the Messiah. It has been the same throughout history. People can accept that Jesus was a good teacher, but they become intensely offended when Christians present Jesus as the *only* way to God (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12).

Honourless Prophet – The proverb Jesus quoted (see also, Jn 4.44) confirmed his role as a Prophet and condemned their rejection of him. They were no different from the ancient Jews who had rejected the prophets sent to warn them of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. Scoffers abound in these last days who deny that Jesus will return to this earth as judge to execute eternal vengeance on all who reject him (2 Pt 3.3-4; Heb 10.26-31).

Hopeless ‘Pagans’ – When they report that Jesus could not perform many miracles in Nazareth, the Gospel writers are not suggesting that God’s power to heal or save is limited. Rather, they are focusing on human responsibility to accept or reject God’s messenger. Jesus was astonished at how the scepticism of the people of Nazareth had turned to disbelief. As a result, he left, never to return—and they lost their opportunity to receive the Messiah.

Like those in Nazareth, the Jews, as a people, rejected their Messiah (Jn 1.11). They remain in their unbelief to this day (2 Cor 3.14-15). They, along with every person who rejects Jesus, are essentially like pagans who do not have the true religion and have no hope in this life, or in eternity (Eph 2.12).

Of course, individual Jews did believe in Jesus. After the resurrection, at least some of his siblings believed. His brother James became a leader in the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 15.13-21), and wrote an epistle (James 1.1). And Judas is probably Jude, the author of the Epistle of Jude. However, the key message of this account is that those who persist in unbelief will be cut off forever from the grace of God.

Final Galilean Tour

Workers Sought ^[June 7]

(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 9.35-38; Mk 6.6b)

In these verses Matthew summarizes the work that Jesus performed and provides a synopsis of God's plan and strategy for redeeming lost sinners.

The Mission – Jesus went throughout Galilee to revisit the towns and villages in which he had previously preached. He took the initiative, making another attempt to convince the crowds of their need and to provide them with a solution. He didn't just visit a few key cities as a token of concern for the territory. In spite of rejection by many, including his own family and townsmen, and opposition from the leaders of the people, particularly the Pharisees, he had a burden for the common people. In this Galilean tour, he exercised his three-fold ministry of teaching, preaching and healing.

Jesus provides a lesson, by example, to the disciples before he gives them explicit instruction. It is also given to the Church to teach us how we are to carry on his work until he returns. We learn that the Church is to:

- *Go out* – We cannot sit back and wait for the needy to come to us. We have to find ways to meet them at their point of need. Evangelism can occur in a church setting, but that is not to be the primary forum.
- *Teach* – In the midst of the worshiping covenant-community, we are to provide constant instruction in the matters of faith and practice.
- *Preach* – We are to proclaim the good news to those who are living in sin and the superstitions of false religions, that in Jesus there is true hope and salvation from sin.
- *Heal* – The miracles of *physical* healing performed by Jesus validated his ministry and claim to divinity, and pointed to the *spiritual* healing that he could provide. The Holy Spirit continues to provide healing through the preaching, teaching, and ministry of

compassion provided by Christians.

This set the stage for the mission given to the Twelve and to the Church.

The Motive – Ancient Sumerian cucumber growers, Hellenistic shepherds, Middle Ages carpenters, and modern North American bank tellers all think the same way. Ever since the first cities were built after the Flood, people have flocked in crowds to the shopping malls, sports arenas and concert halls; and have observed their pagan festivals with celebration and offerings. They wander aimlessly through life following the latest fashion or trend established by the cultural ‘elite’ who, just like the Pharisees, define ‘political correctness’ for their day. They are “like sheep without a shepherd” (1 Ki 22.17) struggling to find meaning and hope in the face of the daily hassles of life that lead to nothing but depression, despair, and death.

It is for people like these that the God-man felt gut-wrenching pity. He left Glory to be born in poverty, serve in humility, and die in ignominy. He did this to offer himself a ransom for the common people, to lift their minds and hearts from the passing and decaying to the eternally glorious, and to save precious souls—spirit and body. He did this because he is Love (1 Jn 4.16).

The Measure – For the Church, living in what appears to be the day of small things (Zech 4.10), we must not become discouraged. It is the *crowd* that Jesus had pity on, not a few wanderers in the rarefied paths of enlightenment. It is from the crowd of humanity that a plentiful harvest of souls is being gathered (Jn 4.35-38). Never despair! Christ’s death was not a mistake; it was not a waste. His memory was not celebrated by a few straggling war-weary soldiers coming home from a nasty defeat. He marches triumphantly, Lord’s Day by Lord’s Day through time and space, as the resurrected and returning King, leading a mighty army of exultant warriors—a great multitude that no man can count (Rev 7.9).

The Means – Jesus calls God (the Father) the ‘Lord of the harvest’ (compare Jn 15.1). He implies that the Father is the Sovereign Lord. He calls and saves those who are to be gathered into his kingdom (Rom

8.28-30). He adopts them as sons and daughters and assigns them roles of service (Eph 4.11, 12). But Jesus, preparing to teach his disciples again, does not focus on God's eternal decrees in election. Rather, he draws attention to the means—the harvesters (Mt 13.30)—that God uses to collect the eternal harvest.

Jesus instructs his disciples, and us, to ask God to send out workers into the field of the world, and teaches about:

- *Delegation* – God can, and does occasionally, save people through direct means. Accounts are told of individuals who read a Bible in a hotel room and were converted or had a spiritual experience and become Christians. But, the normal means that God uses to bring people into his kingdom is through preaching (Rom 10.14, 15; 1 Cor 1.18-21).
- *Duty* – The second means God uses, is our prayers. When the harvest seems sparse, and the prospects discouraging, we should re-double our prayers that God would provide faithful workers.

Being saved into his kingdom does not result in our becoming passive blobs. God delights in his sons and daughters and assigns them meaningful work for the kingdom. Let us pray that we will all be faithful in fulfilling our duties.

Workers Summoned [June 8] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.1-4; Mk 6.7; Lk 9.1)**

Matthew tells us twice (Mt 4.23; Mt 9.35) that Jesus taught in the synagogues, preached the good news, and healed many people. Both of these summaries of Jesus' work are introductions to major teaching sessions for the disciples (Mt 5.1; Mt 10.1). At this time, Jesus, seeing the crowds, instructs his disciples to ask the Father for more workers (Mt 9.36-38). Jesus answers his own prayer request by summoning the first of the workers to extend his kingdom.

Called – Jesus *called* the disciples. They did not appoint themselves. Often young men, and today even women, think that they have something special to offer the Church and feel slighted if they are not

given responsibility—usually they want to teach. The disciples had been traveling with Jesus for about a year, receiving intensive training by example and explicit instruction before they were appointed to act on his behalf. Paul, following this example, indicates that it is a great responsibility to be a ruling and teaching elder. Those appointed to the office must meet strict qualifications (2 Tim 2.2; Titus 1.6-9). He says that no one should be appointed quickly to the office, but rather he should be tested first (1 Tim 5.22).

Count – Jesus called *twelve* of his disciples whom he appointed as Apostles. It is clear that Jesus was laying the foundation (Eph 2.20) for the new spiritual Israel—the Church (Gal 6.16). He selected twelve elders to act as the heads of the spiritual children of Abraham, and to replace the sons of Jacob who had represented the physical Israel that had rejected their Messiah.

Matthew lists the names of the Apostles. There may be significance in the order—Peter first and Judas Iscariot last. It may point to the leadership role that Peter later had among the Apostles and to the infamy of Judas. However, it could be that Peter is named first because he was the first disciple (Mt 4.18). Notice that Matthew alone (see, Mk 3.16-19; Lk 6.13-16) includes his former occupation (tax collector) with his name. He reminds us that Jesus came to save sinners (Mt 1.21). He knew that he was a sinner saved by grace.

The disciples are named in pairs. This may be the groupings by which Jesus sent them out (Mk 6.7). Having the Apostles work in pairs teaches that there is no room in Christ's Church for a 'one-man ministry'. Even Paul, with his strong personality, followed this principle on his missionary journeys. Congregations are to have a plurality of elders (Titus 1.5; Jam 5.14) who are to share in the work (1 Tim 5.17). This co-operation is essential to provide encouragement and strengthening (Eccl 4.9, 10; Mk 11.1; Mk 14.13), and help ensure that a Biblically-wise balance is maintained (Jn 8.17).

Commissioned – Jesus commissioned the twelve as his ambassadors,

and sent them out as his official representatives to establish the NT Church—its doctrine, government, and worship. The Apostolic office was unique, and remains unique. A foundation is laid only once. A different foundation means a different building. In the NT Church, which is the temple of Christ, many living stones (1 Pt 2.4) have been added over the millennia; but the foundation remains solid and unmoving with Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2.20) that anchors it firmly. Writings composed by the Apostles, or under their authority, constitute the *New Testament*. These writings, with those of the OT prophets, endorsed by Jesus, form our final authoritative standard.

Paul's defence of his apostleship proves that membership in the Apostolic office was not simple to obtain (2 Cor 11.1-33 and 2 Cor 12.10). He claims both a direct commission and instruction from Jesus, like the twelve (Gal 1.11-17). The other Apostles accepted Paul's calling (Gal 2.9) and Peter accepted his writings as Apostolic and therefore part of Scripture (2 Pt 3.15, 16). No one since the 1st century—whether pope or cult leader—has been commissioned directly by Jesus, and can claim Apostolic authority. No new normative revelation from God is forthcoming. The Scriptures are complete and our only final standard for faith and practice. We are not to elevate pastors, teachers, confessions, or the rulings of assemblies of elders, to the level of Scripture.

Confirmation – The confirmation of the call of the twelve to the Apostolic office is shown as Jesus delegates to them authority (right and power) over the physical and supernatural realms. Their power to heal the sick and exorcise demons authenticated their call to the office. Paul refers to this delegation of authority as the 'marks' of an apostle (2 Cor 12.12). Anyone who claims Apostolic authority must demonstrate his claim by signs, wonders, and miracles—including raising the dead (Acts 9.40; Acts 20.10). However, the purpose of the delegation of authority to the Apostles was not so that they could ease temporarily the physical burden of sin's effect. Rather it was to confirm their teachings (Mk 6.12-13). The ultimate battle is spiritual—truth over error, Christ's religion over Satan's, God's honour over man's. What is really important is not how we *feel*, but what we *believe*. Ironically, what we believe will, in the

end, determine how we feel, into eternity. In the truth of the Gospel is eternal medicine that will forever remove the consequences of sin through the final resurrection to eternal life.

Workers Schooled [June 9]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.5-15; Mk 6.8-11; Lk 9.2-5)

Before Jesus sent out the Twelve to preach the message of the kingdom and heal the sick, he preached their ‘ordination sermon’. The message of this sermon is considerably different from what we might expect from the one who came to save the world (Jn 3.16, 17; Jn 12.47; 1 Tim 1.15), and different also from the commission he gave these same men after his resurrection (Mt 28.16-20). What does this instruction teach us?

Particular Sheep – Before the Gospel was given in full measure to the Gentiles it had to be proclaimed to Israel. Jesus would not reject a person from any nation who came to him (Mk 7.24-30; Jn 10.16; Jn 12.20, 21), but the focus of his earthly ministry was to the lost sheep of Israel. The reason that Jesus specifically prohibited the Apostles initial ministry to Gentiles and half-breed Samaritans was so that God’s covenant nation would have a final opportunity to hear and receive the Gospel (Mt 1.21). On their refusal, the Gospel would be removed from them and given to the Gentiles. Although there will always be a remnant of the physical seed of Abraham coming to the Messiah, God completed his dealings with Israel as a nation when, through the Roman army, he destroyed the Temple in 70 AD.

Proving Signs – The primary duty of the Apostles on this evangelistic tour was to preach the message that ‘the kingdom of heaven is near.’ They were given powers to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and drive out demons as signs to the nation that the Messiah and his kingdom had truly arrived among them. The covenant people knew that God revealed himself to their nation through miracles and validated his prophets with signs. Even when God performed miracles in other nations (e.g., in Egypt or Babylon) it was primarily for the benefit of his people. So the Jews at the time of Jesus sought signs to

validate his ministry and that of his emissaries (Jn 2.18; 1 Cor 1.22; 2 Cor 12.12).

Jesus carefully instructs the Apostles not to use their miraculous gifts as a means of furthering their own pride or material gain. They had been saved from eternal wrath by the grace of God, and in turn they were to give freely to others, God's message and the gift of healing. This instruction applies to the Church today (Acts 8.18-20). Although teaching elders are to be paid for their work (1 Cor 9.14; 1 Tim 5.17-18) by the Church they are never to make payment their objective for preaching (Titus 1.7; 1 Pt 5.1, 2). Also, the Church should never charge people to hear the presentation of the Gospel. This is one reason why commercial movies about Christ and ticketed concerts of 'Gospel Music' are not valid forms of evangelism.

People's Sincerity – The Apostles were sent as a test of faith. Most people assume that this faith-test applied primarily to the Apostles. During the Middle Ages the leaders of monastic movements, thinking this way, sent out mendicant friars to subsidize their preaching by begging. They misapplied this passage. The primary faith-test was for the *hearers*, not the preachers. The Apostles were instructed to take along only one walking stick and a pair of sandals and no extra provisions as a test of the worthiness of the recipients of the message. The hearers were to show evidence that they had received the message of salvation by ministering to those who brought it to them.

Applied to the Church today, the test is not how poor we can keep our pastors but rather how willing we are to share with those who come into the midst of our congregation. If we are true recipients of the Gospel then we will be willing to show hospitality to visitors and everyone in the congregation (Rom 12.13; Heb 13.2; Jam 2.1-4; 3 Jn 5, 6), and support whole-heartedly those who preach the Gospel (Phil 4.16-19).

Pronounced Sentence – Blessings and curses are associated with covenant keeping and breaking (Dt 27-29; Josh 8.30-35). When a household or town was found unworthy because it rejected the Good

News, it was to be cursed by the Apostles. The reason was that the family or inhabitants of the town had rejected the Messiah and showed no respect for the Covenant vows they were under through circumcision.

The Apostles went out in pairs (Mk 6.7), so that there were two witnesses (Dt 9.15; Mt 18.16) to the rejection of the Covenant. They exercised disciplinary action on those who rejected Christ (Mt 16.19; Mt 18.15-20; Acts 18.6) and essentially ex-communicated these members of the covenant-community by pronouncing an anathema (curse) and treating them like pagans (1 Cor 16.22; Mt 18.17). Jesus tells his disciples the eternal consequences will be worse for anyone who has been raised under the obligations of the Covenant and has rejected the message of the Gospel than for a person who has never heard the Gospel. This should engender a sober reflection in each of us.

Promised Shalom – In contrast, those who receive the messengers cordially are those who are receptive to the coming of the Anointed One. A blessing of eternal peace (Shalom) rests on them.

Workers Supported [June 10] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.16-23)**

The warnings Jesus gives in this part of the Apostles' 'ordination sermon' do not sound encouraging. Rather than supporting them, it seems that Jesus is scaring them off. Compare what Jesus says to what a general facing his troops says before a difficult battle. He warns them of the difficulties they will face, not to discourage but to encourage. Winston Churchill did the same when he spoke to the House of Commons, May 13th, 1940, and said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many months of struggle and suffering." We find in Jesus' instructions a mix of warning with encouragement. As the proverb says: "to be forewarned is to be forearmed."

Prospects – The Apostles who would profess that Jesus was the Messiah, and hoped for the coming of a glorious earthly kingdom (Acts

1.6), were warned that they were going to be treated like prisoners rather than princes, slaves rather than sons, and with calamity rather than comfort. The opposition was to come from every direction—from men in the community (16), in the professing church (17), in positions of command (18), of their own clan (21), and from everyone in the crowd (22). The difficulties they would face would be both psychological and physical: falsehood (16), torture (17), intimidation (17, 18), betrayal (21), murder (21), and hatred (22). About the only thing Jesus doesn't mention is confiscation of property (1 Cor 4.11; Heb 11.37).

The difficulties faced by the Church are the same in every generation. They arise because of what men are like when not constrained by the leaven of God's Law. They are wolves who devour and destroy, barbarous beasts inflamed with extreme hatred against all that is good, and abusers of good institutions (law, government, church) for their mischievous ends. Because wicked men hate God and his Law and Son, they hate his Church and people.

Preparation – Anyone who professes faith in Jesus Christ knows that these evils will come upon him. What is to be our response? It is to prepare for the worst and trust God through evil times or good times. The preparation does not consist of building bunkers and stocking supplies. Rather it is being:

- *Wise* (16) – Instead of being wolves, Christians are to combine the traits of two animals—snakes and doves. Snakes try to stay out of the way of people. Jesus teaches that, like snakes, we should avoid evil-doers intent on persecuting the Church. This avoidance is to be balanced with the gentleness of a dove. Our approach to violently evil men is not to wave placards in their faces but to avoid them, and if challenged with a confrontation, to be gentle and respectful (1 Pt 3.13-16). For example, it is probably more in keeping with Christ's teaching for us to participate as, or support, counsellors in a Pregnancy Care Centre than to be involved in attempting to shut down abortion businesses.
- *Watchful* (17) – We are to realize that men without Christ are generally antagonistic to truth. We should try to avoid spiritually and

physically dangerous situations. We should be aware that our unbelieving friends live in self-deception (Rom 1.18, 21) and could turn on us in an instant if they become uncomfortable when their false presuppositions are challenged (Micah 7.5). Clearly this means that we are not to marry or form partnerships with unbelievers (2 Cor 6.14-16), but it does not mean we are to avoid entirely friendships with them (1 Cor 5.9, 10).

- *Wary* (23) – When persecution appears inevitable and an opportunity is available to avoid it, we should flee it (Mt 24.16-20). It is a false honour for Christians to throw themselves in the line of fire from the enemies of God. It is good to avoid persecution as long as truth is not compromised.

Promise – It is a grievous thing to be hated, but to be hated by men for Christ's sake is to be loved by God. Because we are his, Jesus promises to support us if we stand firm, through even the most difficult circumstances. He informs us that he will provide for us, and we will be:

- *Witnesses* (18) – It is a privilege to be a spokesperson for the Kingdom of God, which all faithful believers are (Is 43.10). At the Day of Judgment we will stand as witnesses in the court of eternity against all those who wickedly mistreated us.
- *Worry-free* (19, 20) – The Holy Spirit resides in the people of God and will stand with them in the face of opposition, including helping them speak firmly, forcefully, and faithfully.
- *Withdrawn* (22, 23) – For the early Church, the persecutions ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. Roman persecutions ended by the 3rd century. Christ will permit suffering for a time, but the trials will not exceed the grace his everlasting arms provide (1 Cor 10.13). The trials may last for awhile, but in awhile they will not last. God will either stop the persecutors or withdraw his people from the world, to be with him forever. Salvation with a crown of glory (1 Pt 5.4) will be the eternal reward of all who endure to the end.

Pray that God gives us the faith and courage we need to take him at his word.

Workers Strengthened [June 11]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.24-31)

At first glance it is difficult to see the connection between the points Jesus makes in this part of the Apostles' 'ordination sermon', but on reflection we find that he strengthens them, and us, in four ways:

Students' Domain (24-26a) – Jesus informs the Apostles that nothing can happen to them that he didn't have to endure. As students of the master and servants of the Lord, they were not called to carry burdens that were any greater than he would bear. The domain of our temptations and sufferings is smaller than anything Jesus experienced. Our challenges are but a small subset of the tribulations that Jesus encountered and overcame. In this knowledge we are strengthened, because:

- *He doesn't ask of us more than he is willing to do.* Jesus has suffered every conceivable kind of persecution—physical and psychological. He endured abuse and accusation, beatings and blasphemy, punishment and pain, ridicule and rejection, and suffering and separation. Nothing we encounter, in part or in total, compares to what he endured.
- *He leads by example.* He shows us what love of enemies is all about. His examples from washing Judas' feet to dying for us while we were still rebels encourage us to proper behaviour in the face of our tormenters.
- *He sympathizes with us.* He has been tempted in all the ways we can be tempted, and more. He has been tried in ways we cannot imagine. He knows what we go through and can help us every step of the journey.
- *He provides support.* As we share in his sufferings, we can be assured that he will never allow us to be put in a situation that is beyond his power to control and knowledge to provide suitable succour.

Secrets Divulged (26b-27) – Jesus tells the disciples that nothing that happens can be kept a secret. There are two encouraging dimensions in

this reality. First, no matter what trials come our way, God knows all about them. Even if our persecutions are hidden from the public eye in this life, in the Day of Judgment they will be revealed. We can rest in the assurance that God will balance all accounts and repay those who have unjustly used us.

Second, we can be assured that nothing can finally suppress the truth of the Gospel. What Jesus taught his disciples in ‘dark’ parables has now been fully revealed so that men are without excuse for rejecting him and his truth. Wicked men want nothing more than silencing God’s witness against them. For example, homosexuals want the Bible declared ‘hate literature’, and all manner of people want displays of the Ten Commandments banned from the public square. However, no matter what men attempt to do, we know that the Truth will be declared loudly and clearly.

Spiritual Destiny (28) – Jesus continues his encouraging words: nothing that happens in this life can ultimately destroy us, if we are in Christ. Men who live for the moment and have no hope beyond this space-time realm, can never understand what Jesus says. We all have to die sometime—in the end, it really doesn’t matter if it is today or tomorrow. Of far more importance is whether we are prepared for eternity. If we trust God with our eternal souls, we need not worry about what happens to our mortal bodies. It is easy to say this, but can we stand in the face of the Inquisition’s instruments? If we truly fear God, we will obey him rather than men (Acts 4.19). If we reverence God, we will not fear men. What is the worst that they can do? They can kill us, but not destroy us. If we flee from sin, we can stand in the face of Satan.

Sparrows’ Demise (29-31) – Finally Jesus assures his students that nothing happens outside of God’s providential governance. Jesus uses two apparently mundane examples to demonstrate this reality:

- Do we give any thought to what the sparrows will eat today? God not only provides their food, but every breath as a direct act of preservation. When one of them dies, it is in accord with his plan and purpose.

- When we go to the hairdresser or barber, we rarely think about the sweepings collected at the end of the day. In contrast, God knows the state of each piece of hair until the keratin decomposes into amino acids.

God's absolute providence and his work through miracles are an obstacle for many, because their understanding of God is too small. A God who plans every breath of every bird, the exact trajectory of each falling piece of hair, and the orbit of every electron around every atomic nucleus is, beyond any doubt, in control of what happens to his children every minute of every day.

Summary Direction – The sum of the matter is four ‘nothings’:

- *Nothing* happens to us that Jesus hasn't already overcome. He is able to help us through the worst.
- *Nothing* that happens to us can be kept secret from God. All wickedness will be revealed and repaid.
- *Nothing* that happens in this life can ultimately destroy us if we are in Christ. He holds us in the palm of his hand and protects us into eternity.
- *Nothing* happens outside of God's providence. We can put aside our fears knowing that we are of more value to God than many sparrows.
-

Workers Stirred-up [June 12]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.32-39)

Jesus continues the Apostles' 'ordination sermon' with a lesson in priority setting. His admonition consists of five contrasts that he presents to test their commitment to him and the work of the kingdom. Even though we may not be facing the prospect of physical persecution at this time, we still need to apply these tests of discipleship to determine where we stand for the cause of Christ. The Devil has many tactics for distracting our focus.

Confession (32-33) – When challenged about our hope in Christ or the belief that we profess in the face of the world's wickedness we must be ready to give a thoughtful answer that is consistent with our status as true

children of God (1 Pt 3.15). At times, we will be tempted to skirt around the fact that we are Christians and state half-truths. At other times, we may go so far as to deny, like Peter, that we know Jesus. Thank God that Jesus reinstated Peter. This assures us that there is forgiveness if we fall, and then repent. Anyone who speaks with a ‘forked tongue’—among Christians claiming to be a fellow pilgrim, but among the worldly participating in empty folly—and continues to deny the Lord Jesus, cannot stand. On the Day of Judgment, his claim to know Jesus will be revealed as only empty words. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is Lord will be welcomed into glory (Rom 10.9, 10). We must trust God to give us bold words to speak in every situation (Mt 10.19).

Conflict (34-36) – In many cultures, to become a Christian is to be expelled from society and cut off from family. Among Moslems in particular, a person who receives Christ is treated as if he never existed. A Christian, regardless of how gentle and loving, will also be viewed as suspect when he speaks against homosexual practice or an adulterous affair in his family. Marriages have been torn apart when one spouse says that a son’s or daughter’s ‘lifestyle’ is un-Biblical and the other spouse sides with the child. Christians who ‘blow the whistle’ against tax fraud or insider trading are blacklisted and become pariahs in their professions. We are to expect this tension, turmoil, and tearing-apart, since truth divides. All kinds of error can sleep together in a dark bed of iniquity and unite with false religions against the common enemy of Truth. Hell has no fury greater than when it is scorned by those who love Christ rather than Satan. When the Gospel works its grace, the greedy goblins of Gehenna sharpen their teeth and claws to tear apart flesh and limb in a cruel frenzy of persecution.

Care (37) – Some pastors and missionaries have notorious children because they dedicated so much time to the work of the Kingdom that they neglected their families. It is always hard to learn how to maintain the right balance of priorities in this area. Jesus does not say that we should not love our family. He does not say that we are to despise family for the sake of the Gospel. He does say, however, that we are never to put love of any man, woman, or child above our love for him. The right

balance will include showing love for God by obeying his commands and caring for our families (1 Tim 5.3, 8). At the same time we will not let physical blood-ties with family distract us from our spiritual blood-ties with Christ and our neglect of necessary correction (1 Tim 3.5) and, at times, separation (1 Cor 7.15).

Cross (38) – Many people speak of ailments or frustrations that come their way as ‘their cross’. However, the ‘cross’ that Jesus would have us take up is that which comes directly from the enemies of Christ, not from the general consequences of sin in this world. When unbelievers persecute the Church and harass Christians because of their stand for Christ, this is following in the footsteps of Christ to Golgotha (1 Pt 2.20, 21). When we deny our own passions and desires and live wholly for Christ, this also is taking up the cross and following Christ (Mt 16.24).

Commitment (39) – Jesus uses the cross as the symbol for commitment to him. He wants all of his disciples to know what is their ultimate goal in life. We must not live as materialistic hedonists or existential materialists. We must live with our eyes focused on the near return of the one who is coming to judge all mankind. Our goals should not be worldly power, popularity, or prosperity. Rather, we should live knowing that the things of this world are all going to perish. We should treat all that this world offers as worthless, and be willing to part with it in an instant for the sake of eternal riches in Glory. Commitment to Christ means eyes on eternity and dismissal of the decaying.

Cost vs Comfort – If Christ is worth anything, he is worth everything. The costs may seem high when we are suffering at the hands of homosexuals who hate God’s requirements for sexual purity, abortionists who despise God’s right over life, the ‘politically correct’ who drive God’s Law from public discourse, and false religions that deny the uniqueness of Christ. We may have to leave or lose the comforts associated with worldly position, respect, and income. How we respond to persecution is the measure of where we rest. If we truly rest in Christ, the pleasures of this life are deemed as empty, but the prospects of eternity are desired as excellent. Like Christ, we must count the costs and

benefits of living with a future focus (Heb 12.2). The crown of righteousness awaits all who finish the race (2 Tim 4.7-8).

Workers Sustained [June 13] (Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 10.40-42)

Relationships – In this portion of the Apostles’ ‘ordination sermon,’ Jesus works through four links in a chain of equivalence, and equates the reception of the least in the Kingdom of Heaven with reception of God himself:

- *God the Father and the God-man* – To receive Jesus is equivalent to receiving God. We must believe that Jesus is truly God.
- *The God-man and a Prophet* – To receive a prophet or Apostle in the name of Jesus is to receive Jesus. In the post-apostolic age, we are to receive the message from ministers of the Gospel as if we are hearing it from God himself.
- *A Prophet and a Righteous Man* – Ministers (Pastors/Elders) hold office from Christ but they are not superior to any other mature believer in the congregation. All true believers are sons and daughters of a King and co-heirs of the eternal rewards. We are to treat all true believers with the same respect that we are to give to Christ (Jam 2.1-4).
- *A Righteous Man and a Disciple* – Even a person with weak faith or a new believer is part of the Kingdom. When we help, through prayer, comfort, and material assistance, the weakest baby lamb we do it for the Great Shepherd. There is no insignificant member of Christ’s flock.

Reception – Reception is not passive. Reception of Jesus as God and saviour requires an active faith, not mere intellectual assent (Jam 2.19). Active faith includes thankful rejoicing and committed trust through all the easy days, but also through all the days filled with hardship. Reception of the preached word is not allowing words to enter our heads to rattle around in an echo chamber and then die out in a whisper. The received word is to permeate our grey-matter, seep into our blood, build our muscles, and show its effect through works of righteousness

performed by our hands, feet and mouth. Reception of any member of God's household is not just a handshake on Sunday morning. It is a phone call, a note of encouragement, an invitation to dinner, or a ride to the doctor's office. Cups of cold water come in all sizes and shapes.

Reason – What is the main reason that people will go to hear a speaker? In most cases it is because the person is famous. He might own half of the city centre, have scored a goal in every game, or garnered 76% of the popular vote. She might be the object of desire in six romantic comedies, hold an audience breathless with the beauty of her singing voice, or make even frumpy clothes look they came from a designer rack. What of ultimate value do they have to offer? Will their words be remembered the next morning?

In contrast, consider a faithful pastor who preaches through the Gospel of John, or a director of a crisis pregnancy centre who, through tears, tells of a young woman who has abandoned rebellion and is now raising her two-year-old as a child of the Covenant. How many people will be in their audience? The few scattered in the pews or auditorium seats are encouraged and humbled and come away saying, "If only more would come to listen!"

The contrast between fame and fortune with words of little eternal worth, and the faithful and friendly with life-changing words, illustrates why we are to receive a prophet, righteous man, or disciple. The reason has ultimately nothing to do with what *they* have accomplished, but with what Christ has done through them. The reason we are to receive all of God's people, as we should receive God himself, is because of *who* they are, not for what they have done. We are to receive a prophet not because he has written a dozen books or lists three degrees after his name, but because he is God's man. We are to receive the crisis pregnancy counsellor, not because she has a degree in social work or because she dresses well but because she is living to run errands for Christ. Why are we to receive them? Because the work they do is performed in Christ's name.

Reward – Jesus promises a reward to those who faithfully receive his messengers and people, but we must be careful not to fall into the common error of assuming that we can earn, or deserve, a payment from God for doing works on behalf of the Kingdom. At best we are unfaithful servants who deserve nothing (Lk 17.9, 10). Any reward we receive will be a free gift from God, not payment for services rendered. Our reception of God’s messengers is not a meritorious work. Receiving the messengers of Christ is equivalent to receiving Christ himself. The ability to receive Christ is given to us as the gift of faith. The reception of Christ’s people is the outward evidence and indicator that we have already been received into God’s family.

The three-fold repetition of the promise reinforces the absolute certainty of the reward, which we “will certainly not lose.” The receipt of the full reward will be realized only in the eternal Kingdom. At that time, the full measure will be revealed. But, Jesus tells us what each member of his Kingdom can expect. We might think that a ‘prophet’ who preaches the Gospel faithfully, or a righteous man, will receive a greater reward than a simple believer. Surprisingly the reward for the one receiving a prophet will be the same as a prophet’s, and the one receiving the righteous man will also receive his reward. This indicates that the reward Jesus is speaking about is eternal life.

Workers Sent [June 14]
(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 11.1; Mk 6.12-13; Lk 9.6)

Applied Schooling – Training not immediately applied is soon forgotten. Jesus understood this practical reality and sent out the twelve disciples on their own to apply their most recent training and to begin to exercise their delegated authority. He went in one direction (the towns of Galilee) and they went in another (village to village). Jesus was likely accompanied by many of the other disciples that he had. It is only the Twelve who, in their special capacity as the foundation ‘stones’ of the NT Church, were sent out at this time. They were sent to apply on their own what they had learned and to exercise the office to which they had been ordained.

Each one of us who is part of Christ's Kingdom is also called to serve the King in some way. We are not all called to preach, teach, or perform miraculous healings. But we are all called to love God and demonstrate this love through good works (Rom 12.1; Eph 2.10; Eph 4.12). We must not just *learn* from Christ, we must go and *act* for Christ!

Apostolic Signs – The Apostles, holding a unique office, were given the power and authority to heal the sick and to drive out demons (Lk 9.1). These signs demonstrated their position as official representatives of Jesus (2 Cor 12.12). If we focus on what the Twelve did—i.e., healing—we will miss the key message about what they learned as they ventured out on their own. While they were without the physical presence of Christ, they were not without his power. Whether the Apostolic signs continue in the Church today is debated. What is not subject to debate is that the power of Christ extends beyond his physical presence. Jesus is no less able to work through his sent messengers today than he was two thousand years ago. As a reigning sovereign, he continues to send his ambassadors and endows them with exactly the gifts, skills, and words that they need to accomplish their mission. His power is not diminished because he now reigns from heaven.

Mark mentions that the Apostles anointed the sick with oil (Mk 6.13). Along with wine, olive oil was considered to have medicinal properties by the ancient world (e.g., Lk 10.34). The oil used by the Apostles had no magical properties and was not a direct instrument of healing. Its use may symbolize: that the disciples acted under Jesus' authority through the power of the Holy Spirit or, conversely, through the use of proximate instrumentality in the healing.

All Societies – Luke tells us that they went 'everywhere'. Of course, this does not mean that at this time they went to the ports of Spain, the courts of the Han dynasty in China, or the sports arenas in Tiberian Rome. Their immediate mission was to the settlements in the Galilean region. However, it is instructive that Luke uses a Greek word that has universal implications. He anticipates the work of the Apostles who carried the

Gospel beyond the immediate vicinity of their own family groups and national tribes into the Roman world (Acts 1.8). The message of Christ is not to be confined to one locale or ethnic group. It is not a religion for the Jews only, any more than it is a religion only for the descendants of Mediterranean Greek and Latin speakers or of northern European Anglo-Saxons. Those who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles are to preach the Gospel to the people of every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7.9).

Announced Salvation – The Gospel writers tell us that the Twelve preached two things: ‘that people should repent’ and the ‘gospel’. This means that they preached God’s requirements in the Law and salvation through grace—that man is a sinner and has broken God’s Law and must repent, and anyone who repents of his or her sin and believes in Christ will be saved. Two thousand years later, the Church is sent to preach exactly the same two messages.

When the Church deviates from the centrality of the message, it fails to meet its primary purpose for existence. Throughout history, the Church has tended to go to one extreme or another. For example, it has overemphasized the place of miracles, direct involvement in social change, or the communal aspects of the family of Christ. It has ceased to preach sin, repentance, and faith and has instead attempted to become a means for achieving health and wealth, an instrument for socialism, or a community club.

The Church must preach the Law, and it is to speak prophetically against corporate and individual sin. However, the Church errs greatly when it champions particular forms of government or economic systems such as western democratic socialism, or endorses political parties. The Gospel must also be preached and the Church is to encourage its members to live selfless lives and teach benevolence. However, this does not mean that it is to become a closed community separated from the world (e.g., a monastic, Anabaptist, or cult-like community). The Church is sent into the world to seek the lost, but this does not include using ‘seeker sensitive’ entertainment ‘worship’ as practiced in many North American

Evangelical churches, nor does it include preaching the ‘feel good’ power of positive thinking. The Church must stay focused on preaching two things, and only two things: mankind as lost in sin and mankind as saved in Christ.

“Who is Jesus” [June 15]

(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 14.1-2; Mk 6.14-16; Lk 9.7-9)

Historical Man – Throughout the past two thousand years, and particularly during the last two hundred, many have attempted to dismiss the historicity of Jesus. The ‘search for the historical Jesus’ discredits, at minimum, the accounts of his miracles found in the Gospels and relegates them to the domain of early Church myth. Ironically, we find in the Gospel accounts an accepted historical contemporary of Jesus—Herod a self-designated ‘king’, who governed a quarter of Palestine from 4 BC to 39 AD. In these accounts, Herod hears about the miracles of Jesus that everyone, from carpenter to courtier, was discussing. The miracles of Jesus are as historical as is Herod’s self-acknowledged sin of murder. Men cannot honestly dismiss the fact that Jesus, the man, lived in Palestine and performed the works that are credited to him in the Gospels any more than they can dismiss Herod as an historical figure. Meet the real Jesus as he confronts Herod and us with our sin.

Heralding Messenger – Jesus stood out in a religiously superstitious society. Most people in those times would have claimed to believe in miracles. Yet, when confronted with real miracles they were perplexed about the miracle-worker. They could not adjust their paradigm and see in Jesus the truth that he is the God-man. Instead, they attempted to fit him into their traditional mental framework. Their confusion reflects popular messianic expectations. They could not understand how the Messiah could have come in the form of Jesus. They looked for a majestic warrior to lead them to victory over Rome. They did not consider a teacher who turned their interpretation of the Law upside-down to be a candidate for the office and concluded that, at best, he was a herald for the coming Messiah—a prophet. Their faulty understanding of God’s purposes for the Messiah and the true Israel led the people to

assume that Jesus was just a prophet like Elijah or John the Baptist—either in spirit or by resurrection. Ironically, their conclusions about Jesus were not far from the truth, for he is in fact a prophet (Lk 12.33; Heb 1.1, 2).

Haunting Miracles – Instead of enquiring into the facts about Jesus, Herod joined the crowd and accepted emphatically the popular and uninformed opinion that Jesus was a resurrected John. Even though John had performed no miracles, Herod's guilty conscience over destroying John haunted him, and he concluded that John had come back with new powers to perform miracles. He undoubtedly thought that John was 'coming to get him.' Men with guilty consciences invariably come to the wrong conclusions about reality. They are prepared to believe lies before they will face the truth. This fact is shown, for example, by atheists who cling to the myth that life can arise spontaneously from a 'cosmic soup' of chemicals to avoid facing God-the-creator, or proponents of homosexuality who deny clear biological realities to defend wicked practices.

Heartless Measures – Luke tells us that Herod tried to see Jesus. Obviously, his attempts were not very sincere or he could have seen Jesus by sending for him or by going out to where he was teaching. Herod is like the man who all his life says, "I'd love to visit Europe," but never moves from the comfort of his couch where he watches Sunday-afternoon football; or like the woman who says, "I wish I could lose twenty pounds," but cannot turn down a dessert. Many people make great protestations about their desires to accomplish things but are heartless in their attempts. The world is full of talkers who aren't doers.

To Herod, Jesus was nothing more than a curiosity at a freak show. His idle interest was not sufficient to overcome his concern that he might be confronted with another preacher who would reprove him for his adulterous life. Herod eventually did see Jesus, not by going to him, but rather by Pilate sending Jesus to him (Lk 23.7). By that time, Herod's heart was hardened and their meeting ended up being a session for ridicule and mocking of Jesus (Luke 23.8-11). Herod left the encounter

with Jesus, hating God and befriending the world (Lk 23.12).

In the realm of religion, many claim that they are ‘seekers after truth’ but never find Truth. What is necessary is the insistence of the Greeks who came to Philip and asked to see Jesus (Jn 12.22). Jesus says that anyone who truly seeks Truth will find it (Mt 7.7).

Honest Materialization – Who is Jesus? There is no more important question that you can ask or answer. However, the answer must be the right one. If you conclude that Jesus is merely a man with a message, a man with miraculous powers, or even a resurrected man, you have answered incorrectly. Jesus is the *God-man* with a message—the message that all who believe in him will be saved. Jesus is the *God-man* with miraculous powers that provided the evidence that he is from Heaven. Jesus is the *God-man* who on the third day after his crucifixion rose from the dead.

We must not be like Herod, who sat in his palace, didn’t enquire into the true nature of Jesus, and let the opportunity to meet the God-man pass him by. We must go out to meet Jesus and accept him for who he is—God and man, one person with two natures.

Flashback to a Murder [June 16] **(Galilee, Winter 32 AD. Mt 14.3-12; Mk 6.17-29)**

Murder mysteries often contain flashbacks that show, sometimes from different perspectives, how the crime was carried out. In a similar manner Matthew and Mark report on the murder of John the Baptist. Their flashbacks occur in the midst of their reports about the question of the identity of Jesus. Their accounts teach that:

Evil Hates Rebuke – John rebuked the ‘king’ for an adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife. John’s rebuke reminds us that Christians (particularly those holding office in the Church), even while facing the prospect of persecution, have a responsibility to call to account the public sin of those in civic office—for example, when presidents,

prime ministers, or judges lie, steal, cheat, or engage in immoral sexual behaviour. Unjust laws may provide official immunity, but that does not excuse the responsibility of the Church to remind society that today's statute laws must reflect God's moral standards. Our current laws permit divorce for any reason, and Herod's behaviour would be tolerated today. John, however, applied God's laws to all men and expected that a non-believing civil magistrate under a non-Christian government was still required to abide by God's standards.

It is significant that John's rebuke related to a sexual sin. Most people today claim that religious beliefs have no place in public policy. They go further and state that society has no business regulating what people do in their bedrooms. John's rebuke of Herod proves otherwise. John expected the civil magistrate, and by implication all who were under his authority, to obey God's Law—i.e., laws of men respecting sexual morality are to be consistent with God's Law. When Christians today speak against homosexuality and expect the law to defend God-defined marriage, we see the same reactionary response of Herod and Herodias. In general, those who practice sexual immorality react strongly against anyone who calls them to account for their wicked practices. Legislators create 'hate-crime' bills that attempt to silence the Bible and dispose of God's law, and they punish pastors and business owners for taking a stand against sexual practices condemned by God.

Evil Harbours Revenge – The old quip, "Don't get angry, get even," is a truism for many. Herod and Herodias harboured their hatred for John and looked for an opportunity to get even. Some who seek revenge do so in response to injustice—e.g., to avenge a murder. However, the vindictiveness of Herod and Herodias was far more vicious, since it was based on a reaction to a just rebuke. Ironically, Herod, while wishing John dead, was still fascinated by his message and knew that he was a holy man. This demonstrates that every person knows God's righteous requirements (Rom 1.19, 20, 32) even though he wants to satisfy his lusts.

Evil Hastily Rewards – Titillation breeds temptation and temptation

breeds intemperance. To impress his dinner guests, Herod made a rash vow to give Salome ridiculous quantities of what was not his to give. He was not a king; he was merely a governor under the authority of Rome and could not have given half a kingdom as a reward. Herod's precipitous action, inflamed by debauched behaviour, warns us of the dangers of making a rash vow—we can be caught in a trap and commit sin breaking the vow or commit sin fulfilling it (Eccl 5.4-6). His vain vow was also merely for show and therefore a misuse of a solemn institution.

Evil Harvests Repulsion – Herod's concern for John was not enough to stop him from compounding his sin of adultery and a rash vow—sin seizing the opportunity encouraged him to do more evil, and his reluctance turned to compliance. He immediately sent an executioner to bring John's head. The extent to which unjust vengeance will go is illustrated by the gruesomeness of the acts of revenge. Moslem terrorists who chop off the heads of civilian hostages, have pregnant women carry suicide bombs, pretend to offer jobs to queuing workers and then blow them up, or kill children on their first day of school, provide modern examples. However, Herodias' gruesome request to have John's head brought on a dinner platter in front of the guests must rank among the most repulsive acts of revenge ever perpetrated in the name of an unjust cause. John, like Jesus who followed him, died because of the abuse of power by a brutal but impotent ruler. Herod and Herodias received their 'reward' when exiled to Gaul (France) by the Emperor after Herod's army was defeated fighting the armies of the father of his first wife. And, if extra-biblical history is correct, Salome also harvested her own 'reward'. Once while she was walking on a frozen river the ice broke and she fell into the water, and a piece of ice cut off her head (Nicephorus, *History*, 1.1.20).

Empathy Helpfully Responds – Contrast the response of John's disciples to the macabre scene at the dinner. They showed respect for John's body by providing it with a decent burial, and then informed Jesus about what had transpired. They laid their concerns at Jesus' feet, and so remind us that we are not to take personal revenge but to leave all our

abuses from unbelievers in the hands of the eternal God who will vindicate us (Jer 11.20; Rom 12.19). John may have been silenced, but Jesus can never be silenced; for he reigns eternally and is coming soon to judge all sinners.

Jesus The Bread Of Life

Sheep without a Shepherd [June 17]

(Galilee to Bethsaida near Julias, Spring 32 AD. Mt 14.13-14; Mk 6.30-34; Lk 9.10-11; Jn 6.1-3)

Reasons – Jesus invites, even commands, his disciples to observe a time of retreat from the pressures of the world. The Gospel writers identify the pressures that provide the reasons for the necessary retreat as:

- *Sin* – The murder of John caused them distress (Mt 14.13).
- *Stress* – The pressuring crowds allowed them no rest (Mk 6.31).
- *Service* – They had recently returned from a preaching and healing mission and were likely tired (Mk 6.7-13, 30).
- *Suspicion* – The crowd and Herod were suspicious about Jesus (Lk 9.7-9). He therefore removed himself from immediate threat.

Christians today experience similar conditions and find it necessary to step out of the pressures of the world for a time. Pastors, missionaries, teachers, counsellors, and medical workers become tired facing intense challenges they experience in their work on behalf of the Kingdom. Also, we all can become weary hearing about increasing evils such as when parents have to fight for the right to educate their own children or evolutionists strive to silence the presentation of facts about God's design being evident in nature.

Retreat – At Creation, God established a cycle of six days of work and one day of rest and reflection (realized in worship). The requirement to observe this cycle applies to all men through all time. It is not optional, or specifically a 'Christian' or 'Jewish' practice. Our society does not respect the cycle God instituted but instead endorses sabbath-breaking. Note that the word *sabbath* is derived from the Hebrew word for *rest*. We are to strive to achieve real rest on Sunday and are not to support

those who ignore God's requirement for a day of rest by completing our shopping or buying dinner out.

In spite of understanding and agreeing with this requirement, many devout Christians end up not able to comply with it. Because of works of mercy and legitimate works of necessity on the Sabbath, Christians devoted to the cause of Christ often suffer from overwork. Pastors can be called to bedsides on Monday, hold business meetings on Tuesday, conduct prayer meetings on Wednesday, meet with the Elders on Thursday, host the youth group on Friday and finish their sermons on Saturday. Then they lead the services on Sundays. In a similar vein, staff at Crisis Pregnancy Centres work all week and rush out at night to meet a desperate client contemplating an abortion or suicide. For these servants of Christ the work-rest cycle established by God must be kept in mind, but is hard to put into practice.

Demands on Christian workers can become overwhelming because the need for help can never be met. The poor are always going to be around (Mt 26.11), and there will always be demands from people suffering the consequences of sinful behaviour such as immoral sexual practices, immoderate use of food or financial resources, or drug-abuse. No Christian worker can meet all the demands that will arise. Our responsibility is not to meet every demand that comes our way, but to balance demands wisely with the utilization of the material, energy and time resources that God gives us. The key is balance. We are faithfully to serve, not to serve to the point of self-destruction.

It is for workers like these that Jesus calls for a brief time-out—a chance for rest, reflection, refreshment, and recreation (re-creation). Jesus didn't suggest that the disciples (here called apostles reflecting their work as sent ambassadors) take a vacation. Although not wrong in principle, vacations are a modern invention. He doesn't take them to a resort on the Sea of Galilee but to a place in the desert. He calls them only to rest for a while—to 'catch their breath'—to prepare them for further ministry. We are not to hope for true rest until we arrive in Heaven. The temporary rest of Christian workers may be realized in various forms such as a

sabbatical or attendance at a ministry conference or husband-wife study retreat.

Reaction – The crowds would not give Jesus any rest. They were able to guess where he was headed in the boat, and went along the shore to meet him. Like people everywhere, they were interested in what they could get out of a generous person. They were not so much interested in what he had to teach them as in what he could provide for them by way of physical comfort through healing (Jn 6.2). We should not judge them too harshly, however, as we all come to Jesus with impure motives.

Response – Jesus was not annoyed, and was ready to give graciously and compassionately to those who came to him sincerely. He provided for their physical needs (Mt 14.14) but stayed focused on his true purpose for coming to earth. He took the opportunity to teach them about the eternal Kingdom (Lk 9.11; Mk 6.34). Workers in Christian ministries, especially providing services such as those in street missions, group-homes, or crisis counselling need to maintain the perspective of Jesus and use the provision of their services as a means of presenting Jesus as the saviour of sinners. The people who come for help are like “sheep without a shepherd.” They are morally and spiritually lost and helpless. They need guidance, feeding, and protection.

Feeding *Ten* Thousand Sheep [June 18]

(Bethsaida near Julias, Spring 32 AD. Mt 14.15-21; Mk 6.35-44; Lk 9.12-17; Jn 6.4-13)

This miracle must provide an important lesson since it is the only one recorded by all four Gospel writers. This incident is recorded not primarily as a sign to demonstrate that Jesus is divine (the Son of God) but rather to show that he is the Messiah (the Son of Man)—it is a declaration to Israel that the King has come.

Power – The amazing power of Jesus to control the natural elements had been demonstrated to the disciples previously (Jn 2.1-11; Mt 8.23-27). They had no reason to doubt that he could feed a crowd of people. What

kind of man can turn water into wine or calm a storm? Yet, we see them expressing doubt about his power, not realizing that he could provide all the food that they would need.

A comparison of the four accounts shows that Jesus asked Philip earlier in the day (when the crowd arrived) how they were going to feed the people (Jn 6.5). Philip was from Bethsaida (Jn 1.44), the nearest town, so he would have known where to buy food in the nearby towns and villages. But Jesus did not ask this question to obtain information; rather he was testing Philip (Jn 6.6) and, indirectly, all the disciples. Later in the day, as evening approached, the disciples suggested to Jesus that he send the people away so that they could buy food in the nearby villages. In response, Jesus simply told them to feed the crowd.

Philip, who had been thinking about the problem all day, spoke on behalf of the disciples and asked with incredulity how they could do this as it would require at least 200 denarii, the equivalent of eight months' of a working man's wages, to buy enough food. The disciples' unbelief in the power of God is reminiscent of Moses' doubt (Num 11.22; Ps 78.19, 20) that God could provide food in the wilderness. Jesus as the Messiah, who is greater than Moses, reminds the disciples, and us, that with God all things are possible (Mt 19.26).

Pasture – As the Good Shepherd (Ps 23.1, 2; Ezk 34.15, 23; Mk 6.34; Jn 10.11), Jesus leads his flock to green grass (Mk 6.39) in the wilderness where he can provide food for them. He has them sit in companies ranging from fifty to one hundred people. This configuration would make it easier for the disciples to walk among the crowd to distribute the food. But it also reinforces the image of Jesus as the NT 'Moses' who apportions Israel into groups (Ex 18.25; Dt 1.15), provides food for them, and leads them through the desert.

Old Covenant kings provided feasts for their people (Gen 14.18; 2 Sam 9.13; Neh 5.17). In the same way, the Shepherd-King of the New Covenant provided a feast for his people. He figuratively turned the wilderness into a paradise and fed five thousand men along with the

women and children—probably over ten thousand people. Every person ate and was filled to satisfaction, and there was still an abundance remaining—as shown by the collection of the twelve baskets of fragments. This is reminiscent of God’s provision of the manna, of which no one lacked enough (Ex 16.17, 18), and of Elijah’s feeding his one hundred disciples with twenty barley loaves (2 Ki 4.42-44) and having some left over. The provision of the food by Christ and the twelve baskets of leftover fragments are symbols of the twelve tribes of the new Israel participating in the plentiful feast of the eternal King.

Passover – According to John, this episode in the life of Jesus occurs as the Passover was drawing near (Jn 6.4). He probably does not provide this information to help us understand the chronology of Jesus’ life, but rather to reinforce one of the key themes he expounds—Jesus is the true Bread (Jn 6.33). Jesus as the head of a new family leads the thanksgiving prayer (Mk 6.41) and distributes God’s provision of bread to his children. He is, in effect, ushering in a new Passover that will symbolize the deliverance of his people—not from the captivity of Egypt but from captivity to eternal sin. His actions—prayer and breaking the bread—likely prefigured the introduction of the Lord’s Supper that would be the NT replacement for the Passover. His actions provide a living parable that shows that he is the final Prophet to replace Moses.

Prospect – The Jewish people longed for the Messiah, a new Moses, who would deliver them from the power of Rome. Through this miracle, Jesus provides only simple fare—barley bread and pickled fish. He teaches his disciples, and us, that God cares about man’s physical needs but that the food of this world is not that which will ultimately satisfy man’s needs. The food that man really needs is spiritual food, like living water (Jn 4.10; Rev 7.17). The spiritual food that God provides, and ultimately the physical food in the New Heavens and New Earth, is inexhaustible, just like the supply of bread that came from the hand of Jesus in the wilderness near Bethsaida. The overall lesson of this encounter between Jesus and the people is that God provides a superabundance of grace and a promise of a better feast to come in his eternal kingdom (Is 25.6; Rev 19.9).

Alone on a Mountain [June 19]

(A mountainside, Spring 32 AD. Mt 14.22-23; Mk 6.45-46; Jn 6.14-15)

This brief episode from the life of Jesus receives little attention. Many people reading, commenting on, or preaching through the Gospels move quickly to the next ‘big’ event—Jesus walking on the water. There are, however, a few lessons we can derive from the account of what happened to each of the parties—the crowd, the disciples, and Jesus—after the miracle of the loaves.

People’s Reaction – Jesus fed the crowd, and they were prepared to proclaim him as their king. Their reaction was, in many respects, no different from that of people today who elect a politician who promises to provide for their physical health and welfare. Sinful human nature is always the same and will take handouts wherever they are offered. Anyone who can provide our daily bread without requiring that we work for it is considered the ideal candidate for office. To the extent that people have full stomachs, and overflow with material goods, they feel little need for reflection on eternal matters.

You may think this analysis is cynical and respond that the people realized that Jesus was the Messiah and had understood that the miracle of his feeding thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes demonstrated that he was the prophet who would arise (Jn 6.14), as Moses foretold (Dt 18.15). Without question, some in the crowd truly believed that he was the Messiah who would proclaim the Law and save them from their sins. But the majority hoped that Jesus was the Messiah of legend who would raise an army and lead them, like Moses, out of their captivity to a foreign power—Rome. Most of the people present that day were shallow in their commitment to Jesus and wanted him as king only for the material and temporal benefits they believed he could provide. They did not love Jesus as Lord; they loved this world.

Pupils’ Rehearsal – With a commanding urgency Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of him on their own to another

Bethsaida, near Capernaum. This action would have seemed strange to them. To this point, he had never sent them away in such a manner. Throughout his ministry, he would deputize the disciples to do jobs such as dismissing the crowd or he would tell the majority to wait while he took a select group aside with him. Why was it so important that Jesus send the disciples away so quickly?

We may not be able always to discern God's reasons why things happen as they do. But we must believe that his providence unfolds as he intends. In this case, we can infer that the reasons for dismissing the disciples were to:

- *Prepare* – Jesus was planning to teach the disciples a lesson in trust later, when the intensity of the winds and waves would increase. They needed to learn that Jesus could be depended upon even when he was not present with them. This training was necessary because soon Jesus would no longer be physically near them in this world.
- *Prod* – Being on their own in the boat would give them an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the miracle he had performed. But it would not be until after they had seen it again that they would come to a fuller understanding of Jesus as the true 'bread' (Mt 16.5-12; Jn 6.35).
- *Protect* – Jesus understood the danger of the messianic enthusiasm motivating the crowd, and its potential effect on the disciples. It was necessary, therefore, that they be moved away from the crowd that was going in the wrong direction, so that they would not form incorrect opinions about Jesus and the purpose of his ministry.

We also need to learn to depend on Jesus for our spiritual sustenance.

Prophet's Retreat – We must not forget that Jesus is a real man. In his human nature, he was subject to temptation to the same extent that we are (Heb 4.15). When he understood that the people intended to make him a king by force, he responded by going away to a mountain to be alone (Jn 6.15). This departure accomplished two things: 1) it put an end to the false ambition of the crowd, and 2) it removed him from the source of temptation.

It is proper for people to worship Jesus in his human nature, since he is God (Mt 14.33; Jn 9.38). But this worship must be for the right reasons—i.e., we must understand that he is *the* God, and has power either to forgive or to condemn. The people were pouring adulation on Jesus for the wrong reasons and were planning to endow him with authority at the wrong time. If he had assented to their intentions, he would have usurped authority which was not to be his until he had accomplished his work of redemption on the Cross, and then only when given to him by the Father (Ps 2.7-12; Dan 7.13-14; Jn 18.36; Ph 2.6-11). No man is to take falsely offered or obtained honours.

Prayer's Readjustment – Being by himself, Jesus was able to get some rest and, more importantly, through prayer to reflect on and refocus his mission. He could not take a short cut to kingly authority. He had to obtain it through the hard road of self-denial and the humiliation of the Cross. Prayer reminded him that he was dependent on the Father. In the same way, prayer reminds us of our dependency and puts us in a humble frame of mind before God.

Lesson in Assurance: Walking on Water [June 20] (Sea of Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Mt 14.24-33; Mk 6.47-52; Jn 6.16-21)

The miracle of Jesus walking on the water is *the* one, among the many that he performed, that most people seem to know about. For example, movies such as *The Karate Kid* and *Ever After* allude to it, and high-tech office workers sometimes refer to an outstanding co-worker as one who 'walks on water'. Ironically, most people miss the point. The Gospel writers, in this instance, treat the miracle almost as a mere incidental. Their purpose is not primarily to prove that Jesus is God, but to teach important lessons about faith in Jesus.

Reinforcing the Anxiety – In the middle of the night, the disciples found themselves facing heavy winds and waves that prevented them from making headway. They knew that if Jesus had been present he could have calmed the storm as he had done on one of their previous crossings (Mk 4.35-41), but he was not there; they were alone. They

were likely already perplexed about why he had sent them ahead on their own. At this point, their doubt would probably be increasing as they wondered if Jesus had abandoned them. God's special providence for the disciples that night included contrary winds so that their faith could be tested and strengthened. God sometimes deals with us in the same way. At times, we experience troubles and then, in our darkest hour, he sends stormy winds and waves to make our way even more difficult. Why does he reinforce our anxiety at just the point when we would think he would lift the clouds? He does it so that we can learn to trust him in every situation. He is not far away. Just like Jesus that night, he watches over us (Mk 6.48) and makes sure that we don't sink beneath the waves of despair.

Reservations and Assurance – At their most desperate moment, Jesus approached, walking on the water. Our English translations imply that he wished to walk past them (Mk 6.48). This probably was not his intention. It is more likely that we are to understand Mark as saying that Jesus intended to reassure them by bringing his theophanic presence (i.e., God in human form) near them (compare Ex 33.19, 22; 1 Ki 19.11; Job 9.8, 11). However, before he got close, they saw his approach and thought he was a ghost and were afraid. Jesus responded immediately to their superstitious reservations with two statements of divine consolation (compare Is 41.10, 13, 14; Is 43.1, 2):

- *“Take courage! ... Do not be afraid”* – In the OT God spoke these words to encourage his people (Gen 15.1; Josh 8.1; Zeph 3.16). By saying this, Jesus wants them to know that he is the God who provides true peace.
- *“I am”* – Jesus may have been simply identifying himself, but it is more likely that he used the self-revelatory form of God's name—‘YHWH’ or Jehovah, usually rendered as LORD, from “I am” (Ex 3.13-15; Jn 8.58).

With these words, he was doing more than what you or I would do if we tried to encourage a friend. He was informing them that God was truly with them through himself as Immanuel (Is 7.14; Mt 1.23). Just as Jesus was with the disciples as God, so he is with us until the end of this age (Mt 28.20).

Request and Assurance – Peter wanted physical proof, not just words. Trying to increase his assurance in his own way, he put Jesus to the test and requested that he also be allowed to walk on the water. Jesus took him at his word and told him to come on out. Some view Peter's action as courageous, a display of strong faith, or an affectionate desire to be closer to Jesus. It is none of these. Rather, Peter's action is full of stupid bravado—he challenged Jesus to prove he was God, showing a lack of trust—he didn't take the words of Jesus at face value, and his request has little to do with true affection for Jesus. Peter was like modern sceptics who say, "If God performs a miracle then I will believe." Ironically, as he lost confidence in his own abilities, he called out to Jesus to save him. Then Jesus took him by the hand and gave him the real assurance he needed. True faith accepts God at his word and waits patiently for him to come to us in the midst of the storm.

Rebuke and Assurance – Jesus rebuked Peter for doubting. The rebuke is only partly related to Peter's fear of the wind and waves. Peter's little faith and doubt was primarily his unwillingness to accept Jesus at his word when he said, "I am." Peter's challenge: "Lord, if it's you," (Mt 14.28) shows where the essence of the doubt lay—in accepting what Jesus said, not in being worried about sinking. Jesus included all who were in the boat when he rebuked Peter. None of them really believed that he was watching over them or that it was he himself coming to them. In grace, he again gave them assurance that he really is the God-man with mastery over all of creation, by calming the wind as he climbed into the boat to be with them. We displease God when we don't take him at his word but challenge him to prove himself.

Response of Awe – Water-walking, wind-calming, and teleportation were required to instil awe in the disciples. Only then, did they understand the meaning of the miracle of the loaves and fully realize that they were dealing with more than a mere man—the one who is truly God. In response, they worshiped him. Along with the disciples, the angels and glorified believers bow in Heaven, and all mankind will one day bow (Phil 2.10). However, let us not be (like the disciples) of 'little

faith' who need to see miracles before we will believe. Instead, let us listen, believe, and fall before him in worship.

Healings at Gennesaret [June 21] **(Sea of Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Mt 14.34-36; Mk 6.52-56)**

Early one morning, Jesus and his disciples arrived at Gennesaret, a small town on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and immediately Jesus began healing the locals who were sick. Why do Matthew and Mark tell us about these healings? It is probably not to reinforce the fact that Jesus is God with power over the natural realm, since they have already given sufficient evidence of this in their preceding accounts. Rather, it appears that they provide this information about Jesus' visit to Gennesaret to teach us about his:

- 1) *Sympathy* – He is presented as the *loving pastor of sheep* who even while being exhausted (he had been awake all night praying and watching over the disciples on the lake) pours out himself to care for everyone who comes to him.
- 2) *Salvation* – His healing work is presented here as a *living parable of salvation*. Those who came to Jesus for healing were healed; but not long after, most would become sick again, and all would eventually die. We must understand the underlying lesson of this living parable that points to a more important miracle of healing—eternal salvation from sin.

Recognition – If a popular actress arrived unannounced at the airport, crowds would quickly materialize to escort her to her limousine. In some ways, the arrival of Jesus in the harbour of Gennesaret was similar. He arrived without notice; but within minutes a crowd had formed, and others, on hearing the news of his arrival, came as quickly as they could. Jesus was welcomed like a celebrity by the crowd that knew of the healing he could provide. It was not wrong for them to want physical healing, any more than it is for us to ask God in prayer for healing, or to ask a doctor for an antibiotic prescription. The failure on the part of the crowd was that they only saw him as a miracle-worker and did not recognize him as the God-man. A question for us is: do we recognize

Jesus? Many today go after Mohammed or Buddha thinking they can provide meaning or answers to the perplexing issues of life. The real solution to any of life's problems—sin, worry, discouragement, sadness, despair, loneliness, etc.—can only be found when we truly recognize Jesus.

Running – It would take a while today for Jesus to attract attention if he were to stand on a street corner and begin offering healing. With our government funded health care system and access to many 'wonder' drugs people today are not as obviously in need of healing as they were two thousand years ago. Therefore, we can understand the impact of Jesus' appearance more easily if we consider someone standing at the intersection of two main streets in the city handing out \$100 bills. It would not take long for news to spread and crowds to begin running to where he stood. This contrast helps illustrate the spiritual reality today. Jesus is standing at the intersection of the world's crossroads offering eternal spiritual healing, but few run to him. They think that they have their own source of healing—their own works or effort, self-discipline, friends or family, philosophies or human-based religions, or resources like power or property. People rush to obtain the latest technological innovation or fashionably hot outfit, but they have little interest in what Jesus has to offer. A question for us is: do we run to Jesus? We should run as if being chased by a lion (1 Pt 5.8) or as if there is no tomorrow (Eccl 9.12), for he alone can provide the eternal healing that we need (Mal 4.2). And, as we come, we should bring others who also need the healing he provides.

Request – Those wishing to be healed begged Jesus to let them touch the blue tassels on the edge of his cloak (Num 15.37-41; Dt 22.12), like the woman with a haemorrhage who had touched his garment (Mt 9.20). Their means were steeped in superstition, but their motive was valid. They knew that touching Jesus would provide them with healing. A question for us is: do we ask Jesus to let us touch him? Our touch should not be one of doubt, like the desire of Thomas to prove that Jesus had been raised from the grave (Jn 20.25). Rather, our touch should be spiritual, in faith. We must ask Jesus to hold our hand through this life

and through the valley of the shadow of death into eternity. When we ask for this, we will feel his presence nearby.

Remedy – Everyone who touched Jesus was healed. There is no room for doubt or uncertainty in the words of the Gospel writers; Jesus healed them, not because of their touch but through his grace. It is interesting that the words Matthew and Mark used for ‘healed’ are derived from the word that is translated elsewhere as ‘saved’. They didn’t use one of the other words commonly used for being cured (such as the one from which we get the word therapeutic). They may have chosen the word ‘saved’ to point to the underlying meaning of the healing sign-miracles—those who come to Jesus asking for his touch will be perfectly, completely, and eternally saved.

The people who came to Jesus in Gennesaret did not understand who he was. This is not surprising, since the disciples were only beginning to comprehend that he was the God-man. The people were amazed at his power, but their main interest was to ease their earthly pain and gain a few more years of life. We, however, must recognize him as the Lord of the universe, come to him and ask him, with a touch of his Spirit, to save us from our sins.

The Work of Belief [June 22] **(Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.22-29)**

Surprise Appearance – Jesus surprised the crowd by appearing on the other side of the lake. They didn’t know that he had walked out to the disciples’ boat in the middle of the night and that, after he had climbed into the boat, it had arrived immediately at its destination (Jn 6.21). The crowd had searched for him near Bethsaida. They knew that Jesus hadn’t left for Capernaum with his disciples but couldn’t figure out how he had gotten there so quickly—thus their question, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Their question is an oblique way of asking, “How did you do it?” They are typical of the crowds of humanity who, in general, will accept as truth, without even blinking, the fiction spouted by some ‘prophetic’ guru or self-proclaimed scientific expert—for example, the *Prophecies of*

Nostradamus, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, or Carl Sagan on the origin of the universe in *Cosmos*. Yet, when it comes to accepting the fact that Jesus is God and that he can perform miracles such as disappearing from one location and instantly appearing in another many kilometres away, they dismiss the possibility as a hoax perpetrated by a deluded disciple of a first-century itinerant preacher.

Nothing that Jesus did during his time on earth was without a purpose, including his surprise appearance in Capernaum. In this action, Jesus demonstrates again that we cannot put God in a 'box'. He is not subject to human wills and expectations and will accomplish his purposes as he plans and chooses. To reinforce this point, Jesus did not explain how or when he had arrived. He wasn't going to be held accountable for explaining his ways to those who wouldn't accept him on faith.

Supplied Appetites – To reveal another miracle to the crowd would have been a waste of breath and would have only reinforced their wrong motives for seeking him. His response (26), "I tell you the truth," emphasizes the importance of what he is going to tell them instead, and reveals the fact that he knows the corrupt motivation of their hearts. They followed him only because they thought he could provide relief from the hardships of life—as a miracle-working king he could fill their stomachs. Rather than telling them how he got to Capernaum, he rebuked them for chasing the miraculous signs and failing to perceive the meaning of them. The bread they had received on the hillside across the lake was intended to point them to the eternal bread—Jesus as the saviour from sin—that they should be seeking (Is 55.2).

Sealed Approval – Jesus encourages the crowd to turn their focus from a quest for physical food (or material goods) that has value only for a moment (Prov 23.4, 5) to spiritual food that provides for eternal life (27). At this point, he is not explicit as to what the eternal food is, other than saying that it is food that does not spoil and lasts forever—i.e., it cannot go bad or ever be used up. He uses the powerful didactic mechanism of rhetorical suspense to introduce the crowd to the fact that there are two classes of food—a temporary one for the body, and an eternal one for the

spirit. He used a similar technique with the Samaritan woman when he introduced her to living water (Jn 4.10). Before he proceeds to expand on the second class of food, he presents his qualifications to give them this food—he is the Son who has been sealed. Notice that he uses the term “Son of Man” rather than “Son of God”. The latter would have been viewed as blasphemy and could have incited a riot. The former classifies Jesus among the prophets like Ezekiel (Ezk 2.1), and is an indirect appellation for the Messiah (Dan 7.13; Dan 8.17). The seal of approval was first given when the Father spoke from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism and announced that Jesus was the well-pleasing and loved Son (Mt 3.17); then it was evidenced by the miracle of the bread the previous day.

Salvation Applied – Jesus sets before them an apparent contradiction when he says to *work* for the eternal food that he will *give* (27). They focused on the ‘work’ and not on the ‘give’, and asked what work they must do to please God and obtain eternal food (Rom 10.2-4). Even if they were sincere and really wanted to know what they had to do, it was still misguided and sinful to think that men can do anything that is acceptable to God and can earn something good from him (Eph 2.8, 9; Titus 3.5). Jesus addresses their request to be directed to ‘works’ with the one ‘work’ that God requires and that pleases him. At the same time, he solves the apparent contradiction between work and gift.

There always have been, and always will be, those who want to earn merit with God, and think that it is possible. When Martin Luther realized that he could not earn salvation by his righteous acts or works of penance, he was released from the torture of guilt and doubt. A subsequent rallying-cry of the Reformation became ‘salvation by grace alone’. As the Reformers came to understand the Bible’s teaching correctly, they cast off the shackles of grace-plus-works as the basis of salvation. However today, non-Christians and members of large parts of the Church, if they think about Heaven at all, continue to place the wrong emphasis on works as the basis of earning merit with God and for securing a place in Heaven. There is only one ‘work’ that God requires to obtain the eternal ‘bread’: to *exercise* the faith he gives to us by recognizing our inability to save ourselves and by believing in Jesus

Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Manna from Heaven [June 23]

(A Synagogue Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.30-36)

Challenge – When you watch a magician perform a trick such as joining two solid rings, you know that what you have seen was an illusion and didn't really happen, yet you 'believe' it did. In contrast, the people who had seen Jesus produce bread that they had eaten would not believe that what he had done was real. Because they did not want to believe *in* him, they did not believe him. They didn't want to be confused by facts, so they rejected the reality of the actions they had witnessed, to avoid the implications—that Jesus is God and was sent from Heaven (29). In an attempt to avoid having to believe in him, they challenged him to provide them with a sign (30-31). Jesus had already given them a sign that he was the new Moses by feeding thousands on a hillside and had performed many other confirmatory miracles. But this was not enough evidence for their parochial minds. So they indicated that they would only accept Jesus as the Messiah if he could do at least as much as Moses and produce a perpetual source of bread from Heaven that could feed the whole nation. Consider the mistakes they made:

- As skeptics, they demanded empirical evidence when they should have accepted the voice of reason heard in Christ's teachings. The Jews demanded miraculous signs (1 Cor 1.22) as much as skeptics today demand 'proof' of God's existence before they will 'believe'.
- They assumed that a particular miracle would convince them. Yet, many who ate the manna didn't believe. Jesus says that it is not the perception of the 'size' of a miracle that will convince (Lk 16.29-31), but truth.
- They held to Satan's logic, 'see and believe' (Gen 3.4, 5), and rejected God's logic, which is 'believe and see' (Jn 11.40). Having seen, they still did not believe (Jn 6.36).
- They rejected Moses' own teaching that a prophet like him was to come (Dt 18.15, 18). Signs authenticated both Moses and Jesus; therefore, both should be listened to and believed.

- They rejected the fact that Moses was a shadow of the reality (Heb 3.3).
- They were materialists, placing physical reality above spiritual reality. As such, they were unwilling to accept the possibility that their theories about the nature of reality could be wrong.

Correction – Jesus didn’t answer their folly with foolishness by performing another miracle in the face of their scepticism. Instead, he firmly corrected their misunderstanding. With an emphatic ‘amen, amen’ (i.e., ‘I tell you the truth’), he reminded them that Moses hadn’t provided the manna. Moses hadn’t even prayed for a miracle, let alone performed one. In spite of their grumbling, God had graciously provided the people with food without their even asking (Ex 16.3-5). Also, Moses had told the people that the food was directly from God (Ex 16.6-8). The Jews of Jesus’ day conveniently forgot these facts, along with the fact that the Israelites had tired of the manna (Num 11.6) that they now thought so highly of.

Jesus continues his corrective instruction by changing the focus of their thoughts from an historical physical sustenance—manna—to the present spiritual bread—Jesus as the bread of life. He places himself in a special relationship with the Father by the use of ‘my’ and then shifts their attention from what *was* given to the true bread from Heaven that *is* given—a *person* who comes down from Heaven and gives life.

Charge – The people realized that Jesus was speaking of a new kind of bread that would do more than fill the stomach, since he said that it would give life to the world. They may have thought of this ‘bread’ as something magical that, if consumed, would allow them to hunger no longer, or bread to fortify them perpetually against death, or an endless supply of bread like the manna or the flour of Elijah and the widow that was never used up (1 Ki 17.14).

So they charged Jesus to give them this bread (34). There appears to be a degree of respect in their request as they call him ‘Sir’, and they may have been asking sincerely, but ignorantly, for what he was offering.

However, there continues to be a misunderstanding on their part as they still are looking for physical sustenance, and there is an element of scepticism in their request. They say, essentially, “Prove it! Give us this bread of which you speak and then we might believe your teaching.” In the same way, in every generation, men demand favours from God to fill their physical desires. They place conditions before God, expecting him to meet their particular criteria before they will accept his conditions. In response, Jesus says, “Believe!”

Claim – Jesus directs them to the object of belief by his claim to be the bread of life, in this first of the seven great ‘I am’ revelations recorded in the Gospel of John.⁸ This statement has echoes of the personal name of God (Jehovah), which in the Hebrew is a form of ‘I am’, and reveals that Jesus is the source of eternal life. We ‘eat’ this bread by believing that Jesus is the God-man sent to save sinners. When we hunger after spiritual realities and eat this spiritual bread, through belief, we will continue to need daily bread and water for physical life but will never again experience the hollow emptiness of being eternally separated from God.

Assurance in the Will of God [June 24] **(A Synagogue in Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.37-40)**

The people were looking for Jesus to prove himself by giving them manna from heaven. He declared that he had provided the manna—himself as the bread of life—and then rebuked them for not believing him, or *in* him (36). He then explained, in what appears to be a digression, the ultimate reason why they did not believe in him—they were not among the elect. In this explanation Jesus speaks without metaphor or parable and presents a number of doctrines so clearly that it is difficult to understand why many, even to this day, seem confused about the source and nature of the work of salvation. The doctrines that he presents in these four verses include: God’s sovereignty, the election, particular atonement, the effectual call, irresistible grace, vicarious

⁸Compare: Jn 8.12; Jn 10.7, 9, 11, 14; Jn 11.25; Jn 14.6; Jn 15.1, 5.

substitution, salvation through faith, perseverance of the saints, resurrection, and glorification. It would take many pages to consider all the implications of what Jesus teaches; however, we will confine ourselves, today, to only a few observations:

Giving and Coming (37) – Jesus is clear, if many modern preachers are not, that salvation begins with the work of God. God the Father has given to the Son a particular people (an established number) who have been identified from the creation of the universe. Every single person in that number will come to Jesus in faith and repentance and be saved absolutely, without any fear of ever falling away completely. Notice how Jesus states this truth. He grounds his lesson on God's giving, but then he moves on to our coming to him. We need not be distracted by debates about who is, and is not, among the elect. It is simple: everyone who comes to Jesus is among the elect. Therefore, we have an obligation to call everyone to come to Jesus, because whoever comes to him will be saved. Again, notice how Jesus declares the truth. He will never, no never! (the Greek is emphatic) drive away anyone who comes to him. Jesus doesn't say that you can only come to him if you aren't too sinful, have strong faith, have done good works, or have sufficient knowledge of theology. He says plainly that everyone who comes to him will never be driven away. This is a promise and it cannot fail. So come to Jesus!

Coming and Giving (38) – The congregation sought bread from heaven that was better than the manna the Israelites received during their wilderness wanderings. Jesus responded by telling them that he was the bread of life (35). This bread is better than the manna. He also informed them, seven times in this discourse, that he came down from Heaven—so he was 'bread from heaven'. In contrast to their desire to obtain 'magical' bread that would never run out and would satisfy their physical appetites continuously, Jesus offered them spiritual bread that, if eaten once, would satisfy their real needs eternally. They wanted selfishly, he gave selflessly. Consider the degree of selflessness in his giving actions:

- He came willingly and voluntarily in accord with the Eternal Covenant.
- He obediently left the riches of Heaven for the miseries of earth.

- He suppressed his own will to give glory to the Father.
- He gave his life so that he could give his people the bread of eternal life.

Willing to Reserve (39) – Jesus next distinguishes between the hidden will of God and his public will. In his hidden will, God has determined the exact number who will be saved from the power of sin and Satan and brought into his eternal kingdom. These God the Father has reserved for his Son and has guaranteed that they can never be lost—now and forever. The reason they cannot be lost is not found in those who are saved, but in the will of God who preserves them. This provides an unshakable assurance that no matter how weak our grasp of Jesus, the hand of God is far stronger and will lift us up and place us on his lap of infinite security.

Willing to Receive (40) – God also wills the public dimension of the work of salvation. Those whom he has included in his gift to the Son will be made willing to receive the Lord Jesus as their lord and saviour. They will turn from their path that leads to perdition and look in faith toward the one who gave his life to redeem them from their debt of sin before God.

Willing to Raise (39, 40) Jesus makes an astonishing declaration—“I will raise him up at the last day”—and then immediately repeats it. Why is this so astounding? Because of the implications of what he says:

- *Deity* – Jesus declares that he is God, with ultimate control over the material universe, by stating that *he* will raise his people from the dead.
- *Day* – Contrary to what materialistic naturalism teaches, the universe is not eternal. The universe had a beginning when God created it, and it is progressing quickly (1 Cor 7.29) to its end—the last day.
- *Destiny* – On the last day of this created order there will be a resurrection of all mankind. This is not a myth or false hope but an absolute certainty. Those who died believing in Christ will be raised to an eternal life in the glory of Heaven, but those who rejected Christ with their dying breath are destined for an eternal Hell (Dan 12.2; Mt 25.41).

God will complete his work of redemption. Those whom the Father has given to Jesus will come to him in faith and they will be raised from the dead. Hallelujah!

Materialistic Myths vs Spiritual Substance [June 25] (A Synagogue Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.41-51)

Our culture thinks that it is modern and progressive and that the ancients were ignorant and unsophisticated. In reality, other than in technology and an understanding of some aspects of how the universe operates, man has not achieved any significant advancement in two thousand years. The people at the time of Jesus were just as ‘modern’ and ‘sophisticated’ in their world-view as is the average person today. They held to the same false beliefs and superstitions that permeate our culture. Any person, ancient or modern, who has not believed in Jesus Christ as saviour and has not accepted a Biblical perspective on life, holds to a set of basic materialistic myths. Jesus presents a challenge to four of these myths in his confrontation with the unbelieving assembly. He uses figures of speech and simple imagery that makes his teaching seem simplistic. However, in truth, the underlying power of his message addresses not only the false views of the Jewish leaders of his day, but also the false views held by the ‘intellectual’ elite of every generation.

Heaven’s Handiwork – *Myth 1*: God is at most an immanent force and not a personal God who controls providentially all the events of history. Men hold contradictory views about the nature of God. Some believe, for example, that there are spiritual forces (embedded in the alignment of heavenly objects or as demons), which maliciously control man’s destiny. In all religions, other than Christianity, their god is either a capricious and malevolent tyrant (e.g., in Islam) or an impotent force that has no direct involvement in the day-to-day unfolding of events (e.g., in Buddhism, Hinduism). In general, men are not willing to accept the Biblical teaching that God, and God alone, controls the outcome of all events in the universe and that he is intimately involved in all aspects of the providential unfolding of his plans. To the Jews, God had become a distant force, much like the deistic view of God. They show incredulity

with the idea that he is personally involved in the lives of men. This unbelief is displayed in their rejection of Jesus' claim that he had come down from Heaven (41). They looked for a materialistic explanation for his presence among them (42) and were not willing to accept the possibility that his place of origin was Heaven. Those today, who reject God as creator, the idea that Intelligent Design is manifest in creation, and the truth that God is in control of every event, are just like the ancient Jews.

Divine Drawing – *Myth 2*: Man controls his own destiny, is independent of God, and has an ultimately free moral will. Jesus didn't debate with the unbelieving Jews about his claim to be God (the one from Heaven). Rather, he dismissed their grumbling and added a second assertion about his own divine nature that challenged their fundamental presuppositions. He informed them that God, and he himself as God, is the source of Law—the one who teaches about sin and what God requires of man (45), the prime mover in salvation—the one who converts the heart and draws men (44), and the one who will raise the dead—the giver of life (44). Life, moral standards, and conversion are all from God. Man is an entirely dependent and impotent creature with no right or ability to determine his own destiny.

Spiritual Sight – *Myth 3*: Only what can be established empirically through the evidence of physical senses is real. Men pit 'science' against religion and 'reason' against faith. They claim that any interpretation of reality that depends on the hand of God cannot be accepted within the domain of science. They exclude from the realm of the possible any explanation for causality that includes God as creator. Their materialistic filters dismiss from the range of the probable any evidence that points to a designer. Jesus shatters this myth by informing us that unless we have spiritual sight we will never be able to understand reality (46). A biologist with a microscope or an astronomer with a telescope will never fully understand creation, and what he thinks he understands will be full of more holes than Swiss cheese, as long as he starts from a materialistic presupposition. No matter how good his instruments, he will fail as long as he is looking in the wrong place for understanding. As has been said

before, we must believe in order to see.

Eternal Existence – *Myth 4*: There is no spiritual component to man, mind is only brain, man is essentially an animal, and his existence ceases at the point of death. The institutions of this world—the academy, science, medicine, the media, and the legal system—all conspire to confirm this myth. Following the principles of Newspeak, they attempt to remake truth in their own image. Jesus emphatically speaks truth and informs his hearers that physical food (even in miraculous form, like manna) is only of temporary worth because eventually all men must die (49). In contrast, he declares his flesh to be the bread that provides eternal life (48, 50, 51). To eat this bread one must believe in him (47)—he must have a continuing trust. Jesus decimates this fourth myth of the materialist with his three-fold declaration of the reality of eternal existence—‘everlasting life,’ ‘not die,’ and ‘live forever’. It is clear that the Jews understood him to be speaking of a spiritual existence that transcends the physical component. They did not accuse him of speaking nonsense. They knew, as do we, that all men must die physically. Death, however, does not end existence because man has a spiritual component that does not cease to exist—for the believer this eternal existence is resurrected life with God.

Spiritual Eating [June 26]

(A Synagogue Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.52-59)

Elevated Difficulty – During this discourse Jesus was teaching in the ‘synagogue’ in Capernaum. He may have moved from the lakeside to the *building* where the Jews normally met or it may be that he met with the Jews as an *assembly*, rather than at a specific place. In either case, it is clear that he was speaking to Jews. It is important to notice this as he elevates the faith-challenge to another level. The Jews had debated among themselves how it was possible for Jesus to give them his flesh to eat. Some probably realized that he was speaking figuratively since Psalm 27.2 refers to David’s enemies eating his flesh. However, they would have been perplexed as how to apply David’s being slandered to what Jesus was saying. Jesus is aware of this debate and adds even more

complexity, apparently to confound them further. He introduces the concept of drinking his blood. He repeats this requirement four times in a few sentences to make sure that he is not misunderstood. The idea of drinking blood would have appalled Jews. They had not forgotten the law prohibiting eating of blood that was given during the restatement of the Covenant of Creation at the time of Noah (Gen 9.4). They also had later commands from the time of Moses that reinforced this prohibition (Lev 3.17; Lev 17.10-14). Jesus appears to be turning their world upside down. His bold figures of speech would have been as revolutionary as is the concept of the Trinity or the idea that Jesus is both God and man. Jesus is reconditioning their materialistic thinking by focusing them on the necessity of spiritually appropriating, through faith, the benefits of his pending atonement sacrifice.

Eating, Drinking – What does Jesus mean when he says that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood? Why does he use such cryptic language? Why does he use such, apparently, repulsive language? We live in a bizarre age that finds the killing of seals for fur repugnant, but allows millions of babies to be slaughtered by abortion, and provides absolution for psychopathic murderers but scoffs at parents who desire to maintain the life of a brain-damaged infant daughter. Christians have been influenced by the ‘sensitivities’ of our culture that calls God barbaric because he punished pagan idolaters with death, and therefore we have difficulty understanding the imagery used by Jesus. All sin, ultimately, deserves the punishment of death (Gen 3.3; Dt 24.16; Ezk 18.20), but Jesus is not exhorting some form of cannibalism—as opponents of the early Church charged Christians of performing when they partook of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, he is restating the necessity of shedding of blood for the remission of sin. Sin must be paid for with blood. It must be either our own blood or the blood of a substitute. The lambs and calves of the OT sacrificial system proved inadequate because they could not pay the debt of human sin (Heb 10.4) and were only a pointer to what was required—the death of a perfect man, the God-man Jesus. Jesus is speaking prophetically of his death on the cross as a substitute for our sins. For us to partake of his sacrifice on our behalf, we must ‘eat and drink’ it. The *only* way we can partake of his body is by

believing that he died as a perfect sacrifice and that he died on our behalf. To ‘eat and drink’ Christ we need an:

- *Appetite* – Loving him and hungering for his righteousness (Mt 5.6).
- *Appreciation* – Overflowing in thankfulness for what he has done for us.
- *Appropriation* – Not observing, but receiving him into our inner being.
- *Assimilation* – Living on the spiritual nourishment that he provides.

This is spiritual eating of Christ.

Eucharistic Direction? – Jesus spoke these words a year before he instituted the Lord’s Supper. This fact, along with the use of the word ‘flesh’ by John rather than ‘body’ (Mt 26.26), leads most protestant commentators to conclude that they do not have any direct relevance to the Lord’s Supper. In contrast, Roman Catholic commentators infer that Jesus is establishing the principle of the physical presence of his body in the elements of the Eucharist. To conclude that Jesus is speaking of a literal eating of his body during the Lord’s Supper, is to make the same mistake that some of the Jews made when they thought that Jesus was speaking of physically eating his flesh. Nicodemus made a similar mistake when he thought that the new-birth referred to a physical rebirth (Jn 3.4) and the Samaritan woman made the same mistake, when she assumed that Jesus was speaking of natural water (Jn 4.11). However, it may be just as much a mistake to claim that there is *not* a prophetic reference to the Lord’s Supper. The use of ‘flesh’ instead of ‘body’ may have no special significance. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (c 100 AD) used the words ‘flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ’ to define the Eucharist, and Justin Martyr (c 150 AD) uses both ‘flesh’ and ‘body’ when citing the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper. It appears that these words were spoken around the time of Passover, and Jesus may be looking ahead prophetically to the replacement of the Passover with the new Covenant meal that would commemorate his death. We partake of his death through his spiritual presence in the elements of the Lord’s Supper.

Embracing Divinity – Whoever spiritually eats of the one sent by the

Father, comes into union with Christ. This is the only way to have eternal life that is more than mere existence. When we embrace Christ, he sustains us through physical death into a resurrection at the last day. We have now, and forever, a life of mutual abiding relationship with Christ—we remain in him and he in us—in which we enjoy eternal intimacy, security, and happiness.

Hard Teachings [June 27]

(Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.60-65)

Troublesome Truth – We should not be surprised that the teachings of Jesus troubled the Jews. God’s truth is always hard for man to accept, and there are many in the Church today who are like the Old Covenant Jews and find truth troublesome. For example, they want to compromise the Bible’s teachings with the beliefs of ‘science’ about geological ages or evolution and reject the plain teaching about how God created the universe during the six days before he made Adam. They also reject the Biblical truth about a global Flood that destroyed everything on the face of the earth, in order to accept theories about the age of artefacts found in archaeological digs. Others have difficulty accepting God’s truth about the roles of men and women and the nature of marriage established at creation and compromise with the ‘politically correct’ and intolerant world of humanism. Finally, others reject one or more of God’s laws, particularly that related to the sanctity of the Sabbath. When we see these reactions to truth, it is not surprising that men would be troubled by the presentation of Jesus in which he declared himself to be the bread of life and declared that eating his flesh and drinking his blood is the only way to gain eternal life. A lesson we should learn from the Jews’ reaction to truth is that we should be like Jesus and present truth simply and boldly, never being worried about how it will be accepted, because most people will reject it.

Anticipated Ascension – Jesus asked the Jews if his teaching scandalized (offended) them. This is a rhetorical question with a tinge of sarcasm. He knew where their hearts were because he understood sinful human nature, had remarkable powers of observation, and had unusual

knowledge (at times directly from Heaven) about the hearts of men. So he cranks up the tension a few more degrees by saying in effect, “If you find *that* truth difficult what are you going to do when I ascend into the heavens?” He may be asking them if seeing his return to the Father would convince them that he really was from Heaven. Or, he may be asking them if such an action, instead of convincing them, would compound their doubts about him. By placing this apparent hypothetical in front of them, he is declaring a set of even more difficult truths for the Jewish mind:

- His pre-incarnate existence (‘where he was before’), making him eternal.
- His divinity, as understood by the term ‘Son of Man’ (Dan 7.13).
- His pending crucifixion that is implied by his ascension. His ascension began on the third day, with the resurrection, and was completed with his going into glory 40 days later. The idea of the Messiah being crucified was a scandal (stumbling block) to the Jews (1 Cor 1.23).

Proper Perspective – In case the Jews thought that Jesus had been speaking about actually eating his physical flesh and drinking his liquid blood, rather than speaking metaphorically about spiritual eating by believing in him, he adds a corrective word—“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.” It is through faith, implanted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we obtain eternal life. We are to understand the words he speaks in their spiritual sense and not to place any hope in the elements of the flesh (physical). With this proper perspective we will ask Jesus to send his life-giving Spirit into our hearts (Jn 14.16-17; Jn 20.22) and dismiss the superstitious idea that a mere participation in eating the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper can save us.

Hardened Hearts – To receive eternal life we must listen to the words of Jesus and receive them in faith. However, many do not believe. So Jesus concludes this teaching session by addressing the two sides of unbelief. First, he mentions the human side, which is a hardened heart. The words of truth are often misunderstood by human wisdom, and the parabolic teachings have little more than a wooden literalness to those

who do not *want* to believe. This is why Jesus noted that there would always be some who do not believe, and even ones who claim to believe, who really do not—they are hypocritical betrayers. In spite of the teaching they hear about the way of salvation and the evidence that they have been given that Jesus is the God-man, men persist in unbelief. The implication of Jesus' statement is that men are responsible for their unbelief, implicated by it, and held accountable for it.

Sovereign Sanction – There is, however, another side to unbelief—God's sovereignty. Although men are accountable for their unbelief, ultimately it is God who hardens hearts (Ex 9.12; Rom 9.11-13) and who saves by drawing men to himself. Jesus does not sidestep this truth, no matter how difficult it seems to be. He makes it clear that it is impossible to have faith without Divine enablement. The fact that men are held liable for unbelief even while God sovereignly sanctions it is another 'troublesome truth' that all kinds of people, even among those in the Church who are born again, stubbornly object to. They do not like to be told that they are (or were) completely dead in their sins and that they have no means of bringing themselves to spiritual life. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, first raises them to spiritual life so that he can raise them to new physical life.

We all must accept the truth that the only way to obtain eternal life is by asking the Holy Spirit to convert our hearts and feed us on the Bread of Life.

Defection and Declaration [June 28] **(Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Jn 6.66-71)**

Desertion – Ideas have legs. Important ideas call for a response and result in action. As Jesus developed his message over the two-year period from his Baptism until this lesson on the Bread of Life, the reaction to his teaching grew stronger—either strongly supportive or aggressively antagonistic. His teaching reached a climax with his declaration of pre-incarnate existence, divinity, and pending crucifixion that is implied by his ascension (Jn 6.62). At this point, many of his apparent disciples

were no longer able to accept him as a healing-Rabbi and turned away. They had hoped that he would offer them an earthly kingdom that would provide them with relief from the occupation of Rome and privation. But they were disappointed when, instead, he called for personal faith and taught that salvation was the work of God. This is how it has been ever since. Jesus is palatable to the world as long as he just dispenses moral advice. When he demands faith, repentance, and obedience, he is spurned as being too narrow and particular. Men want a broad way of life, not the narrow way to Heaven (Mt 7.13).

Declaration – Jesus asked his twelve core disciples if they also were going to leave. He wisely framed the question in a form intended to strengthen their faith in the face of apostasy by many. It is psychologically easier for men to show support for something with a weak negative than with a strong positive. For example, it is easier to say, “I don’t think it is wise to allow a murderer to escape just retribution, even if this requires death,” than to say, “A murderer must be put to death!” Jesus gave them the opportunity to answer in the negative, possibly in a form such as, “No, Master, we aren’t offended too much by your teaching, so we will stick around for now.” Although they didn’t yet have a full understanding about Christ and his work, they believed in him, had been absorbing his teachings, and were well along the path to full knowledge. So Peter, on behalf of the rest, goes beyond a simple negative and provides a powerful response that, from a human perspective, is surprising because it is:

- *Dismissive* – With a counter question—“Lord, to whom shall we go?”—Peter dismisses the idea of leaving as impossible. His answer is a form that, in philosophical terms, argues from the “impossibility of contrary.” For example, God must exist because of the impossibility of the contrary. If God doesn’t exist, there can be no rationality, morality, or meaning to our existence. Therefore, it is impossible that God *not* exist. We should quickly dismiss any thought of going to anyone or any thing, other than Christ with the same response. Where could we possibly turn? Not to matter, time and chance—they cannot produce volition, rationality and morality. Not to the wealth of nations—it decays into dust. Not to the opinions

of professors or judges—they are full of obvious contradictions. Not to unbounded pleasure—it deceives and leaves men broken. Not to holy works—they leave a perpetual nagging doubt as to how much is enough. True religion, based on faith in Jesus, is far better than every other religion because it alone has the answers to man's deepest needs.

- *Definitive* – Peter is definite as to where the words of eternal life can be found. Jesus is not *one* way of many to Heaven, he is the *only* way. To hear, believe, and obey his teachings is the only way to obtain salvation.
- *Decisive* – Peter is also decisive in his assurance. He says, literally, “We have believed and have known.” His faith is strengthened by knowledge, not fancy, and it has grown stronger as he has heard Jesus teach and seen him perform many miracles. Christians first believe, and then they know.
- *Descriptive* – What we come to know, along with Peter, is that Jesus is “the Holy One of God.” This means that we accept Jesus’ transcendence (Is 40.25), representation of God (Col 1.15), sinless nature (Is 6.3; Is 29.23; 1 Pt 2.22), and righteous demands (Rom 7.12).

Hearing Christ’s teaching should lead us to make the same great declaration.

Destined – Jesus reminded the disciples that salvation is not something that they can conjure up from their own wills, when he said, “I have chosen you.” In this discourse, he develops the teaching about God’s sovereignty in salvation through a series of levels:

- *Dispensation* (37-39) – God gives the Messiah (Christ) to those who come to him, and none of them will be lost—their salvation is assured.
- *Drawn* (44-45) – Only those who are drawn can come to Christ—we have no ability to come on our own; there is no free will in salvation.
- *Destiny* (65) – The ability to come to Christ requires the Father’s enabling—the Spirit indwells those destined (pre-destined) by God.

- *Destruction (70-71)* – Those not chosen for eternal life are destined for destruction—God predetermines who will not believe (Rom 11.7).

Devil – Those who stayed and nodded in agreement to Peter’s strong declaration of faith did not fool Jesus. Among them was Judas, who was a devil because he acted with malicious deceit. He may have fooled the other disciples with his apparent piety, but he could not fool Jesus who sees the hearts of men. Judas is an example of many hypocrites who remain in the Church (i.e., among the covenant-confessors) until their dying breath. We must be aware and watch for false sheep and know that by their words and actions we can discern them (Mt 7.15-20). Pray that no devils will be found in our midst.

Interior vs Exterior Cleanliness [June 29] (Capernaum in Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Mt 15.1-20; Mk 7.1-23; Jn 7.1)

Human Traditions – Jesus avoided Judea after a mass exodus by many of his ‘disciples’ showed that there was growing animosity against his teaching. So Jewish leaders came from Judea to challenge him. First, they interrogated him about his disciples’ failure to observe traditional cleansing rites that were not required by God’s Law but by the teachings of former religious leaders. The accusation about the disciples’ unfaithfulness to tradition sharpens the focus on what is ultimately at stake—true religion is faith in the *person* of Jesus Christ, whereas false religions demand adherence to human traditions. We must be careful not to turn Christianity into a caricature of the truth, with:

- *Strictness* – The particular strictness that is highly toxic is not careful obedience to God’s Law out of love for God (Jn 14.15), but rather a legalism that attempts to earn merit with God by strict observance of particular ritual actions and demands that others follow the same rules.
- *Superstition* – We might believe that others, like Hindus and Roman Catholics, are superstitious, but that we are not. They have their holy waters, dabs of mud, repeated mantras, dietary prohibitions, and

devout gestures. We could be just too nearsighted to see our own superstitions.

- *Substitution* – Human traditions have a way of replacing God’s explicit commands in every generation. For example, few believers today accept the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath and many reject God’s Law (Ex 20.8-11). Yet, they cling passionately to the observance of ‘holydays’ like Easter and Christmas—days that our Protestant forefathers viewed as idolatry. We must not let tradition become our Mishnah and Talmud.
- *Separatism* – As with the Jews, the observation of rituals often becomes the distinguishing mark of ‘holy’ separation from the world. Instead, our love for Christian brothers and sisters should distinguish us (Jn 13.35).

Hypothetical Twisting – Jesus did not rebut the challenge of the Pharisees. Rather, he went on the offensive by quoting the Law, as a contrast to human traditions. He cited the fifth commandment (Ex 20.12) and accused his opponents of attempting to get around the command by creating hypothetical categories of ‘honour’. They dedicated gifts to God (referred to as ‘corban’) but continued to use the items or money as if they were their own. They gave the dedicated ‘offerings’ merely as a means of avoiding providing support to their needy parents. This was a misuse of the dedicatory process, whereby gifts dedicated to God were to be given into the Temple treasury, and a means of rationalizing away their obligation to the explicit command of God. We may think that their specific actions were silly. However, Christians are just as prone to find ways of rationalizing God’s commands, for example:

- ‘Borrowing’ supplies from employers by claiming that it is just part of their compensation package,
- Declaring specific income as outside of the tax authority’s purview,
- Claiming that ‘love’ makes sexual acts before marriage permissible, or
- Acting as if self-discipline is less important in some areas of life (e.g., over-consumption of food) than in others (e.g., prayer).

Hypocritical Thoughts – Jesus then addressed two problems that afflict

all people, at least to some degree, who claim to be believers: 1) establishing the source of authority for worship, and 2) understanding the nature of sin. To illustrate the first problem he quoted from Isaiah (Is 29.13) and applied it to his hearers. The Church needs to apply the same words of the prophet to our own contemporary situation. Worship in most churches today is very far from God's standard and full of vain and idolatrous practices. Yet, most Christians, when confronted with what Scripture defines as true and acceptable worship, claim that God is pleased with whatever forms are presented, as long as the 'heart' is in them, and that God couldn't possibly mean what he says. They substitute all kinds of human inventions for God's defined elements and forms of worship. As a result, they claim with their tongues that they are worshipping God, but in their hearts they are actually honouring men and human traditions. For example, when confronted with a Biblically, logically, consistent argument showing that God does not accept merely human compositions in sung-worship, any more than he accepts readings from texts other than the Bible as worship, their first response is incredulity. They cannot believe that God would only accept the Psalms composed by the Holy Spirit. Their next response is a rationalization for why human hymns are permissible as substitutes for his God-breathed words. Then they follow with a vehement assertion that they will sing their beloved hymns because they are *better* than the Psalms. They are honouring man rather than obeying God!

Hearts' Transmission – The Pharisees believed that they could hate their neighbour or lust after his wife, and be justified before God, as long as they observed ritual practices meticulously. Jesus dismantles this false view, as he does in the *Sermon on the Mount*, by teaching that sin is primarily a heart-matter and not a hand-matter. He uses a graphic illustration of food passing through the digestive system to show that what goes into a man may be clean; it is what comes out that is unclean. In contrast, sin of every type (Jesus lists more than a dozen forms) wells up from the heart (Jer 17.9), and pollutes his entire being, oozes from his pores, and is displayed in every member of his body, such as his tongue, eyes, hands, and feet. Jesus displaces ritual cleansing and food laws with their antitype—spiritually clean hearts.

Praying Faith [June 30]

(Vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, Spring 32 AD. Mt 15.21-28; Mk 7.24-30)

Border Region – The common people had defected from Jesus because his teaching was too hard to accept, and the sceptical leaders had attempted to trip him up with their questions. In response to this opposition, Jesus decided to go into the north western border regions where he expected to have some time for rest and to continue teaching his disciples privately. However, his presence became known in spite of his attempt at secrecy. We should be thankful that he was recognized, because this rare encounter with a Gentile teaches us about prayer and faith.

Begging Request – While he was in the house where he was seeking privacy, a woman approached him with a request. The woman is identified both as a Canaanite and a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. This means that she was a descendant of the ancient pagans, called Phoenicians, who had occupied the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Since the time of Alexander the Great this area had been absorbed into the domain of Greek and then, later, Roman culture. From a mere human perspective she was without hope. She had been reared in paganism, was from a doomed race (Dt 7.1-2), and was living among people where the Gospel wasn't known. In modern terms, she was a typical member of western culture with a dab of superstition to fill the void in her soul and a sprinkle of inconsistent moral opinions to temper her materialistic ambitions. But she had a problem her proud heart couldn't deal with. It was a powerful manifestation of evil that touched her personally—a demon possessed her daughter. How did she deal with this problem? She approached Jesus and prayed to him. In the first part of her prayer she:

- *Addressed* him reverently, calling him “Lord, Son of David.”
- *Announced* her need for deliverance from the power of spiritual forces.
- *Appealed* for mercy from the one who alone can conquer sin and Satan.

Our prayers must be based on the same understanding. We must confess

that Jesus is Lord, acknowledge our inability to save ourselves, and cry to him for rescue before we sink into the pit of despair.

Bewildering Reply – At first Heaven seemed silent—Jesus did not reply. She must have persisted in her petition because the disciples suggested that Jesus send her away—they seem to be saying “give her what she wants so that she will stop pestering us.” Then Jesus answered, indicating that her prayer had, in fact, been heard. His answer is cast in the form of a parable or riddle. From his reaction to her request and his reply we learn about:

- *Persistence* – As Jesus teaches elsewhere (Lk 18.1-8), we are not to give up when we pray. The woman, who didn’t yet know Jesus personally, is a rebuke to our lack of persistence in prayer. If we really desire to see a relative healed, or care for the salvation of a friend, we will not give up addressing our petition to *our* Lord, even if Heaven seems silent.
- *Proving* – Jesus’ response appears to be harsh. It is true that Jews called Gentiles, ‘dogs’, but the word Jesus uses is something like *pet* and refers to house dogs rather than to wild scavengers in the streets. However, he uses this parable to test her, so it is cast in the form of a mild insult and challenge similar to what is found in the test of faith of Job by his friends. The objective was to provoke her to commitment. We may find God, at times, doing the same with us when he confronts us with providences that bewilder us. They should not discourage us, but rouse us to press on in faith. We can also apply this as an example when confronting pagans in our day. We can challenge them to a faith-commitment by showing them the foolish end of their illogical beliefs (Prov 26.5).
- *Priorities* – Jesus indicated that he had a primary focus in his ministry—presenting himself as the Messiah to Israel. Notice, however, that he says ‘first’. He implies that there is a second goal. The Gospel is intended also for Gentiles. God will save every person who comes to him in faith. This subtle hint of promise encouraged the woman to continue her appeal.

Bold Response – In the latter part of her prayer, the woman shows that

her raw faith and expectation had been transformed into applied knowledge as she matches his provoking challenge. She:

- *Answered* boldly with an ingenious response that reminded God that the promise made to Abraham (Gen 17.3, 4) provided for Jew and Gentile.
- *Acknowledged* her humble state and did not bristle at being considered less than a child of the house but only a mere ‘dog’.
- *Accepted* that whatever Jesus would graciously give her, even if crumbs, was sufficient to help overcome her most desperate needs.

We must approach God in our prayers confidently expecting him to hear and answer (Heb 4.16), but at the same time realizing our humble position before him and accepting from his hand whatever he graciously gives us.

Blessed Reward – At the end of history, when the accounts are balanced, our family, fame, and fortune will be weightless dust. The only factor that will move the scales and determine our destiny will be our response to the Gospel in faith—Jesus must be sought sincerely and believed, and our faith must be tried and proved. And then, just as for this woman, the result will be a blessed reward. We can go toward our eternal home confident that our prayers have been heard, the spiritual forces of evil have been defeated, and that we will find eternal welcome and rest.

Healing by Spit and Spirit [July 1]

(From Tyre to Decapolis, Spring 32 AD. Mt 15.29-31; Mk 7.31-37)

Gracious Compassion – Despite the fact that many of the common people had left Jesus because they found his teaching difficult to accept, he did not turn away another crowd that came to him for mere physical healing. He would have preferred that they came for eternal spiritual healing, but he still provided for their physical needs. This is how it is with God; in general he continues to shower mercies graciously on men even though they don’t deserve anything but instant execution and eternal punishment in Hell. While he provides for man’s physical needs, such as by providing food and shelter, his desire is that all would turn to

him in faith and repentance.

God's Channel – Matthew speaks of a number of generic healings whereas Mark focuses on one in particular. In his account, Jesus performs what appear to be strange actions—putting his fingers in a deaf mute's ears, spitting, and touching the man's tongue. Different explanations have been offered for the actions. Some suggest they are a form of communication (like sign language) with the man—Jesus is telling him through actions, what he intends to do. Another explanation is that they are symbolical actions—for example, inserting his fingers in the man's ears points to piercing through the blockage. Another possibility is that Jesus used the power of visual and aural supports, like a speaker emphasizing a point by pounding his fist into the palm of his hand to draw attention to the importance of his action. The difficulty with this latter explanation is that Jesus took the man aside from the crowd so that he would not draw attention to this particular miracle.

The actions do not have medicinal merit, so they must have another purpose. It may be that they are used as an object lesson for the disciples. Jesus did not need to use intermediate means to heal. He could heal with a word (Lk 4.39) or a touch (Mt 20.34). We should observe, however, that the man's condition does not appear to be related to a direct spiritual problem as in other cases (e.g., Mt 9.32). In this respect the situation of the deaf-mute is like that of the blind man in John 9.2-3. His blindness was not the direct result of a particular sin (Jn 9.2, 3). In both cases Jesus included physical supports when he healed.

It may be that Jesus is teaching through his actions, supported with physical means, that God uses temporal means to execute many of his plans. In particular, men are given a purpose and a temporal role. They are part of God's means—the channel—for accomplishing his work. While the Holy Spirit is the final cause of all healing, men, with their medicines and their medical technology, are the temporal instruments of the sovereign governor of the universe. If this interpretation is correct, it teaches us not to go to one extreme or the other when dealing with physical healing. We are not to ignore the morally valid and reasonable

technological means God has providentially provided for our use; nor are we to lose sight of the fact that behind all healing is the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be neither spiritualists who deny the physical realm, nor materialists who ignore the spiritual realm

Grieved Christ – Jesus’ sigh indicates his grief over the temporary power of Satan to deform and destroy. It echoes the groans of the world waiting for its redemption from spiritual bondage (Rom 8.22). His command of *Ephphatha!* (‘Be opened!’) is directed to more than the ears of the man. It is a prophetic proclamation to all of creation emancipating it from its shackles of sin. When men look into Heaven through Christ, the mute tongues will be loosed in praise (Is 35.6); but even more, spiritual deserts will blossom and a way of holiness will be opened to the eternal Zion—Heaven.

Grudging Congratulation – Both Gospel writers note the amazement of those who witnessed the healings (Mt 15.31; Mk 7.37). It may be that at this time Jesus performed more miracles than he had at any other instance. Those in attendance would have come away with the same level of amazement as would a crowd from a World Cup soccer match if one player had scored eight goals. It required miracles before they could conclude that he had ‘done everything well’. In spite of themselves, they spoke prophetically, for in their words is an echo of Genesis 1.31—Jesus had brought about a new creation.

Gentiles’ Conviction – The miracles declared that God was with mankind and demonstrated Jesus’ divinity. Some of the crowd believe in him. He was in a region where Gentiles as well as Jews resided and Gentiles likely brought their sick for healing. Matthew, who wrote primarily for a Jewish audience, indicates that the people ‘praised the God of Israel’. Adding ‘of Israel’ would be superfluous if he were not informing us that Jesus pointed Gentiles to the true God. After Jesus fed a Jewish crowd in the wilderness (Mk 6.35-44), he proclaimed that he offered spiritual bread greater than the manna Moses had provided. At this, the Jews rejected him (Jn 1.10). In response, Jesus invites Gentiles into his Church so that he can feed them spiritually. This account is a

prelude to a second meal offered in the wilderness (Mk 8.1-9a).

Guiding Command – Jesus did not want the crowds coming to him for mere physical healing—he commanded them not to make his miracles known. He wants people to come to him in belief, not for the temporal provisions he can provide, but instead to receive the eternal, spiritual food that he alone gives.

A Second Meal in the Wilderness [July 2] (Decapolis, Spring 32 AD. Mt 15.32-38; Mk 8.1-9a)

Why does Jesus miraculously feed a large crowd a second time? What can we learn from an event that is so similar to the one that occurred a few weeks before at Bethsaida near Julias? The lessons are probably not to be found in the comparative details, such as the differences in the number of loaves of bread and fishes, number of people fed, or number of baskets of fragments collected. Rather, the account teaches us about the principles by which Jesus operated—it teaches us to live lives of patient persistence.

Compassion in the Face of Denial – One crowd had rejected Jesus, and then another assembled. The first crowd denied what he taught about the necessity of obtaining spiritual healing and the bread from Heaven. But a second crowd assembled seeking the same temporary physical relief from hunger, disease, and deprivation. His message didn't appear to be getting through. He could have justly told off the crowd for seeking him for the wrong reasons and sent them away to perish, but instead he healed all their sick and then fed them all.

Jesus did not keep a personal record of the wicked denials that he faced every day. Instead of becoming bitter about rejection, he faced each day and new situation with a hopeful disposition. Out of every encounter, most might reject him but some would believe and receive. It was ultimately for the good of the receptive few—the ones given to him by the Father—that Jesus kept pouring out compassion. He came to save *his* people.

However, he continued to show compassion toward even those who rejected him because this display of mercy had an important purpose. Each gracious act of compassion that was ridiculed, ignored, or falsely attributed to an evil power compounded the guilt of the wicked. He heaped fiery coals on their heads (Rom 12.20) that will burn throughout eternity.

God continues to work every day in the same way through his providences. He provides food, health, and security to the rebellious hordes of mankind because scattered among them are his precious gems that he is saving. On the rest of thankless humanity an infinite weight of guilt is piling up. Our mentors should be our Brother and our Father who teach us to act with gentle kindness toward even those who come to us only for temporal help. Our hope is that we may lead some to Christ. The rest store up wrath for the way they mistreat truth. We will leave them in God's hands.

Constancy in the Face of Doubt – Jesus suggests to his disciples that they were to feed the hungry multitude, even though he knew that they had only a meagre supply of food. We would think that after the previous demonstration of his power and the collection of baskets filled with surplus fragments, the disciples would turn to Jesus and say, “Here, Lord, are our supplies. Turn them into a feast!” Instead, they express their doubt about how *they* could get enough food in such a remote place to feed the crowd. Our initial reaction is to ask, “How could they be so stupid?” But are we in a position to judge them? Do we not see God provide more than enough for our needs every day, and then when the first tough situation arises, how do we respond? Do we say, “Yes, Lord, you can take this trouble and turn it into a blessing for me?” Our response, instead, is usually filled with doubts: “Why is this happening to *me*?” “Does God really care for *me*?” “*I* don’t deserve this!”

Jesus does not become exasperated with the disciples’ doubt. Instead, he told the crowd to sit down, and fed them by multiplying the loaves and fishes. We must not miss the key point. He did not perform this miracle

to demonstrate his power to the crowds. He had already demonstrated it so fully that they “were overwhelmed with amazement” (Mk 7.37). Nor is his point, in this instance, to position himself as the greater-Moses who would feed his people with a meal better than manna. His point isn’t even to increase the level of understanding of the disciples. They knew what Jesus could do, and who he was. The issue is not a lack of knowledge but, rather, a lack of trust. Jesus, in this second miraculous meal, teaches us to trust him constantly, no matter what the circumstances are in which he directs our lives.

Confirmation in the Face of Disbelief – Notice that both accounts tell us that the people who ate were *satisfied*. As in the first miraculous meal, many baskets full of fragments were collected. Jesus did not just provide enough to meet the bare necessity, he provided an over-abundance. When God created the universe, it wasn’t a stark, grey, utilitarian abode for man. It was filled with colour and variety, and the products of an imaginative creator. It overflowed with abundance. It was all “very good.”

It is quite likely that this particular meal was provided to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. From both groups, the majority probably continued in their disbelief. Regardless, Jesus demonstrated what God has been showing men for over six-thousand years:

- In spite of what they believe about him, he is Lord of the universe.
- There is no physical or spiritual need that he cannot fill completely.
- Men must trust him and believe that he works all things for their good.
- Those continuing in unbelief will not partake of the inexhaustible bounty.

This is the message that we must proclaim until Jesus returns to this earth.

Demand for a Sign [July 3]

(From Decapolis to Magadan, Spring 32 AD. Mt 15.39-16.4; Mk 8.9b-12)

We live in an age that prides itself in being scientific and rational. Educated people claim that they are sceptical and careful about weighing evidence. However, superstition and credulity for falsehood remain dominating cultural realities. For example, many people reject God's providential governance of the universe, but ask for the birth date of their associates because they believe that a person's astrological sign determines his personality and destiny. In the same way, many reject the historical evidences about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus but accept as fact the foolish schemes for human descent devised by evolutionists from skeletal remains.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the equivalent of today's educated elite—rationalists and sceptics. They thought they were being smart by asking for evidence from Jesus to support his claims to be the one sent from Heaven—the Son of God, the Second Moses. Consider their request and Jesus' rebuke:

Trip Testers – They did not come to Jesus in a spirit of enquiry, seeking truth wherever the facts led. Rather, they came asking for evidence (“a sign from heaven”) of his person, purpose, and prerogative, with the obvious intention of tripping him up. Their motive was to test him, not to be taught by him. They ignored the evidence of the voice from Heaven that had endorsed his ministry, the evidence of the miracles he had performed, and the evidence of his authoritative teaching. None of these could convince them because their presuppositions and premises made it impossible for them to accept facts at face value.

Men and women today are just the same. They suppress truth (Rom 1.18-23) because they start from incorrect assumptions—there is no God, matter and energy interacting randomly through time produced the universe, and man is autonomous. They come to the truth of the Bible with the express purpose of trying to prove it wrong. They are ‘trip testers’ who, in spite of their worst intentions, are at times overruled by the Holy Spirit and brought by grace into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Weather Watchers – Jesus responds to their scepticism with an

illustration taken from the natural realm. The people of his day could observe evidences of atmospheric dust accumulation and cloud formation and determine with reasonable accuracy when the rainy season would begin. They could not, however, apply this interpretive skill to the “signs of the times” and, because of rejecting truth, they could not interpret the clear signs proving Jesus’ deity.

Most people today are just as incapable of interpreting factual evidence about God and Jesus available to them. They can fabricate amazing ‘just so’ stories from a few fragments of bones but have a massive cataract blocking their vision of the clear evidence of design in the created realm. If they are even aware of the many evidences that support the resurrection of Jesus, they reject them without as much as a rudimentary assessment. A common quip clearly sums up their position: ‘Don’t confuse me with the facts.’ We can sigh with Jesus and shake our heads in disbelief at their incredible myopia.

Sign Seekers – Jesus calls their request for a sign ‘wicked’, primarily because their attitude was wrong—as we’ve noted, they asked for a sign to challenge him. Their request is also wrong for a number of other reasons:

- 1) *Finite Creatures* – Jesus is not a marionette on strings that will jump to do man’s proud will. Jesus shows men the signs he wants to show them (Is 55.8-9; Dan 4.37).
- 2) *Unbelief* – They had already been given miraculous signs and fulfilled prophecies that they had rejected. One more sign wasn’t going to change their hearts (Lk 16.29-31).
- 3) *Passionless Quest* – Their request was based on curiosity, not a passion for truth. Knowing Christ was not really as important to them as it should have been (Mt 13.44-46).
- 4) *Seeking the Spectacular* – They sought the equivalent of fireworks in the night sky or a large neon arrow floating above Jesus. But God most often convinces through suasion and the indwelling whisper of the Holy Spirit. (1 Ki 19.11-12).

- 5) *Rejected Generation* – They were part of the generation that reaped the recompense for millennia of rebellion (Mk 8.12; Mt 8.11, 12; Mt 21.43).

Jonah's Judges – Jesus stresses, with the equivalent of an oath, the solemn truth that no additional sign would be given to that nation and its leaders, for they had already been given a sign—Jonah (Mt 12.38-42). Could they judge correctly its meaning? Can we? This sign was undoubtedly somewhat cryptic until after the resurrection. But now that it is an accomplished fact, we should have no difficulty discerning its meaning and accepting the prophetic truth.

There will come a time, and it may be sooner than we think, when Jesus will write off our generation as he did his own. He will leave us and go away, the light of the Gospel will be dimmed, and our nation will be given up to its foolish delusions. Make sure you don't reject God's clear signs declaring Jesus Christ as Lord.

Yeast of the World [July 4]

(East of the of Sea of Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Mt 16.5-12; Mk 8.13-21)

Moral Moment – God often presents us with opportunities to speak about his person, moral requirements, and redemptive work. However, if you are like me, you probably don't use the circumstances to the best advantage. This may be the result of our slow wittedness or reticence. Jesus was never afflicted with either hindrance and used every situation to present the Gospel or teach a Kingdom-lesson. Think, for example, of the miracle he performed in Cana where he turned water into wine, his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, his driving the money changers out of the temple, or his words to the criminal on the cross beside him at his crucifixion.

In this account, after feeding a large crowd with only a few loaves of bread and a few fishes, we find Jesus using the forgetfulness of his disciples as a 'moral moment' to challenge and teach them. He turned their attention from physical bread and leaven to spiritual wisdom. After

being with him for two years they should have understood how he worked. Instead they show a continuing slowness to comprehend spiritual truths. From his actions and the disciples' response, we learn:

- 1) To capitalize on every opportunity to draw attention to the truth about man's sin and Jesus as the only means of salvation, and
- 2) Not to expect most people to understand spiritual truth without having it presented in many forms and multiple times.

Rebuking Reminder – The disciples' reaction to Jesus' comment about yeast was typical of how most people react in many situations—they jump to conclusions. They heard the word 'yeast' and assumed that Jesus was talking about physical bread. People today often react to value-laden words without hearing the context and suppress their rational thinking capacity. Consider the reaction engendered in a radical feminist if a Christian uses words like AIDS, abortion, homosexuality, or sin; or in a 'scientist' if a creationist uses words like evolution, Intelligent Design, big-bang, or God. Man born in, and living with, indwelling sin is not able to hear what God through Christ is teaching.

Jesus challenged their lack of understanding by reminding them of how he had miraculously fed the crowds twice. He said, essentially, "Let the facts speak! Can't you see I can provide you with food?" However, he didn't present explicit propositions. Rather, he framed his rebuke as a series of probing questions. We can do the same when we say to the radical feminist, "When does an unborn child become a human being? Why is the baby a lump of disposable protoplasm only if the mother doesn't want him?" or, we ask the 'scientist,' "Why is it unacceptable to say that the laboratory model of the solar system formed spontaneously from dust-bunnies under your desk when you claim that planets formed from interstellar dust? How can you believe that energy-matter popped into existence from a quantum ripple in the space-time fabric but you can't accept that a rational Creator causes it to exist?"

Disastrous Domains – Jesus repeats his warning and cautions his disciples to guard against the infectious spiritual yeast—the penetrating and pervasive poison—of three different worlds that sum-up all of

existence without Christ:

- *False Religions* (Pharisees) – Belief and trust in anything other than the person and work of Jesus Christ is a false faith. Buddhist's rely on their self-discipline, Moslems and Jehovah Witnesses on their own works, Jews on their ancestry, and Hindus on 'humility'. All are abject failures for providing an answer to man's ultimate need—salvation from sin.
- *Secularist Humanists* (Sadducees) – Men who claim that there is not a supernatural realm and that there is no ultimate meaning to existence can only live out their few remaining years in despair on this blue speck of dust floating in the vacuum of space. They are to be pitied as miserable creatures without any hope (Eph 2.12; 1 Cor 15.19).
- *Hedonistic Materialists* (Herod) – Many people thrive on the 'rush' they receive from each existential experience. As long as they think that there is a possibility of more physical pleasure they slog on. Their licentious desires are never really satisfied and the void in their soul is never filled with true happiness.

Watched Ways – Jesus warned his disciples to watch for, and to be on their guard against, the teachings of these worlds. Through this we learn that:

- *Small Amount* – It does not require much yeast to cause an entire loaf of bread to rise. In the same way, if we accept even the smallest amount of the world's untruth into our minds or hearts it will permeate our entire being with the pollution of sin.
- *Sneaky Attack* – The world's philosophy is subtle and deceptive (Col 2.8) and it can find many ways to gain access to our souls, such as through our non-Christian friends, the media, or what is taught in school. If it were not so sneaky, Jesus would not have to warn us against its attack.
- *Strenuous Awareness* – It requires vigilance to withstand the attacks of the world's evil systems of thought and behaviour. We must therefore apply strenuous Biblically-based analysis to build our spiritual immune system and we must inoculate our souls with prayer.

Are you like the disciples whom Jesus had to rebuke for not understanding? Or, do you understand what Jesus teaches about the yeast of the world?

Incremental Enlightenment ^[July 5]
(Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, Spring 32 AD. Mk 8.22-26)

In the middle of his public ministry, Jesus completed a lengthy period of instruction (at least three months) to begin preparing his disciples for his pending departure—which would be about a year from this point. He had revealed to them truths about his nature as the God-man and the Bread of Life that must be received in faith. To conclude his instruction, he gave a warning that they should avoid the yeast of the world's philosophies. The disciples' response showed that they were experiencing a degree of spiritual blindness and had not yet come to full enlightenment about his person and work.

Instruction – Just as Jesus completed his rebuke of the disciples' slowness to comprehend spiritual truth they were approaching Bethsaida and a blind man with his friends came out to him begging for healing. In response, Jesus showed his command of every situation and his ability to turn every event into an opportunity to present Gospel truths. He provided the healing that the man required, but he did it in such a way that he could turn it into an object lesson to drive home his instruction about spiritual discernment.

This miracle of healing was not just another sign that Jesus was from Heaven. The fact that he took the man outside the village to perform the healing and told him later not to return into the village, demonstrates that he was not using this miracle for public proclamation but rather for private pedagogy. In the OT (Dt 28.29; Is 29.18; Is 42.6, 7; Zeph 1.17) and in general Middle Eastern proverbial wisdom, blindness was used as a metaphor for ignorance and sight for understanding. This miracle reinforces the truth that enlightenment comes ultimately from God alone.

Incremental – This miracle also demonstrates that spiritual

enlightenment may not be provided instantaneously but rather, incrementally. The way in which Jesus heals the blind man is unique among all his miracles. It is the only time that the healing is not instantaneous, but rather is provided in progressive stages. The man first saw the disciples milling around as blurs that he likened to walking trees—the best image he could come up with from his sightless experience. Jesus’ question, “Do you see anything?” also indicates that the incremental nature of the healing was intentional. The fact that the man does not see clearly after the first step of Jesus’ actions is not a demonstration of Jesus’ inability to heal nor is it a statement about the lack of faith on the part of the man. Nothing at all is said about faith in this account.

Through this object lesson, Jesus is illustrating the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples, not dealing with their degree of faith. Understanding grows from a root of faith, but in the case of the disciples their understanding was still immature like the blind man’s partial sight. The experience of the disciples illustrates the progress of many who come to Christ in faith as they grow in their knowledge about his person and work (Heb 5.11-14). It also provides an example of the general experience of the Church as it has developed its understanding of doctrine. For example, the early Church had to struggle with its understanding of the nature of Christ as the God-man and confront modalism (the view that the Logos is a manifestation of God, rather than a distinct person—represented by Sabellianism) and subordinationism (the view that Jesus is less than fully God—represented by Arianism). We must ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to increase our understanding (James 1.5).

Instruments – The people who brought the blind man to Jesus, begged him to touch the man and heal him. They knew that power could flow from Jesus and that at a touch he could heal since he had used this means of healing in their territory before (Mt 8.3; Mk 7.33). Jesus spat on the man’s eyes and then placed his hands on the man. We noted previously in another instance where Jesus used saliva and a touch to heal a deaf mute (Mk 7.31-37), that Jesus used intermediate means as well as direct

verbal commands to perform his miracles to teach us that God works through human instrumentality. In this instance, since Jesus is using the physical healing to teach a spiritual lesson—the spit may represent the spiritual eye-salve by which Christ provides understanding (Rev 3.18).

Illumination – After the man’s admission of having only partial sight, Jesus touched him again and “his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” This taught the disciples that they should expect to encounter difficulties in the process of enlightenment. However, as they continued in the presence of Jesus, learning from him, their understanding would increase. It is the same for us. As we seek to know Jesus better through prayer, reading and singing his word and listening to his instruction through his messengers, we will obtain illumination.

This lesson on incremental enlightenment, illustrated through the progressive healing of a blind man, must have helped the disciples come to a fuller understanding of who Jesus was and of his teaching. In the very next incident reported in the Gospel accounts (as we will see in our next meditation) the disciples, led by Peter, confess that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God. After this Jesus begins to open to them the revelation of his messianic work on the cross. In like manner, each believer must progress from knowing Jesus as the God-man, to acknowledging his completed work of redemption.

Jesus The Messiah

Peter Confesses Christ [July 6]

(Caesarea Philippi, Summer 32 AD. Mt 16.13-20; Mk 8.27-30; Lk 9.18-21)

Catechism – “Who is Jesus?” There is no more important a question to ask and answer correctly than this question. It is, in essence, this question that Jesus asked his disciples after an intense period of instruction about spiritual bread. He catechized them, not primarily to inform himself of the sates of their learning but to help *them* determine if they had a grasp

of what he had revealed about himself. He used his common self-appellation—Son of Man—rather than ‘Son of God’ (Lk 1.35) to emphasize his humble human nature and to determine if the disciples were able to see beyond the veil of humanity to his underlying deity. Depending on their answer, he would be able to: 1) direct their understanding of his role as Messiah, and 2) determine their ability to receive more challenging teachings about his pending suffering and death. His identity had been questioned previously (e.g., Mk 4.41; Mk 6.2, 14-15), and now the time had arrived to ensure that the disciples understood who he was with certainty.

Crowds – He asked the question in an oblique manner, by first asking who the *crowds* thought he was. The disciples reported the people’s ideas. Their suggestions do not differ, in substance, from what most men today say that they believe about Jesus—when they bother to think about him. They are willing to give him some flattering position such as being a good teacher or miracle worker. But their ‘high’ opinion of him is not really high enough and is in fact demeaning since they are not willing to acknowledge him as God. The fact that Jesus is God is the most divisive truth ever proclaimed. Where God’s truth is not accepted, men are left only with false propositions and wild hypotheses. This applies not only to the question of who Jesus is, but also to other areas of knowledge such as how the universe and life originated, the point at which human life begins, the nature of the mind or soul, the reason men commit evil acts, and the definition of marriage and gender roles.

Confession – Jesus presses to the heart of the disciples’ understanding by asking specifically for them to state their belief about who he was. Peter, representing the disciples, responds with the confession that Jesus is both the Son of God and the Messiah—i.e., Lord and Saviour. It is significant that it was in Caesarea Philippi that the disciples first expressed this understanding of the person and office of Jesus. The city was known for its cave-shrine and temples filled with idols—particularly to the god Pan who was reputed to rule the fields and woods (we get our English word ‘panic’ from the fear belief in Pan engendered in those who passed by at night). In addition the city was dedicated by Philip the

Tetrarch to his imperial protector Tiberius Caesar—thus its name Caesarea Philippi. It was in the midst of a city in which pagan gods were worshiped, philosophical Greeks taught, and militant pragmatic Romans ruled that Jesus is declared to be God. Caesarea Philippi was just as confused as in modern-day Toronto which melds in post-modernist superstition pantheism, scientism, and statism. Here we confess Jesus as Lord.

Communication – Jesus had engaged in prayer (Lk 9.18) just prior to asking the disciples about their understanding of his identity. It is likely that he prayed for his disciples and asked God to open their minds and hearts to the truth. In response, God revealed the truth to them. For this reason Jesus states that the communication of his identity was not from men but from God. Peter was not called blessed because he was smarter or holier than the other disciples or because he held a special office, but because he had received the gift of faith and understanding. Christianity is reasonable and rationale, but it is not a religion *based* on reason or research. It is based on revelation. You and I, if we have received the communication of God, are also blessed and we in turn, like Jesus, should ask God to reveal his Son to those whom we love.

Church – The disciples finally understood who Jesus was, and in the confession of Peter they expressed the centrality of the Christian faith. This is the confession that all must make if they are to be part of the household of God and it is the confession on which Christ builds his Church. There will be many who make this confession who have faulty doctrine in some areas and others who live lifestyles inconsistent to their profession that Christ is Lord; but if they believe and confess that Jesus is the God-man who died on the cross to cover their debt of sin, they will be saved. It is on this base of the revealed and confessed truth about Jesus, which leads to faith and repentance, that Jesus builds his Church. In our next meditation we will consider more fully what Jesus teaches (in Mt 16.18, 19) about the foundation of his Church.

Command – Jesus concluded by commanding the disciples to keep silent about the new understanding they had received. His purpose was to

ensure that he finished their instruction before they began to inform others of his Messianic office and confuse them with an incomplete message. He did not want the disciples suggesting that he had come to set up an earthly kingdom. It was necessary for them to understand the purpose of his death as atonement for sin, and of his resurrection as the means of conquering death, before they could present the complete Gospel message. Once they understood these things, his command to them was completely different—“go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them ...” (Mt 28.19, 20). I ask you the same question—who do you say that Jesus is? If you have been blessed with revealed truth and the faith to believe it, Jesus commands you to go and tell.

Jesus Builds His Church [July 7] **(Caesarea Philippi, Summer 32 AD. Mt 16.18-19)**

Builder – Architect, construction worker, and building materials—for the Church, Jesus is all of three. As God he laid out the blueprint for the Church which consists of every elect person and every kingdom-work they perform. As the Christ (Messiah), he taught the truths of the Kingdom and completed, through his death on the cross, the work of acquiring all the living bricks (1 Pt 2.1) that he is using to build his Church. He is also part of the living edifice, being the cornerstone (Eph 2.20) from which the building takes its measure and perfection.

Jesus said: “I will build my church”. This does not mean that the work was all in the future. At this point he hadn’t paid for the building materials with his blood, but he had previously drawn up the blueprint, and from Adam to John the Baptist had been acquiring stones on a promissory note. Upon payment to God for the debt of sin, he began the final assembly of the spiritual temple that he will hand over to the Father when he places the final saint on the cornice. At the end of the last-days we will all see how glorious it is—made up of stones of all colours and shapes, sizes and types, forms and styles—all fitting together in a perfect harmony. Then he will declare: “It is finished!”

Base – What is the foundation rock upon which Jesus builds his Church? It has been suggested that the rock is God, Christ, the Apostles including Peter, Peter alone, or Peter's confession. Some say emphatically that the rock must be Peter personally because Jesus:

- Commends him for his confession
- Gives him the keys of the Church
- Introduces him to deep realities at the Transfiguration (an event that immediately follows Peter's confession)
- Divests the role of leadership on him (Acts 1.15)
- Uses his preaching at Pentecost to formally inaugurate the NT Church
- Calls him, through Paul, a pillar in the Church (Gal 2.9).

Others, just as emphatically, say that it cannot be Peter because:

- Jesus would have said 'on you I will build' rather than on this 'rock'
- Jesus uses different forms of the word 'rock'—'peter' (*petros*, masculine) vs 'rock' (*petra*, feminine)
- No other foundation and cornerstone can be laid but Christ and the Apostles collectively (Is 28.16; 1 Cor 3.11; Eph 2.20; Rev 21.14)
- Jesus is using a comparative, 'you are Peter, *but* on *this* rock' (pointing to himself) as he did when talking of the destruction of the temple (Jn 2.19).

Both positions have weaknesses. It may be that the best way to understand the 'rock' is as the *confession* that Jesus is the Christ (Mt 16.16). The faith to make this confession is from God (Mt 16.17) so does not ultimately give the credit to Peter. The confession has value only because of its objective reality—Jesus, the God-man who saves sinners. And, confession is the means by which a person enters the Kingdom (Rom 10.9-10; 1 Jn 4.2, 3).

Bastion – Without doubt, the Church that Jesus is building will stand at the last day. Nothing, not even the powers of Hell, can defeat Christ or his Church (Rom 8.31-39). However, Jesus uses the word Hades (not Gahanna or Tartarus) and appears to be referring to the place of the dead—in our terms, the grave. He is pointing to the reality that his own pending death will not be able to stop the growth of the Church. The broader implication is that the progress of the Church will not be

hindered by the physical death of any of its members. There is in this truth a promise of his resurrection since the only way this statement can be true is if death does not have the final victory (1 Cor 15.25, 26). Jesus is not, in this case, referring to the powers and policies of Satan, but rather to the curse of death that man brought upon himself in the sin of Adam. As the Last Adam, Jesus is declaring victory over death. His Church will stand in the Resurrection when death and the grave along with Satan and his hordes are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20.10, 14, 15).

Binding – Because death is not the final arbiter, man’s standing before God in this life determines his standing in eternity. So God invests authority in human officers (as symbolized by the keys of the household steward) to rule in his Church and to dispense teaching, the sacraments, and discipline. Peter in this instance represents all the Apostles and Elders (Mt 18.18; Jn 20.22-23). We are not to conjure up the image of Peter standing at the pearly gates determining who may, or may not, enter Heaven. Rather we are to understand this delegation of authority to apply to the temporal realm. When the Elders admit a person into the Church through baptism and the Lord’s Supper or when they remove the privilege of access, they are binding and loosing. Peter was the first to exercise this authority in the NT Church—on the day of Pentecost and over Ananias and Sapphira, Simon, and Cornelius’ household (Acts 2.14; Acts 5.1-11; Acts 8.21; Acts 10.28). The administration of the kingdom in this world by Church officers is recognized in Heaven. This does not mean that Elders can ultimately determine who is, or is not, saved. But it does mean that when Elders act in the will of God, their decisions with respect to the difficult matters of admission and demission are ratified by Christ himself. This teaches us that we must respect and obey the Elders in the Church to whom Jesus has delegated his authority (1 Thess 5.12, 13; 1 Tim 5.17; Heb 13.17).

Dying to Live [July 8]

(Caesarea Philippi, Summer 32 AD. Mt 16.21-26; Mk 8.31-37; Lk 9.22-25)

Prescribed Suffering – At about the half-way point in the public ministry of Jesus, the disciples, through Peter, had confessed their understanding and belief that he was the Messiah (Mt 16.13-20). Upon this confession, Jesus began to expand the scope of their instruction by introducing the necessity of his death to provide eternal life for his people. Christianity is unique among all religions because of this requirement. All other religions base the hope for eternal rewards on personal suffering and stoicism, or works of merit. Only Christianity bases salvation from sin on the work of the God-man who suffers on our behalf. All three of the Gospel writers emphasize the necessity of Christ's suffering and death. It was necessary that Jesus suffer the pain and forsakenness of death on the cross because of:

- Man's *Debt* – Sin requires just retribution. Only death can pay the penalty of man's rejection of God and his Law (Ezk 18.4; Rom 6.23).
- God's *Decree* – From eternity, the Father's plan for the redemption of mankind called for the death of the Messiah. He could not avoid it any more than we can avoid our birth or death (Is 53.4, 11; Mt 26.42).
- Satan's *Defeat* – In the Garden of Eden, while cursing sin, God declared that Jesus would conquer Satan through his suffering (Gen 3.15).
- Christ's *Dominion* – Jesus earned his right as the God-man to universal kingship through obedient suffering and death (Phil 2.8-10).

We probably have only a summary of what Jesus taught to begin preparing the disciples for his pending death, but it presents the essence in miniature:

- *Place* – He would suffer and die in Jerusalem, the holy city.
- *Persons* – Self-righteous religious leaders would lead the persecution.
- *Portion* – His suffering would culminate in death.
- *Prospect* – His death would not be the end—resurrection would follow.

He communicated these facts plainly to prepare his disciples for their share of sorrow and suffering to follow his death, and to correct their mistaken ideas that his kingdom would come with external majesty and glory in this present age.

Proscribed Satan – Peter heard what Jesus was saying and reacted with revulsion. He couldn't accept the teaching that the Messiah would suffer and die and tells him off for saying such things. In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter who was acting as an instrument of Satan. This interaction teaches us about:

- *Satan's Mission* – Satan's desire is to deflect Christ and his Church. In this instance, he worked through a dear friend and attempted to lure Jesus away from the cross. Jesus was wise to Satan's tactics and warns against putting anything in his way that is intended to cause him to stumble and distract him from his directed purpose to save sinners.
- *Stained Minds* – Peter's mind was fouled by sin and he focused on the things of this world; thus he could not see reality from God's viewpoint. He could not accept the truth that Jesus taught about the necessity of his death. In the same way, everyone who succumbs to Satan's temptation rebels against God's word. Christians do this whenever they resist God's clear instructions about proper worship and living holy lives.

Precluded Self – The cost of being Jesus' disciple is holy living that puts to death a love affair with sin and the world, and shows submission to God's will. This involves self-denial and cross-bearing. Self-denial is being willing to empty self of idolatry (including our own forms of false worship), personal ambition and lustful passions. Cross-bearing is not stoically enduring under life's troubles. It is a conscious and visible display of submission to God's authority. Jesus tied the sign of our submission to his own submission through the imagery of the cross. He derived this object lesson from the Roman practice of requiring a convicted criminal to carry his own cross-beam that would be hung on the stake of crucifixion. As convicted rebels against God, we show our submission to his law when we carry our cross-beam—that is, by being

constantly obedient to his revealed will in Scripture. We must bow before God as dependent creatures and as repentant sinners.

Precious Souls – Jesus faced cruel persecution, suffering, and death so that his people might be saved. We can conclude from his actions that he placed such a high value on the souls of men that he was willing to give his sinless life in their place. Yet, what do men think of the value of their own souls? Do they consider them worth dying for? Apparently most do not, since they reject the salvation offered to them by the Holy Spirit through the preached Word. The foolishness of this decision is placed in stark economic terms by Jesus through his rhetorical questions in which he asks: what is of more value than your own soul? Societies and individuals spend significant amounts of their income on attempts to deflect decay and delay death, but they aren't willing to 'spend' on behalf of their souls. What is the value of your soul? Jesus gives his appraisal—it is of greater worth than the wealth of all the nations of the earth. The paradox of this truth is surprisingly simple to understand but difficult to believe and accept; we must be willing to 'die' to self, give up the temporary sinful pleasures of this passing realm, and come to Jesus in humble dependence and repentance in order to have life that is really worth living—eternal life. We must die in order to live!

A Post-Crucifixion Prediction [July 9]

(Caesarea Philippi, Summer 32 AD. Mt 16.27-28; Mk 8.38-9.1; Lk 9.26-27)

As Jesus passed the half-way point in his teaching ministry and drew closer to the time when he would complete his work as redeemer, he increased the degree of complexity of the disciples' instruction by introducing new ideas related to the last days and his second coming. These topics continue to present interpretive challenges for many in the Church. We need, therefore, to approach his teaching on these matters with care and focus on what is clear.

Certainty of Return – Most people today are willing to admit that there is sufficient historical evidence demonstrating that Jesus lived on earth

about two thousand years ago. However, they are unwilling to accept that he is truly God and that he came to earth through the miracle of the virgin conception. They suggest that he was nothing more than a holy and wise teacher of moral principles. However, when people are confronted with Jesus' own explicit teachings about his origin and the nature of his first and second comings to earth, they are faced with a contradiction. We should not accept Jesus as a good moral example and teacher if he is lying about the source of his origin. Alternatively, if he had grand delusions about his origin, then he does not deserve to be listened to as a teacher. Since he is not lying and is not deluded, what he says must be fact. The facts are simple to hear but difficult to accept, unless a person believes in faith:

- Jesus is going to return to this earth at some point in the near future (1 Cor 7.29; 2 Pt 3.8, 9). We must not be like the scoffers, whom Peter condemns (2 Pt 3.3-7), who laugh at the idea of his second coming.
- He will be accompanied by angels who are his messengers and servants.
- His appearance will be with the glory of Heaven—glory that he deserves as a king who conquered death and Satan—not in humble circumstances like those of his first coming, as a child born into a poor family

We should look forward with eager anticipation to that day when our Saviour will return to wrap up time, restore the created order through the New Heavens and Earth, and mete out justice in rewards and punishment

Contingency of Reward – Not everyone is going to be saved and enter Heaven. This is not a popular view, even among many Christians. In spite of Jesus' explicit teaching about eternal damnation (Mt 25.31-46), we all want to think that either we are good enough for Heaven or that a good God could not send people to an eternity in Hell. It is Jesus himself, as ruler and judge, who will condemn the wicked to Hell, not a different OT god that some folks suppose had a different agenda than 'meek and gentle Jesus'. It is the same Jesus who, in love sacrificed his perfect life for sinners, will banish eternally those who reject him in this life. Men reject Jesus in this world by being ashamed of him (Mk 8.38). We can

show that we are ashamed of Jesus in a number of ways, including: **1)** not confessing him as Lord and believing in his resurrection (Rom 10.9), **2)** not aligning with him (Mt 12.30), **3)** denying him (1 Jn 2.22, 23), **4)** denying the power of the Gospel (Rom 1.16), **5)** not obeying him (Jn 14.15), **6)** not denying self (Mk 8.34, 35), and **7)** not being willing to testify for him (2 Tim 1.8).

Commencement of Reign – Some interpreters, who are called scholars but are really just sceptics, claim that the disciples had an expectation that the second coming of Jesus would be within their lifetime and that this statement of Jesus reflects their incorrect viewpoint. They do not accept the fact that the Bible is God-breathed and cannot have errors and that Jesus never lied. Thus, when he stated that some of those standing with him would see the coming of his kingdom in their lifetime, he cannot be referring to the second coming or his statement is wrong. Jesus says, with emphasis, that his words are true—literally he says ‘amen I say ...’

What is the coming of the kingdom that he is referring to? Various suggestions are given, including: **1)** his transfiguration, **2)** his resurrection and ascension, **3)** the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-4) and the subsequent spread of Christianity, or **4)** the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in 70 AD. It is unlikely that he is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem as this symbolizes the end of the old covenant era not the beginning of the new one. It is possible that the events associated with his transfiguration, the resurrection and the Day of Pentecost are *all* included in his perspective. Some Bible-believing interpreters suggest that he is speaking specifically of the transfiguration, which immediately follows this teaching (Mt 17.1-8) and provided a foretaste of the glory of Heaven. If this is the case, then his words were directed to the three apostles who would accompany him on the mountain, and excludes the rest. It seems better, however, to understand his statement about the coming kingdom in the context of his resurrection that he had predicted (Mk 8.31) just prior to making this statement about seeing the coming of his kingdom. In addition, he told the three who accompanied him to the transfiguration that they were not

to tell anyone about what they had seen on the mountain until after he had risen from the dead (Mk 9.9), reiterating his focus on the resurrection. The resurrection is the most important event in the plan of redemption because it demonstrated that Jesus had paid the debt of sin, that the payment had been accepted by the Father, and that as the God-man he could assume his office as the King of kings (Phil 2.8-11). Jesus has risen and reigns now!

The Transfiguration [July 10]

(A Mountain in Galilee, Summer 32 AD. Mt 17.1-8; Mk 9.2-8; Lk 9.28-36a)

Proof – A week⁹ after teaching about his pending death and resurrection, Jesus took three of his disciples, who were his closest friends among the twelve Apostles, to Mount Hermon (the highest mountain in the region, about 20kms northeast of Caesarea Philippi) for a prayer retreat. He undoubtedly took them for company, but he may also have had foreknowledge about the event that was about to transpire. Even if the pending transfiguration was veiled from Jesus' human nature, God determined that the three should be present as witnesses (Dt 19.15; Mt 18.16; 2 Cor 13.1) so that they would be able to inform others of what had happened to the second-Moses when he met with God on the mountain (Mt 17.9; 2 Pt 1.16-18).

Power – In the darkest part of the night, when the disciples were very sleepy, Jesus was transformed/transfigured (we get our English word metamorphosis from the Greek word used here) before them into an object of light (Jn 1.5). In contrast to Moses who reflected the glory of God that was revealed to him (Ex 34.29), the human nature of Jesus was pushed aside and the glory of his divine nature shown through. The Gospel writers describe this glory as light that was as bright as the sun and as flashes of lightening. God reveals his pure essence as light (Ps

⁹ Matthew and Mark say "after six days", Luke uses another way for describing a week ("about eight days") that included a portion of the starting and ending days (for example from 3:00pm on a Saturday to 2:59pm on the following Saturday is a week but includes part of eight days).

104.2; Jn 1.5; 1 Tim 6.16), so it is not surprising that when he wished to demonstrate to the disciples that Jesus is God, he did it through a display of light. For only a moment the disciples saw the incredible power and majesty of divine glory and then it was veiled again. This is the glory that Jesus would re-possess after he had completed his work of redemption through the resurrection, and which will be displayed at his visible return at the end of time. After the prediction of his suffering, death and resurrection, it was comforting for the disciples and strengthening for Jesus to have a glimpse of the heavenly exaltation that awaited him.

Prospect – The two visitors that night, Moses and Elijah who came from Heaven in glorious splendour, also strengthened Jesus as they discussed with him his pending departure (literally, exodus). The presence of these two men symbolized the law and the prophets and represented the beginning and the end of the nation of Israel as the Covenant people of God—Moses, as the Lawgiver founded the nation and Elijah was to introduce the day of the Lord (Mal 4.5-6). Their presence attested to Jesus as the Messiah who would lead the exodus of his people from their bondage in a spiritual Egypt.

Prevention – Misunderstanding the meaning of the transfiguration, Peter thought that the kingdom had arrived in visible form on earth. His response was to suggest to Jesus the construction of three semi-permanent shelters for the holy men. It is not clear why Peter suggested building the shelters. He may have been thinking of the tent that Moses erected when he met with God (Ex 33.7). There may be in this a hint that he still did not fully understand the divinity of Christ, classing him with the other two. Regardless, he was again unwittingly (Mt 16.23) attempting to prevent Jesus from following the path to the cross. His expectation that Jesus would come in his kingdom was correct, but his timing was wrong. The kingdom had not yet arrived visibly, only a sign pointing to its coming had been given on the mountain. The time for possessing rooms would be after Jesus had been glorified (Jn 14.2-3).

Proclamation – Peter's suggestion went unanswered as a cloud

enveloped them. Instead, a voice from Heaven was heard that reinforced the appearance of the light that had witnessed to Jesus as God. God the Father announced the same things he proclaimed when Jesus was baptized (Mt 13.17), he is the:

- *Son* – He is both the second person of the Trinity and the Messiah.
- *Beloved* and *Chosen* – He was appointed to reign as King from eternity.
- *Pleasing One* – He is without sin and all that he does is good.

The Father endorsed the ministry of Jesus thus far, and strengthened him for the second phase which would include desertion, denial, despising and death. After the commendation the Father added a command: “Listen to him!” Moses and Elijah were great prophets, but not perfect—Moses resisted his initial appointment with timidity and did not obey God with respect to striking the rock. Elijah had doubts and fears. Although their word was to be heeded it had authority only because it came from God. Jesus, in contrast, has no shortcomings and he is to be listened to because he is God.

Peace – On hearing this proclamation, the disciples were terrified and fell on their faces. They knew that they were in the presence of God as they bowed before Jesus. This is how all men must react when they meet Jesus, and how all men *will* react; if not in this life, then on the Day of Judgement (Phil 2.10). But, notice how Jesus dealt with them. He came in peace and encouraged them with word and touch. God reaches out to men and women and touches them with his love and declares that they no longer need to fear—the debt of their sins has been paid by Christ. He then invites his blood-ransomed people who are no longer enemies or slaves to sin to stand in his presence as sons and daughters.

John, the Greater Elijah [July 11]

(On a Mountain-side in Galilee, Summer 32 AD. Mt 17.9-13; Mk 9.9-13; Lk 9.36b)

Resurrection Context – As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus told Peter, James and John not to speak of his transfiguration (that they had just witnessed) until after his resurrection. We have seen previously

that Jesus told his disciples not to speak about certain aspects of his ministry because the people would come to him with wrong motives (e.g., for physical food or healing instead of spiritual bread and salvation) or try to anoint him as king prematurely. An expectation that people would continue to do the same thing may be part of the reason he ordered his disciples to silence. Another reason may be that the disciples were not fully able to understand the necessity and nature of his coming suffering and death. If they had announced the events on the mountain as the inauguration of the kingdom, many would have become disappointed by the events (the trial and crucifixion of Jesus) which were yet to follow. Their continuing confusion is illustrated by their discussing what rising from the dead meant (Mk 9.10). Only after the resurrection would they understand the meaning of the transfiguration and be able to proclaim Jesus as King and the proper meaning of his kingdom. Notice, however, that this is the last time Jesus commands silence. From this time on, he permits open declaration of his personal reign (Lk 19.38; Jn 18.37).

Rabbis' Conclusion – The disciples were also perplexed about the role of Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah. Along with the rabbis they had correctly interpreted the Scriptures (Mal 4.5) and understood that Elijah would come to announce the appearance of the Messiah. What they had not understood was *how* the prophecy would be fulfilled.

Representative's Coming – To clear up their misunderstanding, Jesus told them that Elijah had already come to announce his appearance as the Messiah. This was not a new concept for them. Jesus had told them many (six to nine) months before that John was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi (Mt 11.14). We noted in our consideration of Luke 1.16-25, that John was a prophet like Elijah, with a purpose like Elijah, who was called to preach like Elijah and to be persecuted like Elijah. He came in the spirit of Elijah and therefore was the Elijah who was to come.

Jesus then reminded the disciples that John had not been recognized as the forerunner of the Messiah and had been maltreated. Who is the 'they' that he speaks of? It is not Herod and Herodias, even though it was they

who had persecuted John ruthlessly and arbitrarily sentenced him to death (Mk 6.14-29). Rather, it was the Jewish teachers who had correctly understood the message of Malachi but had not accepted its fulfillment in John and had rejected him as being sent from God. It would be at their hands that Jesus himself would be rejected and suffer. The Jewish teachers are typical of the ‘intellectual’ elite in the academies of every age who reject and ridicule anything from God—his truth, his word, his messengers, and his Son.

Restoration’s Completion – Jesus also reminded the disciples of John’s role as the restorer of all things. The angel who had prophesied to Zachariah about John’s birth had assigned the same role to him (Lk 1.16-17). This restoration involved two things:

- *Preaching* the necessity of repentance and reformation to challenge all levels of society, from the roadside beggars to the king in his palace.
- *Preparing* the way for the Messiah by announcing his arrival as the Lamb of God who would become the sacrificial substitute for his people.

Jesus follows this reminder with a rhetorical question: “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?” It appears that he asks this question to focus his disciples’ attention on what he has been telling them—it was necessary that the Messiah suffer and die before the kingdom could be revealed. Even though John pointed the way to the kingdom, the renewal of all things could not be completed until after the debt for sin had been paid and Christ had been raised in glory.

Right Conjecture – The discussion between Jesus and his disciples as they came down the mountain teaches us how to interpret Biblical prophecy—or more accurately, how *not* to interpret it. For example, if we impose our own interpretation on Malachi 4.5-6, we might expect that this prophecy could only be fulfilled if the Elijah of 850 BC were to come down from Heaven to announce the coming of the Messiah. Jews can use this interpretation to reject Jesus as the Messiah, and Christians can use it as a pre-condition for the second coming of the Lord. Jesus

tells us explicitly that Elijah *has* come as John, and the prophecy is fulfilled. We are not, therefore, to impose our own interpretation on the passage. Similarly there are many conjectures about how Ezekiel's vision of the temple will be fulfilled. Some claim that it must be referring to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem at the site of the former temple. In the same way, there are systems of interpretation that tell us that the Beast of Revelation is a particular modern leader and that we are to expect the Rapture on a certain date. We learn in contrast, by considering how OT prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ, that we cannot put God in a box and tell him how he must work out the remainder of redemptive history. We should wait patiently, and then marvel, at how God completes his purposes for mankind.

Countering Unbelief with Exorcism [July 12] (In Galilee, Summer 32 AD. Mt 17.14-23; Mk 9.14-32; Lk 9.37-45)

Fouled Return – When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, where the glory of God had been revealed to him, he found the people had lapsed into disorder and idolatry. Jesus returning from the mountain, where he had revealed his own divine glory, found the crowd arguing with the disciples because they had proved incapable of casting out a demon, even though they had cast them out previously (Mk 6.13). The reason for the chaos, in both cases, is the same—unbelief. The similarity between what the two returning prophets encountered teaches us about:

- *Leadership*– It required the disciplined strength of Moses to keep Israel from rushing into destruction. Even when Jesus was away for only a day, the disciples lost their focus and were easily distracted by the Jewish leaders. When Nehemiah left for the empire's capital, the community quickly fell into disarray. This pattern is repeated in every institution and generation where there is not Biblical-balanced, clear-headed, and vigilant leadership.
- *Letdown* – We may be blessed with the experience of a spiritual 'high' in which the Holy Spirit draws us especially close to God—when we attend a retreat, engage in an intense period of prayer or fasting, hear a moving sermon, or participate in a fellowship or the Lord's Supper. But then we re-enter the world and are disappointed

when dealing with our own and others' sin. In this life we will be let down as we return from glory to the mundane. If we are prepared, we will be less discouraged.

This consideration provides the context for the miracle of exorcism that Jesus performs and shows us that he cast out the demon to counter unbelief.

Father's Request – The boy's plight was pathetic and the father's plea was piercing. Nothing else in our experience can compare with the helplessness we feel when we are confronted by a seriously debilitating situation in a loved one and we are unable to do anything to help. Matters are made even worse when those whom we believe can help, prove incapable. The physical circumstances of the child are heart-wrenching and the disciples' inability to cast out the demon is disappointing but these are nothing in comparison to the real problem that Jesus is confronting—unbelief. Underlying the boy's convulsions is the problem of the sin that pervades the human race. Beyond the disciples' inability to cast out the demon, is the greater problem of man's inability to overcome sin. We need to turn to Jesus and beg him to help.

Frustrated Response – Jesus' reply to the father's request was directed to all the people present, including the father and the disciples. Jesus pointedly reflects on their collective unbelief and perversion. Underlying all spiritual and physical-temporal problems in this world is a lack of faith in God and an unwillingness to deal with the problems in God's way. Illness and poverty, lust and bigotry, depression and tyranny; are all the result of our collective unwillingness to believe that God is the Creator and Lord of the universe. Our failed schemes to solve our problems result from our arrogance in thinking that with enough re-education or social engineering we can create *homo-uber*, while we reject God's laws governing personal behaviour and corporate interaction. Jesus responds to this absurdity by asking, rhetorically, how long he should stay with us and put up with us. The message is that God will provide his revelation of truth to mankind for a limited time and then will lift his patient restraint and call to account all our rebellion.

Firm Rebuke – While his patience endures, God pours out his gracious love. Jesus told the father to bring the boy to him for healing. The demon tried to assert authority and threw the boy into a convulsion. Jesus with a command shows where ultimate authority lies and drove out the spirit. The boy was left lying like a corpse but Jesus raised him up and gave him to his father. The spiritual under-tones come through: breaking Satan's hold over man requires the power of God, leaving a life of sin is a passage from death to life that ultimately requires the resurrection of the God-man, and those who Christ saves he will hand over to the Father.

Faith Required – In this account there are two references to the need for faith—from the father asking for the healing of his son and from the disciples in order to perform the healing. The father admitted his need for strengthened faith. Many modern 'faith healers' seek for evidence of faith from a sick person. Jesus instead says that it is the ones performing the healing who need faith. He explained to them why they had failed to cast out the demon—not because it had some extraordinary power, but because they had failed to base their effort on God's will and power through prayer. True faith sees no limits to God's power and expects him to perform the 'impossible'.

Future Reminder – The requirement for mountain-moving faith appears to be the connector to the prophecy of his betrayal, death, and resurrection. While they were leaving the crowd, Jesus told them again of these coming events. They heard of betrayal and death and were distressed because they did not have faith to believe that he must die to save his people; that it would not hinder the coming of the kingdom, but advance it; and that it would not be the end for Jesus, but the beginning of his resurrected reign. If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we will believe everything that Jesus tells us.

Paying the Temple Tax [July 13] **(Capernaum, Summer 32 AD. Mt 17.24-27)**

This event, contrary to what some suppose, has little to do with rendering to Caesar, what is Caesar's. Rather, its primary purpose is to teach Peter,

and us, to trust God. After returning from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus found that the disciples had been unable to cast out a demon because of their lack of faith. His desire is that his disciples, of every generation, will believe what he teaches and obey what he commands through trust in him. With incredible patience he leads us in that direction by one lesson after another. In this case Jesus apparently works privately with Peter to build his trust. Later, after his betrayal of Jesus and restoration, Peter was much less sure of himself and magnitudes surer of his Lord. I can picture him, an older and wiser Apostle, surrounded by new believers in Rome facing the prospect of persecution. Humbly and quietly he recounts this story to teach them to trust Jesus. Let us consider this lesson in faith-building and learn from it.

Temple Tax – On returning to Capernaum, Peter was confronted by those assigned to collect the Temple Tax. This annual tax applied to all men over the age of nineteen (Ex 30.13-15; Neh 10.32). In this instance, the level of the two-drachma tax is stated in the Greek currency of the day. The amount of the tax was equivalent to about two days of a working man's wages and was sufficient to buy a sheep. At the time of Jesus, the collection of the tax outside of Judea was sporadic, so it is possible that the tax collectors were sent out specifically to test Jesus. The form of the question, in the negative, and since no mention is made of the requirement for the disciples to pay the tax, implies that the Pharisees wanted to see how Jesus would respond to this requirement placed upon Jewish men. Would he place himself above the law and, in their view, break the law? Peter was probably surprised by this request out of the blue, and appears to respond without any deep thought about the implications of the question or his answer. However, there is more at stake than he realizes since it is a challenge to the nature of the Messiah. Is Jesus above the law? As man, Jesus placed himself under the law (Mt 3.15; Mt 5.17; Lk 2.21-27; Gal 4.4) and was fully obedient to every detail.

Pre-empting Probe – Imagine Peter's surprise when he entered the house where Jesus was staying and Jesus raised the general topic of paying taxes before Peter could even open his mouth. Jesus allowed his

divine nature to show through the veil of his humanity, and demonstrated that he knew every detail of Peter's discussion and the question that it had raised in his mind. He first focused on a question of principle that governed tax payment and then dealt with the specific situation of the Temple Tax that had confronted Peter.

Ancient kings and emperors, obviously, did not tax themselves and often also exempted their family members from taxation. Jesus does not refer to this practice to endorse government taxation exemptions, since the specific tax Peter had been asked to pay was not a tax instituted by a civil government but a religious ceremonial tax related to the upkeep of the temple and its sacrifice rituals. Rather, Jesus uses this analogy from the realm of human government to reinforce his divine right as King. As the Messianic heir to all of creation, Jesus does not have to pay taxes to himself. Nevertheless he told Peter to go and pay the tax so that they would not offend the Jewish leaders. He gave up his rights in order to be a humble servant to save mankind (Phil 2.6-8), and teaches us by this example that we also must be willing to give up our rights for the sake of his kingdom (see also, Jn 13.13-17).

Miracle Money – Jesus told Peter to go fishing and he would find a *stater* (four-drachma coin) in the mouth of the first fish he caught. He was to use this to pay the Temple Tax for the two of them. The size of the Temple Tax could be a burden for the poor, but the reason that Jesus gives this peculiar instruction to Peter is probably not because there were insufficient funds in the community purse. God could have as easily arranged for a donor to provide support just prior to this request for payment. The miracle of the money in the mouth is to build Peter's faith through the evidence of God's:

- *Power* – Everything is under Jesus' control; even the trajectory of a coin falling from a merchant's purse as he disembarked from a scow onto a dock in Capernaum or the path of a *musht* swimming by that was attracted to the sparkle of an object drifting to the bottom of the lake.
- *Prescience* – Foretelling the future is ultimately only possible if the future is not random or capricious. Every event, from atomic

vibrations to cosmic pulses and from the instinctive twitches of a cat to the rational thoughts of a volitional creature, has been planned by God. This is why Jesus could identify the specific fish that Peter would catch.

- *Particularity* – Jesus provided exactly the amount that was needed. This demonstrates that God’s providence is always right and specifically what is best in every situation (Mt 6.25-34; Mt 10.26-31; Rom 8.28).

We can assume by Matthew’s silence on the conclusion of the matter that Peter carried out the instructions exactly as given to him by Jesus. Like the disciples, who later would find the donkey and the room prepared precisely as Jesus had told them (Lk 22.10-13), Peter learned that Jesus is the one who controls all things (Acts 17.28; Col 1.17). How can we doubt the words of promise and comfort, or warning and disaster, of the God-man—Jesus—who sovereignly disposes all that transpires in the universe?

True Greatness in the Kingdom [July 14] (Galilee, Summer 32 AD. Mt 18.1-5; Mk 9.33-37; Lk 9.46-48)

The three Gospels present different aspects of this account, so we have to interweave them to obtain a fuller picture of the events. Regardless of the exact order in which the events occurred, the message is clear—Jesus defines greatness in his kingdom very differently from how we define greatness.

Argument – As they had been travelling to Capernaum, the disciples had argued amongst themselves about who would be the greatest in the kingdom that Jesus would set up. They were still anticipating an earthly kingdom and planning who would be appointed Prime Minister, Chancellor, Chamberlain and Clerk of the Privy Council; or to similar offices. Positions of rank were important to Jews (Lk 14.7-11) and the disciples were not immune from this concern for worldly status. At root is the sin of pride. It was the first sin man displayed in the Garden of Eden when he wanted to usurp God’s lordship, and it is the last sin men cling to on their death-beds when they refuse to bow their hearts to King

Jesus. Sadly, we still find all-consuming pride running wild in the Church today. It takes many forms as people seek power, position, or possessions. If only we could all learn to live as servants and desire to be doorkeepers in God's house (Ps 84.10) rather than wallow in pride.

Ashamed – Jesus knew where their thoughts and mouths had taken them and bluntly asked them what they had been arguing about. Their ashamed silence spoke louder than any response. They were guilty of vain ambition and realized that they had been selfish simpletons. Jesus was gentle with them and would, on arriving at his local destination, turn their envy into a teaching moment. However, the patience of Jesus will not last forever. At the time of his return to this earth he will reach his final destination and every proud mouth will be silenced (1 Sam 2.9; Ps 63.11; Rom 3.19). Then there will be no words of instruction from his mouth, but only a lion's roar of damnation.

Audacity – The audacity of man is beyond belief. The disciples' shame was not enough to check their insolence. Once they had arrived at the house in Capernaum they brought up the subject of kingdom-greatness again! Can you picture them trying 'innocently' to broach the subject? What fools we are in our quest to satisfy our ambitions. We think that we can fool God with our 'subtle' rationalizations and self-deceived schemes. Let us, instead, heed the Master as he presents, by action and answer, the way of true greatness in the Kingdom—the path of humble, loving, service.

Action – Jesus took the seated position of a teacher before the twelve, but instead of starting with a lecture he did the unexpected. He called forward a young boy, stood him in their midst, and wrapped his arms around him. This parable in action does not address the supposed innocence of children, but rather it teaches about being:

- *Humble* – The boy was humble, not necessarily because he was poor or righteous, but because of his legal status. Under law, he was not a legal person. He was under the authority of his parents and effectively their property and had no right of self-direction. The true children of God are those who understand that they are under the

authority of their Father in Heaven and have given up all pretence to self-assertion.

- *Helpless* – A young child is powerless to fend for himself. He is totally dependent on his parents to provide for his material needs. In the same way, those who are children of God know that everything that they have been given—from life to liberty, faith to food, and homes to hope—is a gift from God (Mt 6.11; James 1.17).
- *Hearty* – By paying loving attention to the child, Jesus demonstrated that those who wish to be great in his kingdom must not show disdain for those who are humble and helpless but rather respond to them with a display of true heartfelt warmth, friendliness, and affection.

Answer – Jesus answered the disciples’ question by delivering a solemn correction to their lust for positions—he said that they must be:

- *Changed* – Their attitude must change from seeking status among men to understanding their helpless and humble position before God. We must all deny our own ‘rights’ and posturing and confess that without God’s provisions we are nothing but dust. The greatest in Christ’s kingdom is the one who confesses the greatest need.
- *Cordial* – Their desire to be recognized by men must be changed into a desire to welcome, by serving, those who are needy like children—i.e., helpless and humble. The word Jesus uses is “servant” (from which we get the English word deacon) not “slave”. This speaks of one who voluntarily and joyfully attends to the needs of others for the sake of Jesus. Greatness in Christ’s kingdom is determined by service, not status.

Application – Preachers often conclude their three points with an application to their hearers. Jesus does it differently. He applies the message to himself. Jesus humbled himself, leaving his royal robes in Heaven (Phil 2.6-8) and became a helpless baby wrapped in rags by his mother Mary. He walked through his life on earth as a servant—teaching and ministering to the needs of any who asked for help by healing and feeding them. Then he suffered on the cross as a substitute for us who are

rebellious sinners. He is the greatest in the Kingdom because he has performed the greatest service.

The Scandal of Haughtiness [July 15] **(Capernaum, Summer 32 AD. Mt 18.6-14; Mk 9.38-50; Lk 9.49-50)**

On a first read, it may appear that there is not much connection between the various statements contained in these passages. However, they all are a response to the disciples' quest for recognition and status in the Kingdom.

Causing Sin – Haughtiness infects the Church—most people want to be recognized as significant. Yet, often the more responsibility people have, the more they seem to show the rashes and sores of the gross and disfiguring disease of pride. So Jesus warns the disciples that those who are entrusted with responsibilities (e.g., elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers, etc.) in the congregation must not look down on the *little ones*. Jesus had brought a child forward as an object lesson on kingdom greatness, but now he shifts the imagery to those who are 'children' (Mk 9.37) in the kingdom—i.e., new converts, those with weak faith, those struggling to overcome sin. He warns us all, but especially those in positions of leadership, that we must not drive a sheep away or ignore a lost one. Consider, for example, a girl who has grown up in our congregation who becomes pregnant. How will she react and how will *we* react? Will she be so afraid of the congregation that she will leave and possibly seek an abortion? Will we scorn her in self-righteousness? Or will we seek her out in love? Will the congregation give her a baby-shower? Will mothers offer to baby-sit once she has the baby? Jesus didn't endorse the sin of prostitution or adultery but he welcomed repentant sinners into the Kingdom (Mt 21.31; Jn 8.2-11). We must be like the angels who stand ready to do God's will and welcome and defend those who are in his kingdom.

Controlling Sin – Jesus teaches that we must be brutal with haughtiness that fills us. He is not teaching literal self-mutilation, since actually cutting off a hand or a foot, or plucking out an eye, will not remove the

source of the problem—a proud heart. We are, however, to take prompt and decisive action to purge out the sin of thinking that we are better than other Christians or deserve a special place in the Kingdom. We are to act as we would if we had a skin rash or a diseased limb. We would go to a doctor for treatment. So we must go to Jesus, in repentance, and ask for cleansing. Christians are to be salt in the world (Mt 5.13), holding back the decaying rot (Gen 6.5; Gen 8.21). This means we are not to be like the coarse, impure salt from the Dead (Salt) Sea's saline deposits that deteriorates into a useless residue. Rather, we are to be like the pure salt that purges out the biting for power and bickering about prominence. We are to live sacrificial lives seeking peace in the fellowship.

Chastising Sin – Either we must kill sin, or it will kill us. If we don't put away our arrogance and contempt for the weak sheep, we must question our salvation and expect a punishment suitable for the crime. Instead of our being salt in the world and Church, the salt of chastisement will be poured on us. This 'salt' will be worse than some imaginable fate like being dragged to the bottom of the sea by a large stone. It will be an eternal residence in *Gehenna* (a pseudonym for Hell) where the universe's moral garbage will be dumped. The gnawing worms of torment will burrow into every orifice and the eternal fire of torture will roast every appendage. We can expect Heaven's wrath if we offend one of God's little ones.

Corralling Sinners – Instead, our mission should be to retrieve straying sheep and bring them to the bosom of the Gentle Shepherd. In this instance, when Jesus speaks of wandering sheep, he appears to be referring to the 'little ones' (Mt 18.14) who are believers and have weak or immature faith or have been led astray by sin. Later in his ministry he uses the same parable in a somewhat different context (Lk 15.3-7). Jesus is not teaching that the ninety-nine Christians who remain firm in their faith are unimportant. Rather, he is teaching that every Christian is important. We are to treat all our brothers and sisters in Jesus as first being *his* brothers and sisters. If we really understand what this means we will never look down our noses at, or turn our backs on, those who don't behave according to our standards. Instead, we will hold out our

hands and gently lead them back to our Father.

Censuring Sectarianism – Someone has said, “With ‘friends’ like this, who needs enemies?” John reported that the disciples had seen an anonymous exorcist driving out demons and had rebuked him for using Jesus’ name. Jesus doesn’t need ‘friends’ like this, who have a sectarian spirit that holds aloof from any person who is not part of his immediate congregation or assembly. Jesus is clear: if a person performs a work of mercy in his name, he acts on behalf of the Kingdom. This does not mean that everyone who does some form of charitable, altruistic, or benevolent work is Heaven-bound. Jesus is speaking only of those who perform the work in his name, which means that they are doing it for his sake. It is not possible to work for Jesus’ sake, rather than for the sake of self, unless the Holy Spirit has converted our hearts. Those who love Jesus and care for the advance of his kingdom are to be treated with respect and love. An exclusivism that imagines that God can only work through our denominational structure, form of doctrine, or practice is censured by Jesus. Jesus is building his Church, not us! We are not God’s exclusive representatives on earth. There is no room for pride in being right. All that we have, know, and believe, is a gift from God (James 1.17). Rejoice that the power of God is being made known among men, that Jesus is being preached as Lord and Saviour, and that the Holy Spirit is changing hearts.

Forgiving a Sinning Brother [July 16] **(Capernaum, Summer 32 AD. Mt 18.15-35)**

After Jesus completes his in-depth instruction on the need to overcome the sin of haughtiness, that seeks pre-eminence in the Church and looks down on the *little* ones (i.e., new converts, those with weak faith, and those struggling to overcome sin), he deals with an evil son of pride—an unforgiving spirit.

Provoking Faults – Having warned the disciples not to offend others with a superior attitude, he turns to the inevitable—that *we* will be offended in some way by the sins of our brothers and sisters in the

congregation. It may be that their understanding of the Law is immature and they sin out of ignorance of what God requires. They may also sin directly against us by word or action. How we respond will show our level of spiritual maturity. Will we haughtily dismiss them or, with a gentle and forgiving spirit, will we lead them home?

Private Forum – If we cannot write off a sin against us because it needs correction—not because our egos have been bruised but because we care for our brother’s spiritual wellbeing and growth—we must first attempt to deal with the matter privately. We won’t stew on any hurt he has caused us, but will take the initiative and go to him and explain—gently and with clemency—why his action or word was wrong. If he listens and repents, we must forgive him with sincerity and close the matter forever. This means we won’t gossip about it or use it as a rebuke, through a reminder, at some future date. However, if he denies having done the wrong or attempts to rationalize it as being proper, we are to bring in multiple witnesses (Dt 19.15). This may involve others who heard the hurtful word or saw the wrong action, but it may also involve those who are able to explain more cogently, with Biblical evidence, why our brother needs to repent and take corrective action.

Procedural Facilitation – If our brother does not listen to us and the sin is grievous enough to warrant further action—for example he is pursuing an adulterous affair, is misusing holy ordinances, or continues to malign us—we are to follow a prescribed process to facilitate his repentance and correction. We are to bring the matter before the Church. Usually, this is understood as meaning that the matter is to be announced publicly in the assembly. I wonder, however, if Jesus uses the word ‘church’ as a figure of speech called a *metonymy*, where one word stands in the place of another, such as when someone says ‘Washington’ when meaning the United States government. It is possible, that Jesus is referring the matter to the Elders of the congregation. This seems to be supported by Jesus’ reference (18) to binding and loosing, which was a responsibility previously assigned to Church officers (Mt 16.18-19). The reference to a gathering of two or three in Jesus’ name (19, 20) also supports the idea that it is the Elders who are to deal with the wayward sinner. Although

most interpreters conclude that this passage is speaking of the assembly gathered for prayer, there is nothing in the context to support this interpretation. These verses also do not provide solace when only a handful shows up for the mid-week prayer meeting! Rather, this passage speaks of a judicial setting, with the Elders acting on Christ's behalf. The end result of this judicial process may be excommunication. If we didn't have this instruction from Jesus some people would claim that Paul's instruction to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5.1-5) was un-Christ like. Jesus teaches that Elders have the authority to rebuke and deal with sinful behaviour.

Plenteous Forgiveness – Jesus does not leave room for any form of personal vindictiveness. Our goal must be to restore our brother, and if he responds to correction we are to forgive him with no tallying of the debt. Peter had heard Jesus teach about forgiveness (Mt 6.14) but still attempted to find an escape clause when he asked if he only needed to forgive seven times. Even though he exceeded the Rabbi's tradition of forgiving three times based on their interpretation of Amos 1.3, this is not sufficient. Jesus requires that we be willing to forgive sins against us an unlimited number of times.

Paradigmatic Forbearance – Jesus seals the instruction of forgiveness with a parable. As we have already seen in our consideration of earlier parables, we are not to read essential meaning into every detail but to understand the main message. This parable does not teach that just by begging God for time to pay the debt of sin we can escape eternal punishment, that we are to tattle to God about our brothers' sins, or that sinners will pay off their debt in some form of purgatory. We may, however, picture God as the great exemplar who forgives our sins, which are equivalent to a squandered unimaginable wealth, and that we must in turn be quick to forgive the sins of our brothers against us, that cost us nothing more than a few dollars or even pennies.

Payment in Full – If we are hypocrites, and ask God to forgive us but refuse to forgive our brothers in the Church, we should question our membership in God's household. True Christians will not forgive just

formally but fully. If you hold grudges and seek means of reprisal, you can be sure that you will be paid in full with a final excommunication of torture from which no escape is possible. Instead, thank God that, in Christ, our debts are never remembered (Ps 32.1; Ps 103.3, 12). And like our Father, cultivate short memories about the sins of others and anticipate the coming glorious day in which all of God's children will share a pardon made possible through Jesus' payment in full.

Feast of Booths

Jesus Ridiculed by Unbelief [July 17] (Galilee, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.2-9)

Change – We have reached a key milestone in the life and ministry of Jesus on earth. At this time, just prior to the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) in 32 AD, he changes direction—he leaves Galilee, and heads to Jerusalem where he will face his remaining challenges to redeem his people. It is fitting that it was at the time of this feast that he is appointed to make an appearance in Jerusalem. The booths the Jews constructed symbolized God's dwelling with his people. Jesus made his dwelling among men (Jn 1.14) and would make his presence known in the holy city as a living 'booth'. This feast, also called the Feast of Ingathering, was a time of thanksgiving for the harvest (Lev 23.35-36, 39-43). Symbolically, this feast also pointed to the harvest of the nations through salvation (Mt 13.37-43; Jn 4.35-38). Jesus will rejoice eternally with the Father over the harvest of the saints.

Challenge – The sinful, unbelieving world will not accept Jesus at his word. Men always want proof of who Jesus is and evidence to support his claims to be God. He, of course, gave that evidence through the sign miracles of healing and through the demonstration of his power over the forces of nature, but men don't want to accept his evidence and try instead to dictate to God the terms of the proof that they will accept. At this time, Jesus' half-brothers (children of Mary and Joseph and not the disciples, as is claimed by those who attempt to preserve Mary's virginity) challenged him to prove his claims by meeting their test. They

argued that the questions about his identity and the nature of his kingdom could only be answered in the religious capital—Jerusalem—not in the backwater territory of Galilee. It might seem that they were trying to help him reclaim the lost crowds (Jn 6.66) or offered him a crowded venue before the pilgrims and Jewish leaders at the Feast where he could display his glory. But in reality what they were doing was similar to someone today saying to a local unpretentious high-school football hero, “So you think you are great? Well, prove it, apply to USC and let’s see if you can make that team. Then we will know if you are truly as good as you claim!” Jesus was not going to bite their barb. He had no interest in meeting their presumptuous prescription—God’s way was not their way. Nothing has changed when it comes to God’s claims and ways. Today men ignore all the evidence for his creative presence in the universe and that the world is *not* billions of years old. When pressed about their questioning the existence of God, they demand evidence that will meet their criteria. But God will not let men set the agenda, nor will he permit men to think that they are more than mere creatures by acceding to their demands for evidence. He simply states the fact, “In the beginning God created ... in six days.” (Gen 1.1; Ex 20.11)

Confusion – John tells us that the reason Jesus’ brothers challenged him in this way was because they did not believe *in* him; which probably means that they did not believe that he was the Messiah and the Son of God. John would have known them personally as he was with Jesus in Galilee and would have known about their scepticism at this time. John’s simple statement (5) reminds us that family affiliation is not sufficient to bring us into the Kingdom—we must each repent and believe. But it also reminds that we should never lose hope over our unsaved family members. God may yet have a purpose for them, as he did for Jesus’ brothers. By his grace, after the resurrection of Jesus, his brothers (at least two of the four) did accept him as Lord and Saviour, and James and Jude became leaders in the Jerusalem church and each authored an epistle that is part of the New Testament.

Contrast – Mankind, by nature, hates Christianity and Christ. Leaders of false religions like Islam and Hinduism persecute Christians because

they want to keep men enslaved by lies. Tyrants, communists and socialists hate Christianity because they know that Christ offers true freedom (Jn 8.36). Teachers of evolution and atheistic philosophies hate Christ because as the creator of the universe he shatters their myths. Radical feminists, homosexual activists, and hedonistic pleasure seekers hate Christ because he condemns their love of abortion and sexual perversion. (The list of Christ-haters could be expanded but it would only discourage us.) In contrast, evil accepts and even loves perversion and darkness. For example, feminists don't speak out against the oppression of women in Islam or against the destruction of female babies through gender-specific abortion in China or India, and humanistic scientists flirt with the Dali Lama and the irrationality of Buddhism. Jesus tells us (7) that we should not be surprised by these affinities because it comes down to one ultimate factor—hatred of the righteous Law of God. Jesus by his life and teaching endorsed the Law and condemned all forms of evil. Men in love with this world cannot tolerate being reminded of their sin.

Chronology – As God's way is not man's way, so God's time is not man's time. God through Jesus sets the moral program for the rational universe, so he also sets the temporal pace for the created order. For man, not wishing to be directed by God, any time seems to be the right time. Sinful man believes that he is either subject to the whims of Fate and a victim of circumstances or is the ultimate master of his own destiny. Jesus in contrast teaches (6, 8) that God works all things according to the purpose of his will and that we are to acquiesce in that will and to live and act in joyful and purposeful obedience. Our prayer must always be: "Our Father, not as I will, but as you will!"

Jesus Rejected by Unbelief [July 18]
(Capernaum, Fall 32 AD. Lk 9.51-56; Jn 7.10)

Sovereign Regulation – Time was created along with space and matter. As a created entity, it is subject to God's plan and providential control. Thus, when Luke tells us that the *time* approached for Jesus to be taken up into Heaven, he is not speaking retrospectively and in human terms, but from an absolute perspective. Jesus knew that every step of his walk

through this world was planned by the Father and that he was the volitional actor responsible for carrying out that plan. Jesus knew that the next step in God's plan was for him to journey to Jerusalem and to face the events there that were prescribed for him. Luke foreshortens the forward look by skipping over the sufferings of Christ and points instead to the resurrection and glorious ascension. We do not have access to the details of God's plan in the way that Jesus did; nevertheless, if we are part of his people, we are to go forward throughout our lives with an unwavering certainty that every event has been predetermined from eternity and that God will raise us up to Heaven on the last day.

Secret Resolve – Jesus had not deceived his brothers when he said that he was not going to the feast at the time they left. He did not wish the pilgrims travelling toward Jerusalem to announce his presence and draw crowds seeking physical healing and food rather than spiritual provisions, and to have them mistakenly declare the advent of his kingdom before his work was completed, or to attract the Jewish leaders who were seeking to kill him before his time. Nothing happens by chance, and God's timing is always perfect. So at the right moment, Jesus set out with just his closest disciples to attend the feast. His purpose was set—he was heading into his final battle and to the victory over sin and Satan that was declared in the ancient prophecy delivered in the midst of a curse in the Garden (Gen 3.15).

Samaritan Rejection – He sent ahead some of his disciples to one of the villages in Samaria to find a place for them to stay for the night. He probably wished to enter the village unobtrusively by going directly to the selected place of lodging. However, the Samaritans were not willing to accommodate Jewish travellers going to the feast in Jerusalem. Their lack of hospitality was not because the travellers were Galileans, but because the Samaritans mistakenly believed that the only place for true worship was at Mt. Gerizim (Jn 4.20-24). We learn from their rejection of Jesus and his disciples that men and women who adhere to false religions make exclusive claims about their own religious practices that preclude the practices and beliefs of the true religion. This is the case today among many of the adherents of Islam who will cooperate with

those whom they consider to be infidels when they can make money (e.g., by selling oil), but are quick to reject, even with violence, those who hold to the truths about Jesus and worship the only true God.

Sinful Response – The disciples thought that since they were with a greater prophet than Elijah, they had a responsibility to judge those who rejected God and his messenger. They thought that, like Elijah (2 Ki 1.9-12) who was a prophet in Samaria, they could call down fire and destroy the supporters of unbelief. This is the way extreme adherents of Islam react to rejection of their, so-called, prophet Mohammed. Since they cannot command God to send down fire on those they believe are infidels, they engage in riots and violence, pronounce curses, and call for *jihad*. This is not how Christians are to respond to abuse and rejection of the true prophet Jesus.

Saviour's Rebuke – Jesus rebuked the disciples for their suggestion. This raises a number of questions with respect to how we should respond to false religions. For example: Does Jesus' rebuke mean that we are to accept false religious practices? Is Jesus teaching that when it comes to false religions we are to beat our swords into ploughshares (Is 2.4)? Does this incident provide a practical illustration of non-resistance to force? Are we living in a new age of love, ushered in with a proclamation of peace on earth and good will toward men, which does not permit imprecations? How do we reconcile this rebuke with Jesus' own statement that he didn't come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword (Mt 10.34-36)? Is Jesus here reinforcing the principle he taught previously that we are to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us? Can a government outlaw the practices of false religions? Can a government adhere to religious neutrality? Is Jesus endorsing religious tolerance? If so, what is religious tolerance? Or, is Jesus teaching that we are to leave the punishment of false religious practices to God on the Day of Judgement? These questions, and many more, are raised by the different interpretations that are offered for this passage. To answer them adequately would require hundreds of pages. We can only note summary guidelines and conclusions:

- 1) *God will punish rejection* – Nothing here implies that it was right to reject Jesus and his disciples. God will deal with all who reject Jesus.
- 2) *Stay focused on mission* – We are not to concern ourselves with how rejection will be punished. We are to focus on the tasks God assigns us.
- 3) *Personal revenge is excluded* – Jesus does not address the role of the civil magistrate (Rom 13.1-7) here but our personal response to rejection.
- 4) *Live circumspectly* – We are to live so that the world will be attracted to Jesus—so that men have no reason to respond negatively to the Gospel.
- 5) *Avoid persecution* – When opposition to Christ and his people becomes severe, we can go elsewhere rather than fight it (Mt 10.14; Lk 9.56).

Radical Commitment Required to Follow Jesus [July 19] (Travelling to the Feast, Fall 32 AD. Mt 8.19-22; Lk 9.57-62)

Professed Commitment – What does it mean to follow Jesus? When he was on earth, it certainly included travelling in his company as he went from village to town and region to territory. It also included the idea of adhering to his teachings as a Rabbi. For us, to follow Jesus means that we will:

- *Proceed* in the paths he requires us to go, wherever that may lead (Lk 9.58), by accepting his will and direction for our lives.
- *Perform* in accord with his commands given in the Bible; accepting them as the standard for our thoughts, words, and actions; and believing them to be absolute (Lk 9.59).
- *Proclaim* the Gospel through what he has done in saving us (Lk 9.60).
- *Plough* by serving Jesus in a love-starved world (Lk 9.62).

It is relatively easy to profess commitment to Jesus but difficult to put it into practice and achieve the radical level of commitment required by him. He does not accept those who approach him unthinkingly and hastily promise to follow him without counting the cost. Therefore, we

must exhibit a serious level of commitment like the teacher of the law (Mt 8.19), and be:

- *Recruits* who enlist voluntarily in his service, by saying “I will”.
- *Resolute*, with a desire to “follow” obediently.
- *Ready* to follow without reserve “wherever” he may lead us, even if this means that we must go to our own ‘Jerusalem’ and a premature death.

The Gospel writers expand on what this commitment entails by recording the words of two other followers, who are also identified as disciples, who made excuses, and Jesus’ responses to all three of the professed followers.

Pilgrim Commitment – Jesus did not directly challenge the commitment of the first disciple, but rather illustrated the challenge that would be faced by all those who make a full commitment, by referring to his personal situation through an analogy. Foxes and birds have their own places of rest but the Son of Man had no such place. Some suggest that Jesus is referring in these words to the depth of the poverty he encountered in this life, and to the fact that he and his disciples lived off charity (Lk 8.3). This may be encompassed in his meaning, but it seems that his real emphasis is on the fact that *we* are not to live as if this world is our permanent abode. We are pilgrims passing through this world (Gen 47.9; 1 Pt 2.11) and heading toward our permanent residence in eternal glory (Jn 14.2; Heb 13.14; 2 Pt 3.13).

Priority Commitment – The second disciple who approached Jesus asked to be excused for an indefinite period while he waited for his father to die and he could see that he was properly buried. In Jesus’ response to the man we are not to understand him as rejecting proper respect for our relatives who have just died. The burial would have occurred immediately (the same day if possible) and the man would have been engaged in the burial procedures rather than travelling with Jesus. The implication is, rather, that the disciple was allowing other things, beside the work of the Kingdom, to have priority. He may have been expecting to receive an inheritance or felt that familial duties should take

precedence over going wherever Jesus wanted him to go. His request to return home for a time indicated that he believed that discipleship was something he could casually pick up or lay down. Ultimately, following Jesus means that nothing should be more important to us than bringing glory to God through our obedience to his commands.

Pure Commitment – The world is dead in sin—all men are spiritually and morally dead and, unless they repent, are already considered to be eternally dead. They have no interest or hope in spiritual or eternal matters, so all that they can hope for is what they can get out of their brief temporal existence. Jesus reminds us that true disciples are not to be like the world's inhabitants who place their hope in family members or some expected inheritance. We are to be pure and untainted from the false hopes of those who live only for the things of this passing realm—we are to let the dead bury their own dead.

Prompt Commitment – We are also not to be procrastinators when it comes to following Jesus. We are not to be slow about receiving him in salvation, obeying his commands, or acting when he gives us providential direction. Kingdom-life is governed by the absolute and urgent word of the King and we are to respond now, not later. Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow. Today is when we are presented with the opportunity to reach out to a dying sinner, not next week. Today the Holy Spirit prods us to action, not when it feels convenient to us. We are tempted to defer and postpone what God calls us to do and to offer excuses about 'pressing' matters associated with the needs of our family or friends. Instead, we must believe, and act like we believe, that faithful servants of the King cannot have divided loyalties that cause them to delay taking immediate and prompt action.

Purposeful Commitment – To conclude his lesson on commitment, Jesus says that we must focus all of our attention on the 'ploughing' we have been assigned for the Kingdom. We cannot be distracted by what is going on in the *other* principality, nor should we be looking to see if our co-labourers are ploughing straight. Our mandate is to maintain straight and steady progress and to complete the course assigned to us (Eph 4.1;

Ph 3.14; Heb 3.1).

Unbelieving Reactions to Jesus [July 20] (In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.11-24)

How do men react to Jesus? There are really only four ways that they can react when they have not believed in him as the Holy One of God. John tells us of these four ways when he recounts the appearance of Jesus in the temple courts on the fourth day of the Feast of Booths.

Curiosity – Up until he appeared at the Feast, the people, and primarily the Jewish leaders, were wondering if he would appear. They referred to him as “that one”, implying that they were aware of what he had done in Jerusalem at his previous appearance at the Feast (Jn 5.1) and of the rumours that were coming out of Galilee. They wanted to know what he was up to and whether or not he would come and perform miracles or make a special announcement, such as claiming to be the Messiah.

Confusion – Beyond curiosity, the crowd displays the initial confusion that all men demonstrate when they first encounter Jesus. Is he really a good man or is he a self-deluded egotist or a con man deceiving the people? Notice that the initial confusion that people have is not about whether he is the God-man, but rather what kind of *man* he is. Because of our sinful natures our initial reaction to Jesus is one of incredulity. We cannot, by nature, accept the things of God and so assume that Jesus is just like any other man and we try to place him into a category that we can understand—either as a benevolent social worker or a confused lunatic.

The crowd’s initial confusion is compounded by the official position of the Jewish leaders who prohibited serious consideration of the truth of who Jesus was. Men in power-positions invariably suppress discussion of any truth that threatens their ‘authority’. History provides examples such as the 16th century inquisition that oppressed truth and communism that attempted to stifle consideration of religion in the hope that the ‘people’s opiate’ would pass into oblivion. Recently, proponents of evolution have

used the courts to stop discussion of alternative views such as Intelligent Design, pro-abortionists suppress evidence of the link between abortion and breast cancer, and the Harvard faculty engineered the dismissal of the university's president because he dared to question the politically correct view of gender equality. When open discussion is suppressed, people resort to alternative means for communicating. Then, the enquirers discussed Jesus secretly. Today, people resort to *blogs* when shut out of the mainstream media or academic journals.

Condescension – When men continue to rebel against truth their usual next response to Jesus is condescension; which can appear in two forms: ignoring Jesus as if he were irrelevant or insinuating that he is insignificant. We see this latter response from the Jewish leaders who questioned his authority and ability to teach by suggesting that he was ignorant. They show their contempt by saying “this man”. In spite of their ridicule, and in spite of the fact that he had not studied formally in a Rabbinic school, Jesus' teaching was truly learned and spiritually challenging. Jesus responds to their grumbling by telling them that he was:

- *Commissioned* – Jesus did not respond that he was self-taught as the Jews implied. This was an age that did not ‘worship’ originality and such a claim would inflame them. Rather he told them that he was God-taught, having received his instruction and commission from the Father.
- *Conscientious* – He did not speak his own opinions to honour himself, but was principled and honest and spoke only what would glorify God.

With each rebuttal he also challenged their self-confident, and false, religious views and presented them with a call to repentant action:

- *Choice* – To know Jesus we must first believe. Faith is the prerequisite for knowledge. Only those who have been taught the truth about Jesus by the Holy Spirit can understand his teaching. We show that we are truly enlightened, not by choosing our own path but by obeying God's revealed will.
- *Charge* – In contrast to Jesus who obeyed the Father in word and action, the Jewish leaders, who claimed that they were the guardians

of the Law given by Moses, showed their contempt for God's Law by disobeying its requirements, ignoring its intent, and rejecting its messenger.

Censure – On being accused of trying to kill him, the Jews responded with a final reaction that men display toward Jesus—they rejected him with hatred (Jn 7.7) and censure. Instead of repenting, men insult Jesus. Here they called him demon-possessed and accused him of having a paranoid delusion. Jesus responded apologetically by appealing to experience, knowledge, and reason:

- *Citation* – He reminded them that he had healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda during his last visit to Jerusalem. Their own experience informed them that he was from God.
- *Circumcision* – He appealed to their knowledge of the Law that permitted necessary ritual work, such as circumcision (Lev 12.3), to be performed on the Sabbath. By logical extension healing a man did not transgress the Sabbath but fulfilled its deepest meaning—spiritual renewal.
- *Challenge* – He challenged them to be rational and not make judgments based on appearances but to consider all the facts. In the same way Jesus calls today's secular materialists not to dismiss the transcendent but to repent and believe in God the Creator.

Is Jesus the Christ? [July 21]

(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.25-31)

Speaking Publicly (26) – Whenever the topic of election or predestination comes up in conversation, someone will usually reject the idea that God chooses and converts those whom he saves. The common retort is that this doctrine leaves no room for man's 'free' will and volition. Yet we find Jesus, who taught this truth (Mt 24.22; Jn 6.37, 39), preaching publicly, with the purpose of calling people into the Kingdom. If God's election leaves no room for a responsible response to Jesus, then Jesus was a hypocrite when he called men to repent and believe in him (Mk 1.14). Rather, his own speaking publicly shows that he must be

presented as *the* Christ not only in the confines of the churches but at the crossroads of the community.

Searching Ponder (25-26) – While he was preaching the people pondered his identity. Whereas previously (20) they accused him of being a ‘mental case’ for stating that the Jewish leaders were trying to kill him, among their own kind they admitted that Jesus was speaking the truth. But, having noted that their leaders were trying to kill Jesus, they wondered why he was being permitted to speak publicly. This led them to think that their leaders might have concluded that Jesus was the Messiah. The irony is that in their half-jesting questions they expressed the truth that:

- 1) The person speaking in the temple was the preacher and miracle worker whose reputation preceded him from Galilee.
- 2) He spoke with such authority and clarity that the Jewish leaders dared not touch him, implying that he had more authority than the Sanhedrin.
- 3) He was the Messiah.

So it is today. Men claim to be undertaking great adventures in the search for the ‘historical Jesus’ or express an agnosticism about who Jesus is. But, in fact, all men who encounter Jesus **know** beyond any doubt that he is the Christ. They just are not willing to acknowledge him as Lord and Saviour.

Surprising Protest (27) – Their claim to agnosticism can be seen in their suggestion that the origin of the Messiah was to be a mystery. They filtered the Biblical evidence selectively and followed one form of Rabbinic teaching so they could dismiss any serious consideration of him. They had sufficient evidence (Dan 9.25; Mic 5.2; Mal 3.1) to know where the Messiah was to arise from and could easily have determined that Jesus met the qualifications. The irony is that while they thought they knew where he was from (Nazareth rather than Bethlehem); they really did not know where he was from (Heaven). They chose to ignore his true origin so they could ignore his role.

Stated Provenance (28-29) – Jesus responds to their feigned agnosticism by setting forth the truth in five clear propositions. It is the same truth that our secular society does not want to hear—Jesus is the God-man from Heaven:

- *Ancestry* – Every person who has heard of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection knows that he is Divine and that he came from above.
- *Appointment* – He did not come to earth for his own purposes, but was appointed to fulfill the Father’s redemptive plan by saving sinners.
- *Authority* – Because his appointment is from God the Father, who is the “true one”, his mission is validated and vindicated.
- *Alienation* – Men are alienated from God because of sin and therefore do not know God the Father or God the Son, and do not *want* to know them.
- *Association* – Jesus alone truly knows the Father because of his intimate association with him in eternity and, by implication, is the only one who can reveal the Father to men.

Sovereign Providence (30) – Supporters of false religious views, whether they adhere to organized religions like Hinduism, Judaism, or Islam, or to one of the amorphous forms of religion we encounter today like humanism, hedonism or secularism do not want to hear the truth about Jesus. They all reject the truth that Jesus is God, born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life and died a perfect sacrifice, and who was resurrected the third day after his death. No false religion will accept the fact that Jesus is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life (Jn 14.6). On hearing this from Jesus they attempted to arrest him, but were unable to, because God was overruling. Practitioners of false religions continue their attempts to silence Truth, if necessary by seizing God’s messengers and throwing them into jail or sentencing them to death, but ultimately they fail. Men can only *try* to silence truth, they can never succeed.

Simple Profession (31) – In the midst of the suspicion, ridicule and hatred of Jesus, we find hope. It is the same hope that was presented to Adam in the midst of the curse in the Garden—the head of the serpent

would be crushed by the foot of the Son (Gen 3.15). It is also the same hope we find in every spiritually dark age—God is drawing men, women and children into his Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. Many in the crowd believed in him because, as they said, no one could do more miraculous signs than he had done. It was not wrong for them to believe because they saw him perform miracles. The signs he performed were for the purpose of demonstrating that he is God. In the same way, it is not wrong to believe in Jesus to avoid eternal damnation in Hell. A simple faith is better than no faith. It is not right, however, to infer that it was weak faith because it was simple. In truth, it was a strong faith because they did not yet have complete knowledge. In contrast, we seem to have weak faith in spite of our fuller understanding of who Jesus is and of what he has accomplished on the cross.

Jesus' Frustrated Attempt to Attract the Jews [July 22] (In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.32-39)

Abbreviated Appearance – Jesus declared publicly that he is the God-man from Heaven (Jn 7.28, 29). At this proclamation many believed that he was the Messiah, but those who did not believe he challenged with four warnings:

- *Ephemeral Stay* – Jesus visited Earth with a temporary mission—not because his kingdom is temporal but precisely because it is universal and eternal. He stayed in space-time only as long as was required by God's predetermined plan to demonstrate unequivocally, through message and miracle, that he was the Messiah; lay the Apostolic foundation for his church; and complete the work of redemption on the cross. His warning to the Jewish leaders and those in the crowd who did not believe, was that he would only be present for a short time—about six months of his work was left to be accomplished. This warning is given to us also. If we have not yet settled accounts with God; if we have not repented of our sins; if we have not, through faith, asked Jesus to pay our debt of sin through his death; then Jesus will be with us for only a short time and our opportunity will be gone. The time is short (1 Cor 7.29); either until we pass

through the portal to eternity or until Jesus comes again to wrap up this universe.

- *Expected Separation* – He then spoke of his pending return to the Father. This is more than just a statement of his destination. It speaks of exodus and exaltation, and is therefore a warning. He was rejected by his people, but they didn't drive him away by force. He went willingly to assume his place as the universal sovereign. In Glory, he is preparing to return as the judge who will dispense eternal rewards and punishment (Ps 98.9).
- *Empty Search* – Next, he told them that once he had left, they would not be able to find him. This does not mean that a sincere person today isn't able to find Jesus if he comes to him in faith and repentance. However, it does mean that, in general, if the opportunity to receive Christ has been rejected by any one of us, there is no room for remorse or penance. Those who hate Jesus will find that he leaves them in their hatred and withdraws the Holy Spirit from their hearts, lives, institutions, and nations. The Jews of that generation rejected their Messiah and Jews today continue to look for a messiah that they will never find. This warns us not to trifle with Jesus as we may not be given a second chance to repent.
- *Exclusive Sphere* – According to their choice, so their condition. Driving him away would be their doom. They would be forever excluded from Heaven because no unbeliever can ever enter it (1 Cor 6.9, 10; Rev 22.15). It is foolish to expect a place in Heaven if you have rejected Jesus.

Agitated Asking – The Jewish leaders were clueless. Because they chose to dismiss Jesus and were deluded in their understanding of what he taught, they sarcastically repeated back his declarations and misapplied them. They couldn't conceive of his returning to Heaven so they concluded that, since he was rejected by most of the people in Jerusalem, he was going to leave Palestine and teach among the dispersed Jews, and even among the despised Gentiles, living throughout the Roman Empire. The irony is that even though their conclusion was derived incorrectly, it spoke prophetically of what was to come. Instead of ridiculing his teaching they should have been repenting, for Jesus

would shortly remove the light of the Gospel from them and, through the Apostles and Church, take it to the Gentile world. We are the recipients of that blessed progression of the truth from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). Let us make sure that we don't squander the opportunity, as did the Jews, by rejecting the message delivered to us by faithful witnesses.

Announced Animation – Jesus tried again to get through to his nation before the pilgrims departed for their homes. He stood up on the last and greatest day of the Feast (Lev 23.36), when the largest crowds were present, and declared loudly that he is the water of life and whoever drinks of him will overflow with life-giving water. His message was well suited for the last day of the Feast. On the first seven days, libations from the pool of Siloam (or Gihon Spring that fed the pool) were poured out on the altar. However, on the last day, the water ritual was not practiced. Jesus turns their attention from an empty ceremony, created by men, to the object of proper religious practice—himself. He declares an:

- *Extensive Summons* – The Gospel proclamation is not like the pagan oracles that were delivered privately to privileged initiates. Rather, it is a general invitation that calls any, and all, to come to Jesus.
- *Eternal Satiation* – Those who receive Jesus obtain enlightenment and contentment—true knowledge that replaces the fictitious philosophies of this world and a spiritual happiness and psychological well-being that assures men that they are resting in the hands of a loving Father.
- *Expanding Supply* – When sinners are converted and become one with Christ, the spiritual water that indwells them flows out of them in such abundance that it floods every life and institution that it encounters (Ezk 47.1-11). Christians are refreshing springs in the sin-parched deserts of materialistic humanism and socialistic authoritarianism.

Energizing Spirit – The Spirit was present in the life of every believer before the advent of Christ (Ps 51.11), but he is present now in Christians and the Church in a special way. Since Christ's resurrection ushered in the age of the energizing Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1.5, 8), NT Christians are endowed with spiritual gifts and power beyond compare (1 Cor 12.1-

31).

The Jews' Frustrated Attempt to Arrest Jesus [July 23] (In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.32, 40-52)

Alternatives Assessed – Jesus' teaching at the Feast was so different from anything that the people had ever heard in the Synagogues that some of them began to wonder if he might be the Prophet or the Messiah. By 'the Prophet' they meant the one whom Moses predicted God would raise up (Dt 18.15, 18)—not necessarily the fore-runner of the Messiah, but a prophet in his own right, of equal or greater stature to Moses. Any of them who affirmed that he was either, was heading in the right direction. However, very few would have thought that Jesus could have been *both* the Prophet (Acts 3.22) and the Messiah (Mt 16.16). It is only with the fullness of the NT teaching that we understand that Jesus holds three anointed offices—prophet, priest and king. Also, few of those who proposed a valid explanation of who Jesus might be were willing to personally commit themselves to him. This is the way it has been for two thousand years. Many have come to some correct conclusions about Jesus but have nevertheless not been willing to accept him as the God-man. It is not sufficient for us to have correct information about Jesus; it is necessary that we know him as *our* Lord and Saviour.

Others in the crowd were not as ready to accept the idea that he could be the Messiah. They referred to OT passages that spoke of the Messiah coming from the tribe of Judah and from the root of Jesse through David (2 Sam 7.16; Is 11.1; Mic 5.2). They claimed that the Messiah could not come from Galilee and, since Jesus was from there (Jn 1.46; Jn 7.52), he could not be the Messiah. They were correct with respect to their understanding of the origin of the Messiah, showing that there was a messianic expectation among the people that had been cultivated by the Rabbis. However, they were wilfully ignorant of all the facts: first, that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and a descendant of David (Mt 1.1-17), and was born in Bethlehem (Mt 2.1-6); second, that the Messiah would *also* come from Galilee (Is 9.1; Mt 2.23). Admittedly, the second fact is not as clear in the OT. However, their ignorance of Jesus' origin cannot

be excused as they did not want to know the facts. The real problem was not their lack of willingness to enquire into and accept his earthly origin, but his heavenly origin.

The question of his origin caused a schism among the people. This is to be expected since the truth about Jesus divides mankind. Ultimately there is only one division among mankind—it is not gender, racial, ethnic, or linguistic; but rather, religious—a division over the origin and person of Jesus Christ.

Attempted Arrest – On one side of this division were many from the crowd, most of the Pharisees who had authority in the Synagogues, and leaders from the priests (primarily Sadducees) with authority in the temple. These pious and self-righteous leaders constituted different factions of the ‘Taliban’ of their day who were usually at odds, but with respect to their attitude toward Jesus they agreed—they wanted him destroyed because he set aside their manmade traditions and undermined their perceived authority. Instead of attending to the observances of the Feast, they plotted how they could destroy Jesus and appointed temple guards to seize him. However, because of God’s overruling providence, probable concern over causing a riot among the people, and the impressive nature of Jesus’ teaching, the guards returned empty handed. The guards were asked why they hadn’t arrested Jesus. Their literal response is: “Never spoke this way, a man.” From their failure to arrest Jesus and their response on returning to their masters, we can infer the following about Jesus’ teaching:

- *Priority* – Jesus spoke not only in an unusual way, but in a way that no man had ever spoken. He is greater than Moses and all the prophets.
- *Perfection* – He spoke absolute and compelling truth.
- *Potency* – His words humbled the crudest and toughest among men.
- *Power* – It compelled them to endorse Jesus before their evil masters.

Adamant Accusation – Those who heard and rejected Jesus’ teaching displayed a number of the attributes that are common to all men who hate God’s truth and God’s Son:

- *Scorn* – They proudly assumed that they alone knew the truth and could not be deceived. In their opinion, the common people were an uncultured mob whose tastes and opinions were worthy of nothing but scorn. Scorn is a child of pride.
- *Stubbornness* – They sought earthly glory which made them impervious to the word of God. It is rare that believers in Christ are found among the rulers, the ‘elite’, the ‘cultured’ and the ‘thought leaders’ of this earth.
- *Stupidity* – In their antagonism against God they became irrational fools. The standards they would apply to others (Dt 1.16-17), they refused to apply to Christ and Christians. For example, they claimed to be tolerant, but were overt in their prejudice and hatred against Jesus and his people.
- *Slander* – They ignored facts (Jonah and Nahum came from Galilee; men today dismiss the witness of God’s creative design found in nature) and slandered those who (like Nicodemus) dared to suggest that their theories were ‘just-so stories’, not supported by any evidence.
- *Shame* – While they placed others under a curse (49), they were in fact the ones who are anathematized. The sword of God’s judgment was only a hair-breadth from their necks. They were one twitch away from eternity and from the endless shame of Hell.

Forgiving a Woman Caught in Adultery [July 24] (In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 7.53-8.11)

This is one of the more challenging passages in the Gospels for a number of reasons. There is debate about: 1) its place in the Gospel accounts, 2) whether or not it teaches that capital punishment is annulled, and 3) if it teaches that the Church is to have a tolerant view of adultery and other sexual sins.

It appears that no extant Greek manuscript of John's Gospel, prior to the 5th century, contains this passage, nor is it referred to by the very early Greek writers on the Gospel of John. Versions of this account are found in different places in at least two manuscripts of Luke. Where it fits into the Gospel accounts is therefore somewhat problematic. However, it was received by the early Church as being a faithful account of an historical incident in the life of Jesus and early scribes ensured that it was handed down to the Church. The Latin, *Vulgate*, translation places the account during the Feast of Booths. This appears to be correct, both from a chronological and theological perspective, and our English translations follow that tradition.

This passage does not teach that God has changed his moral standards. God continues to hate adultery, fornication, homosexual practices and all other sexual sins. He will punish in Hell those who have not repented of these sins and have not endeavoured to live pure lives (Mt 5.27-30; 1 Tim 1.8-11; Rev 22.15). Nor does this passage teach that God has discontinued the application of capital punishment for capital crimes. What, then, does it teach?

The Setup – After the Feast, Jesus spent the night at the Mount of Olives and at dawn reappeared in the temple courts to continue teaching the people. The Pharisees, who had been frustrated in their attempt to arrest him, now manufacture an episode which they believe will provide them with an excuse to seize him. That it was a trap is clear, since if the woman was 'caught in the act' they ignored the law that required that *both* parties be apprehended and sentenced (Lev 20.10). It appears that they had permitted a married man, who arranged a liaison with a prostitute, to escape. Their subjecting the woman to public humiliation to further their plot against Jesus was as sick as permitting the man to use the woman without stopping him, and as duplicitous as their now calling Jesus 'teacher' when they had previously called him 'deceiver'.

The Sting – The Pharisees attempted to set up a moral dilemma for Jesus. They presented him with two options: 1) Sentence the woman to stoning and counsel action that would undermine his support with the

common people and be contrary to Roman law (adultery was not a capital crime in Rome); or 2) Reject the requirement for capital punishment for an adulterer, given in the Law of Moses, and be perceived as conniving at sin. They were not interested in justice; their intent was to discredit Jesus or to find a ‘legal’ basis for accusing him of heterodoxy. But, as is so often the case when men present an invalid dilemma, they did not anticipate a third option.

The Sin – He dramatically introduces this third option by bending down and writing in the dirt with his finger. It is not worthwhile to speculate on what he wrote, since the Holy Spirit does not tell us. He effectively showed them his back and indicated that he despised their little ‘game’. His silence probably frustrated them as they thought that he was evading their question. So he eventually replied with a challenge: “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” We are not to understand his challenge as referring to sin in general or there is no room for criminal courts of any kind, since all witnesses, judges, and jury members are sinful men. He is, rather, turning their supposed dilemma on them. He asks, “If you are concerned that the law be properly administered, where are the *two* guilty parties—the man and the woman? Why are you acting as accessories to the man’s crime? Where are the required two or three witnesses (Dt 17.6)? Are you willing to perjure yourselves by raising a stone against her (Dt 17.7)?” In this, Jesus is not abrogating capital punishment for adultery, nor dismissing the proper use of witnesses of a crime. He is condemning their sins of duplicity, hypocrisy and evil intent, and upholding the Law’s requirements for proper due process.

The Silence – Impaled by the two prongs of their own dilemma and with consciences burning with guilt, the men departed. The older ones left first. Perhaps their maturity helped them to see the foolishness of their position more easily than the over-zealous young men. No one was left as a witness to condemn the woman so the (ill-)legal case against her had to be dropped.

The Summons – By dropping the case, Jesus does not condone her

sinful life. Even though he would not permit men to act as civil judges without proper procedures and evidence, he acted as a moral judge by telling her to leave her life of sin. In Jesus' words of discharge there is more than just a dismissal of an unfair trial; there is ultimate forgiveness followed by an exhortation to live a righteous life. In these, Jesus graciously invites her into his kingdom. Each of us is as guilty of sin as is the woman, even if we have not been charged with a crime. Regardless of the extent of our sin, if we humbly stand before Jesus fully confessing our sins, he will forgive us and lift our condemnation. We will then be transformed to walk in holiness and one day meet this blessed woman in Heaven.

Jesus, the Light of the World

Jesus, the Light of the World [July 25]
(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 8.12-20)

Limits – John refers a number of times in chapter 7 to the crowds that listened to Jesus, but in chapter 8 there is no reference to the crowds. This indicates that the people, who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast from Palestine and beyond, had returned to their homes. Jesus, however, remained in the city teaching local inhabitants and continuing to face-off against his adversaries. It appears that he was deliberate in his challenge to the Pharisees since he chose to teach in the temple courts in the area where the treasury boxes were placed, near the meeting rooms of the Sanhedrin. This was a deliberate provocation intended to show how foolish the enemies of Christ can be and that God is in control of all events in time and space—no matter how vexed the Pharisees became they could not lay a hand on Jesus until God determined that it was time for Jesus to return to his heavenly realm (20).

Light – The Jews had introduced special lamps for the Feast of Booths which symbolized God's presence and the light of the Law. These lights would have been extinguished on the last day of the Feast. Following this, Jesus appears in the temple and declares the human innovations to be worthless, by stating that he is the light of the world. Man's lights

(e.g., philosophies and religions) go out, but God is the true and eternal light (1 Jn 1.5). Men, with their oil lamps or candles, remain in darkness and cannot approach God correctly because they do not accept the revelation of his light in Jesus, who is:

- *Unlimited* – This ‘I am’ statement declares his divinity.
- *Unique* – The light, not merely a light; the only way, truth, and life.
- *Universal* – The light of the *world*, not of the Jewish church only.
- *Unconditional* – Available to whoever follows, believes, and obeys.
- *Un-obscuring* – Leading men out of spiritual darkness into salvation.

Legalities – Like all men who reject Christ, the Pharisees change the subject. They aren’t interested in dealing with the substance of his statement so they try to challenge him with a legal ‘technicality’. They are still smarting from his having caught them in a misuse of the Law when they brought forward the woman caught in adultery, so they attempt to outsmart him with their feigned knowledge of the Law. Based on Rabbinic law, rather than God’s law, they rejected self-testimony entirely. However, the Bible never suggests that self-authentication is unacceptable, but rather implies that it must be accompanied by a second corroborating witness (Dt 19.15; Mt 18.16).

Litmus – Jesus presented the ultimate ‘litmus’ test of his declarations—true knowledge. The Jewish leaders failed this test because they were ignorant of the truth and came to their conclusions by human standards. They were like a group of blind men standing in a garden who deny that the flowers are blue, red, yellow, pink, and white; even though their sighted guide has told them it is so. At times, self-attestation in worldly affairs is the only way to determine truth—for example, when there is only one survivor of an accident. Self-attestation is the *only* way to determine spiritual and eternal truth (and even, ultimately, physical and temporal truths, in spite of what empiricists claim). We can know about God and his purposes only because he has revealed them. Since Jesus is God, his testimony is valid and the opinions of the leaders of his day about his origin and destiny were mere speculations. We can apply this truth about God’s self-attestation to matters such as the origin of the universe and moral standards. No human was present during the first

five-and-half days of creation. Anyone who rejects God's account of how he created is as foolish as were the Pharisees. Similarly, God defines sin and moral standards in his Law. All people who reject his rules are fools.

Legitimacy – Jesus, however, does not end his reply to their legalistic ploy with self-assertion. He confounds them by presenting the minimum required two corroborating witnesses in judicial proceedings—his own witness and the witness of a second person, the Father who sent him to earth. He declares his:

- *Duo-unity* – By stating, “I stand with the Father” he says that he stands face-to-face with God the Father, revealing two parties of the Trinity.
- *Divinity* – His co-standing with the Father is an assertion of his divinity and that he judges by divine standards and authority, not by appearances.
- *Duty* – He was not sent to judge during his first appearance on earth but to save men from their self-deluded view that they know truth.
- *Decisiveness* – There is no uncertainty, doubt, or equivocation with Jesus. His decisions are right—morally and absolutely.
- *Demonstration* – Jesus’ “other witness is the Father” on whose behalf he taught and performed demonstrative miracles (Jn 5.36).

Linage – On declaring his relationship with the Father, the Jews asked where his father was. It is probable that they thought he was speaking of Joseph, who at this point appears to have already died (Jn 19.27). They were so blind to spiritual truth that they only heard his words but could not understand them because they didn't really know who God is. This is how it is with most men who hear words like ‘god’ and ‘Jesus.’ They fashion their own definitions but have no idea what they really mean, since they have not been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and cannot accept the truth that Jesus is the revelation of God (Jn 1.14, 18; Jn 14.7-10). If we want to know who God is we must know Jesus who is the image of the invisible God (Col 1.15) and the Light of the World.

The Relationship between Jesus and the Father [July 26] **(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 8.21-30)**

Deadly Seeking – Sometime during the two-month interval between the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Dedication, Jesus again addressed the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. He told them a second time that he was going to a place where they could not go. He added that the reason they could not follow him was because of a specific sin—rejecting him as Messiah (23). Instead of following him into Heaven, they would die as sinners and, by implication, be destined to eternal damnation. This is not a message men want to hear. Even many in the Church do not like this message. They believe that somehow God will excuse sincere agnostics, Moslems, Jews, Hindus or Buddhists and make a place for them in Heaven. Men want to think that their search for truth has merit. Jesus is explicit in his rejection of all this wishful thinking and teaches that there are only two categories of mankind—people who receive him as Lord and Saviour, and people who reject him. Their decisions are forever forged into two destinies: Heaven or Hell.

Deliberating Suicide – They misunderstand his statement for a second time. Previously, they thought that he was speaking of going to the Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world (Jn 7.35). This time, they wondered if he was going to commit suicide. Ironically, they stumbled onto a profound truth without realizing it. Jesus would give his life willingly, not as a suicide but as a sinless sacrifice that would fully pay our debt of rebellion against God. His death is sufficient to cover the retributive payment owed to God by every person throughout history, and has been accepted on behalf of all his people.

Devil's Spawn – Jesus then explained why they were unable to understand his words. It wasn't mental stupidity or a lack of temporal knowledge that hindered their ability to comprehend. In fact, from the world's perspective they were brilliant—after all they could speak Greek, recite hundreds of witty sayings, stay clear of unclean pagans, and negotiate a good deal for a camel. However, looking down from Heaven, the angels saw them as no brighter than fleas on a dog's rump that are

about to feel the power of a scratching hind-leg. What can be stupider than a man, created in the image of God, who rejects his Creator and Sin-bearer? Thus, Jesus tells them bluntly that they are from below, of this world. They are children of Satan (Jn 8.44) and will crawl on their bellies eating dust (Gen 3.14) while those who believe in Jesus will soar above the clouds (Is 40.31).

Divine Son – The Pharisees respond with a question: “Who are you?” We can hear in their words many inflections: ‘Who do you think you are to talk that way to us?’ ‘Who died and made you king?’ ‘What right do you, a mere carpenter, have to call us sinners?’ ‘How can you, an uneducated northerner, speak like that to the faculty of the Jerusalem Academy?’ But what we don’t hear is: ‘Please tell us more about yourself.’ Jesus doesn’t waste his breath on defending his person or position. They, or others of their party, have seen the evidence of his works and heard his teachings for two-and-a-half years. They know who he really is. The real problem is not their lack of knowledge, but their lack of will to act in accord with that knowledge. All men who hear the truth about Jesus know, beyond any doubt, that he is the Son of God. They choose to turn their backs on this truth, just as they do with the truth about God the Creator, God the Law Giver and God the Righteous Judge.

Delivered Sacrifice – Jesus reminded them that he came from the Father, but they continued wallowing in their self-imposed ignorance, so he shot another arrow. For unbelievers, it pierces their heart with a poisoned message: ‘*You* will sacrifice me to Hell and then, too late, discover that I am from Heaven.’ For believers it pricks the heart with a message of love: ‘My death will be accepted in Heaven for you; then I will be elevated into the Father’s presence to prepare a place for you when you follow me.’ The same words are a ruin to one person and a resolution to another; a hindrance to one, a hope to another.

Delegated Singularity – Jesus is the all powerful creator of the universe and yet he is not his own man. We are dependent creatures and yet we think and act as if we are gods. In neither of his divine nor human natures

does Jesus act unilaterally. Nor, as a man, is he self taught. Jesus and the Father have a common purpose and plan which they have shared from eternity-past. Jesus, as man, did nothing that was contrary to that plan. He fulfilled it joyfully with a single-minded commitment to loving and saving mankind, out of devotion to his Father. Resting in the assurance of mutual love and purpose, he ignored the scepticism of the Jewish leaders and moved forward to meet his destiny—the destruction *of* death.

Definitively Saved – All mankind is also fulfilling God’s purpose and plan, whether or not consciously and wilfully. Most men and women have only one desire—to serve self—and their destiny is destruction *by* death. However, many from the mass of mankind have been chosen through God’s electing grace to receive a ‘heart transplant’ and their destiny is deliverance *from* death. They have put their faith in Jesus, along with many who heard him speak that day in Jerusalem, and have been brought into family union with the Father and the Son. With Jesus, we can depend on the Father to bring us *through* death to resurrection and eternal life.

Children of Abraham [July 27]
(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 8.31-41)

Who are the children of Abraham? It is often claimed in the popular media that both Arabs and Jews are descended from Abraham—through Ishmael and Isaac. In reality, modern Arabs are probably descended from Elam or Aram rather than Arphaxad who was Abraham’s ancestor, or possibly from Canaan, a descendant of Ham. Moslems (even those in the Middle East) come from across a spectrum of ethnic and racial sub-types. The Jews of today come from an even broader spectrum of racial sub-types that includes descendants of Japheth, and may have blond hair and blue eyes, dark skin and black curly hair, or olive skin and dark brown hair. There is not a single Jew or Moslem who could definitively demonstrate that he is descended from Abraham. Jesus, in this lesson, dismisses any claim that ethnic ancestry has merit before God, and introduces the revolutionary concept that the true descendants of

Abraham are not his physical seed, but those who believe in Christ and are obedient to God's commands (Lk 19.9; Rom 4.11; Gal 3.7, 29).

Among those Jews who listened to Jesus in the Temple that day, there were some who were nominal believers. They were willing to accept some facts about Jesus, such as his ability to perform miracles or that he could teach effectively, but were unwilling to yield to his authority and teaching. To these 'believers' Jesus presented the fact that if they embraced the truth about him, they would be set free. In response, they claimed that they were already free, because of their descent from Abraham, and were subject to no one. In truth, from a temporal perspective, they had been slaves in Egypt and Babylon; and for much of the preceding 500 years they had been subject to many overlords (Persian, Greek, Hasmonean, and Roman). However, Jesus is not particularly interested in which pagan empire held the sceptre of power over the Jews at that time. His concern was with the ruler who is a self-appointed sovereign over all the nations of this earth—Satan.

All men—Jews, Moslems or Gentiles; physical children of Abraham or not—are descendants of Adam and are therefore born into slavery to sin and Satan. In their innate state of bondage, they have drunk the intoxicating liquor of pride and inhaled the drug of vanity. This has distorted their sense of reality and they have become deluded into thinking that their licence is liberty. They are like members of a wild crowd exiting a rave who don't notice their slur and stagger. While they fumble with the car keys they claim to be in control. In spiritual terms, men claim that they can think objectively and rationally, act with independent volition—with so called free wills—and perform deeds that are good, just, and kind. In reality, they are just as deluded as the drunk who thinks he is sober. Every inclination of their thoughts and hearts is to do *only* evil all the time (Gen 6.5). They are slaves to sin, their cruel master.

Those who are slaves have no household rights. So those who are slaves to sin cannot claim to be sons of Abraham or heirs in God's kingdom. Just as Ishmael, who was the son of a slave, had no rights and had to be

driven out of Abraham's house (Gen 21.8-21), so those who are not born into the Kingdom cannot have household rights. Through Jesus, sinners can be reborn (Jn 3.3), and declared to be sons of the King. Jesus says (36) that he is the one who sets sinners free. He accomplishes this, first by paying their ransom through his sacrificial death on the cross, and then by applying that payment through the new birth. We are born again when we break free of our bondage to sin by repenting of our sins and believing that Jesus has paid the debt we owe to God for all of our sins. At rebirth we are declared to be children of God and are no longer slaves to sin, but free. The freedom that Christ gives us entails both rights and responsibilities. The rights that we acquire in Christ include:

- *Delight* in being able to commune with God as our Father (Mt 6.9) through a personal relationship, not just from being part of his creation.
- *Dissipation* of the fear of death and eternal damnation.
- *Deposing* of the bondage to sin's corrupting influence in our minds, and eventually in our entire beings (spirit and body) through the resurrection.
- *Diffusion* of the fog that fills the minds of those who pretend to be 'free thinking' and replacement with the sunshine of rational thought.

When the Son sets us free, we are free indeed!

Jesus also speaks to the responsibilities that accompany freedom. Freedom is not as men think—the removal of all boundaries or the ability to act as we please. God himself is, ultimately, the only truly free being and yet he acts neither arbitrarily, capriciously, nor maliciously. He is bound by his own laws of consistency, love and justice. Freedom in Christ gives us the ability to act wilfully and live purposefully. False religions—like Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism—need detailed strictures and rituals or their adherents go wild. In contrast, those who are true Christians, need only simple laws (e.g. the Ten Commandments) and examples of how to apply them, in order to do what is right out of love for God and man. The unwillingness of the Jews to accept Jesus' teaching and their desire to kill him demonstrated that they were not really free from slavery to sin. No one who is free from sin, and a true

descendant of Abraham, will reject Jesus or his Laws. Rather, he will do what is right, just as Abraham did by belief and obedience. Abraham accepted God's words, left the false gods of Aram, believed God's promises, and was obedient to God's commands (Gen 12.1-9; Gen 15.6; Gen 22.1-19).

Children of the Devil [July 28] (In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 8.41-47)

What are the signs that a person is a child of the Devil? Conversely, what are the signs that he is a child of God? In this section of his discourse, Jesus identifies the seven distinguishing attributes of Satan's family affinity:

Abominable Acts (Jn 8.41, 44) – The Jewish leaders are determined to remove Jesus from their community so that their standing among the people is not threatened. They would use even murder if it could advance their goals. The majority of the community blow hot and cold about Jesus, and eventually side with their leaders when they cry out for his crucifixion. Dictators and tyrants, and their gullible followers, throughout history have been ready to use genocide, ethnic cleansing, jihad, assassination, suicide bombers, and other forms of murder without compunction. Without Christ, we could all 'justify' eliminating our rivals by murder if we thought we could get away with it. It is only by God's preserving grace that we are not annihilated.

Warped Wills (Jn 8.42) – The heart of man is *only* evil all the time (Gen 6.5). From it comes all manner of abominable acts (Mt 15.19). So it should not surprise us that men hate Jesus and wish to extinguish his existence. They hate the fact that he is God, despise his laws, and rebel against his demands for holiness. By nature, all men want King Jesus to abdicate and they desire to put their own posteriors on his throne. Only people adopted into God's family by converting grace love Jesus and wish to see his name glorified.

Heedless Hearing (Jn 8.43, 47) – Packages of cigarettes contain graphic

pictures of what will happen to your lungs if you smoke and dire warnings about the terminal effects of smoke. However, most smokers ignore the consequences of their actions. So it is with unbelievers when they ignore the message of the Gospel. The problem is not a lack of clarity in the message; the words of Scripture and conscience are clear—all who die unrepentantly will face eternal damnation. The problem is an unwillingness to hear and heed—a lack of will that arises from spiritual inability. Although men understand the words of Jesus on a superficial level, they chose not to comprehend what they really mean so that they can feign ignorance. They are like a stubborn child who hears his mother say not to touch the hot stove, but who goes ahead and places his hand on the burner. We can only shake our heads at such stupidity that ignores the words of life and considers them foolishness (1 Cor 2.14).

Depraved Desires (Jn 8.44) – Believers in Christ continue to sin in this life. It is not until we reach Heaven that our inclination to sin will be finally removed. So then, how are the children of God different from the children of the Devil? It is not a matter of degree. There are some believers who, sadly, commit heinous sins, or are total grumps who we would rather not have as friends. In contrast some unbelievers are outwardly moral and kind, and very agreeable people to have as associates. The primary difference is in our heart desires. A true child of God hates his sin and wishes that he could be rid of it. He comes to the Father daily and pleads with him to remove the evil desires that well-up in him. Children of the Devil, in contrast, *want* to do the Devil's desires, even if they are constrained from acting by a fear of the consequences.

Lying Lips (Jn 8.44) – Besides being a murderer, Satan is a liar. His lies began in glory at the beginning, when he was still an angel. He deluded himself and a legion of rebellious cronies into thinking that they could usurp God's place. Once he was cast out of Heaven, he then turned his venom on man through the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Since then he has been the father of every lie, and the father of every liar. Satan and his children hate God because he alone is true (Rom 3.4). We see the results of this untruthfulness everywhere: children try to lie their way out of trouble and dig a deeper hole; suppliers lie to customers to such an extent

that even written contracts have becoming almost worthless; husbands and wives lie about the use of money and extra-marital relations; and politicians lie so often that it is almost accepted. Lies are the baggy clothes of the children of the Devil.

Muddled Minds (Jn 8.45, 46) – Men believe lies and filter God's revelation through the warp-o-meters of their fouled wills that do not *want* to believe truth. The result is that truth is twisted beyond recognition. They concoct theories that would be laughable if it were not for the seriousness with which they espouse them, such as: man is a relative of a chimp; homosexual relations are natural; the State can serve as a surrogate parent; criminals need to be reformed, not punished; and Jesus was a mere man with sinful passions who bore a child with Mary Magdalene. Where ever God gives direction or guidance on a subject, we can be sure that men will believe the opposite

Unlawful Union (Jn 8.41, 47) – The greatest lie that men believe, is that they are okay with God. In their deepest hearts all men know there is a God and that they are accountable to him. But they convince themselves that no matter what they do, say, or think, at the end of their lives God will accept them into his presence. Jesus dismisses this deception emphatically: those who belong to God hear and, by implication, do what God says. Anyone who continues living in the Devil's den and does not become a child of God through adoption will be consigned forever to the Devil's dungeon.

Liar, Lunatic, or Lord of All [July 29]
(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 8.48-59)

C. S. Lewis pointed out that we cannot view Jesus as a mere man who is just a good teacher. If what Jesus claims about himself is not true, he is either a liar or a lunatic, and we should not accept his teachings as good. However, if his claims are true, then he is in fact lord of all creation. The passage we are considering today confirms the reality that we cannot be indifferent to the claims that Jesus makes.

Denying Demons (Jn 8.48, 49, 54) – In response to their being called children of the Devil, the Jews accused Jesus of being either a liar or a lunatic. By saying that he was a Samaritan, they could have meant that he was misinterpreting the teachings of the OT, that he was mistaken in his understanding of what it meant to be a true child of Abraham, or that he was a heretic for rejecting the teachings of their fathers. Whatever they had in mind, it is clear that this cavil is intended as an insult, and that they viewed him as a false teacher, and thus a *liar*. Their alternative hypothesis—that he was a *lunatic*—is implied by their calling him demon possessed. Their meaning is not so much that he was diabolical, as that he was addled-brained and living in a cloud of self-deluded insanity. Jesus doesn't bother to defend himself against the accusation of his being a liar. His authoritative teachings stood on their own merit and the truthfulness of his life put a lie to their accusation. He did, however, respond to the suggestion that his teachings originated with Satan, with a simple emphatic rejection. He could ignore a slight on his person as the Son of Man, but could not tolerate a slur on the one who commissioned him—God the Father. Jesus counters the Jews' claim that he is a liar or a lunatic by stating the fact that he is Lord and God. He presents evidence to support this claim in four areas: his relationship with the Father, his being the hope of Abraham, his role of saving men from death, and his relationship with creation.

Divine Dignity (Jn 8.49-50, 54-55) – The Jews did not respect Jesus and give him the honour that is his due as Lord. As God, he could have rightly told them that they were being disrespectful. However, in his role as a mediator, having taken a human nature, he submitted himself in obedience to humiliation, so he would not grab for glory that would be his only when he had completed his task of redeeming his people. Rather than claim glory and offer himself as his own witness, he appealed to two other witnesses to his glory. First, he placed his case before the heavenly court, with God the Father as judge. He had total confidence that his authority would be fully vindicated by the Father. The Jews who showed scorn for Jesus that day in Jerusalem are dead now and they know truly that Jesus is Lord of the universe. This example of Jesus' patience and reliance on God's vindication teaches us that we must trust that God will

vindicate Christians for the abuse they receive at the hands of every ‘politically-correct’ and ‘tolerant’ anti-Christ. It also warns the God-haters of this age, who do not know the Father, that they also will shortly have to face the sombre reality that they have trifled with Jesus the Lord.

Delighted Doyen (Jn 8.56) – The second witness he appeals to is Abraham, the revered ancestor of the Jews. He presents Abraham as looking forward to the day of Jesus and rejoicing in it. There could be many subtleties in what Jesus meant by this statement. However, Jesus does mean, at least, that Abraham understood that his salvation was dependent on the Messiah who would come to save his people from their sin. Abraham looked forward to the work of substitutionary atonement that was foreshadowed by the ram provided in the place of Isaac (Gen 22.13). As Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing the redemption Jesus would provide, so every Jew, and Gentile, who wishes to be a true child of Abraham, should look to Jesus joyfully as his saviour.

Defying Death (Jn 8.51-53) – Jesus provides additional evidence that he is Lord by indicating that he will save from death anyone who obeys his teachings. The Jews mistakenly assume that Jesus is referring to physical death and they mention the fact that Abraham and the prophets, who were obedient to God, died. They assume that these examples refute his teaching. Jesus, of course, is not speaking of physical death, but eternal death—separation from God in eternal damnation in Hell. Jesus will later tell essentially the same audience that he is the source of eternal life (Jn 10.28). Everyone who believes that Jesus died as his substitute on the cross, heeds the word of Jesus, and will pass through physical death to eternal life. For the believer, physical death is radically altered so that it is no longer a terror. Rather, it becomes the gate to a new existence that includes receiving a resurrected body and purification from all sin in his entire being.

Definitive Declaration (Jn 8.57-59) – The final evidence that Jesus presents to defend his position as Lord, is his relationship with the created order. Not only did Abraham see Jesus with spiritual eyes, but Jesus saw Abraham with transcendent eyes. Jesus implies this reality

through the startling declaration that he is eternal; not just eternal in the sense of having endless years, but eternal in that he was before all things, and is therefore the Creator. The Jews understood that by his “I am” declaration he declared himself to be equal with God and they were prepared to stone him for blasphemy. With classic irony, he drives home the point about who can see him. Before their physical eyes he suddenly vanishes and is hidden from them.

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind [July 30] **(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 9.1-12)**

‘Problem of Evil’ – On seeing the blind man, the disciples assume that he had received his infirmity as the direct result of his own sin, possibly in the womb (since he was born blind), or as the result of his parents’ sin (Ex 20.5). Jesus indicates that the man’s condition is not the result of a particular sin, such as a disease that could be acquired through a sinful sexual act. Rather, Jesus points them to another option—this ‘evil’ was permitted by God for the display of his glory. Of course, all illnesses, infirmities, and disasters (natural as in a hurricane, or the result of human wickedness such as a terrorist attack) are the indirect result of pervasive sin in the world. However, this does not mean that they are direct punishment for sin. This should caution us not to connect disasters (e.g., earthquakes in Indonesia) with immediate punishment for sin. We should focus on the lesson in theodicy (the vindication of God’s goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil) that Jesus presents.

When considering God’s providential control over all events, someone might ask why God would plan, decree, and permit (i.e., not restrain; Gen 20.6) evil such as a person being born blind or a terrorist attack. David Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) says: “Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?” This analysis has been re-stated by many atheists since Hume. However, there is no ‘problem of evil’ unless evil really exists. Without God’s moral standard there is no evil. All other definitions of ‘evil’ are purely subjective. One man’s evil can be another

man's good. The 'problem of evil' turns out to be a problem for Hume, all atheists, and all unbelievers. In order to argue that something is evil they must first show that something *can* be evil (i.e., that the existence of evil is meaningful) and not just inconvenient, unpleasant, or against their own wills. Moral indignation against atrocities is inconsistent within their materialistic naturalistic philosophy. The unbeliever has to work from a Christian presupposition to declare something as evil. The real problem of evil is a logical problem for the unbeliever.

How then, as Christians, can we answer Hume's challenge? We can set out the following presuppositions:

- God is completely and only good (Ps 25.8; Ps 119.68).
- God can do anything except what is against his nature (e.g., deny truth).
- Evil exists by definition (against God's law) and actually (evil happens).
- God plans, decrees, and permits evil (such as a man being born blind) for reasons which are morally commendable and good.

The final presupposition is the one missed by Hume. As a set, there is no logical contradiction in these four statements. The good that Jesus worked in the man, even though many years after his birth, provides a sufficient reason.

Priority of Evangelism – Jesus ties the man's situation to his own assigned mission and work. He implies (4-5) that the reason God dealt in Providence with the man as he did, was so that the healing could serve as a sign miracle to validate his work as the Messiah and signify that he, as the light of the world, provides sight to the spiritually blind. The 'day' for the Jewish nation was drawing to a close as the 'night' of his crucifixion would end his ministry among them. But a new day would dawn with his resurrection; in which the light of the Gospel would shine throughout the world. Our own 'night' approaches; we need to walk in the light while there is an opportunity.

Potter's Earth – Jesus used a peculiar salve of saliva and dirt for applying the remedy of healing followed by a bath in a fountain. There

was probably no medicinal value intended by this application. Some suggest that the reason Jesus used the mud was to reinforce the fact that man is of the earth or as an aid to develop the man's faith. Because John tells us that *siloam* means 'sent', it may be that Jesus is symbolically pointing out that spiritual blindness must be washed away by the one who is sent from Heaven (Acts 26.17, 18).

People's Enquiry – The people who knew the blind man were perplexed about the healing and questioned one another and the man. We see in their debate and progressive illumination what we should see in those who encounter Christ and come to put their faith in him:

- *Dilemma* – They questioned the reliability of their own eyes before they believed a miracle. God does not expect us to accept his truths on blind faith. Our belief in Jesus is to be rational—founded on evidence from his works of creation, word of communication, and way of conviction.
- *Determination* – The man assures them that he was the one born blind and bears witness to his healing by Jesus. They conclude that a miracle has in fact occurred. In the same way, we can speak to our spiritual healing and definitively direct enquiring family and friends to Jesus.
- *Demand* – They asked about the means that were used and are presented with simple facts. Most Christians, especially those recently converted, are not able to discuss the nuances of God's approach to saving the lost. Rather, the level of their understanding is "I believed and now I see!"
- *Desire* – The man's witness to Jesus' cleansing work led the people to a desire to see him. The man, being blind when he was healed, had no idea where Jesus was to be found. We however, know where to find Jesus.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing [July 31] **(In the Temple in Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 9.13-34)**

The Jewish leaders are not pleased when they hear about the healing of the blind man (Jn 9.1-12). They want to stop anything that interferes with

their claims to authority and strengthens the witness to Jesus as the Messiah. So they investigate the healing in three stages: an initial interview with the man himself to determine the facts of the case (13-17); an interview with his parents to determine the veracity of the claim that he was born blind (18-23); and a second interview with the man in which they try to find inconsistencies in his presentation of the facts (24-34). Let us look at this passage from the perspective of the lessons we can derive from four themes that run throughout the three interviews.

Sabbath Sanctity – It is likely that Jesus healed on the Sabbath (14) so that he could set up a confrontation with the Jews. He healed the man with clay made from saliva and dirt so that he could break the tradition of the rabbis which condemned working with clay on the Sabbath. Was this deliberate, to provoke the Jewish leaders? Since he had been in Jerusalem for many days he had probably seen the blind man on other days and could have healed him on one of those days. He also could have healed the man without using any intermediate symbolic means. So it is quite probable that his actions were designed to elicit a reaction. The Pharisees responded as he expected (16) and accused him of not being from God because he did not keep the Sabbath according to their understanding of proper observance. It seems that his objective was to teach the proper meaning of the Sabbath:

- *Purpose* – The Sabbath was given by God for man's benefit in the past, for today, and for all of eternity. The healing of the man on the Sabbath points to spiritual rest in salvation and eternal rest in Glory.
- *Pointer* – Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath to point to the fact that the eyes of the spiritually blind are to be opened on the Christian Sabbath—the Lord's Day
- *Priority* – Jesus never sinned and he kept the Sabbath perfectly according to God's demands. But he did not keep it according to the superstitious traditions of the elders, and so allow them to usurp priority over God's law. Jesus obeyed the Father's law but not man's *arbitrary* laws.
- *Perpetual* – In defending the purpose of the Sabbath, Jesus indicates that it is a standing ordinance for all men, in every generation—there

is no need to defend the proper observance of something being abrogated.

Churlish Court – The examination of the man by the Pharisees became progressively more hostile. Initially, it appears that they have an unbiased interest in hearing how the healing had occurred. However, it becomes clear that their real motive is to find a way to attack Jesus—i.e., as a sinner. They draw in the man's parents who are afraid of excommunication if they say anything wrong. So they disavow knowledge of the events. The Pharisees then recall the man, insult him, accuse him of being a perverse sinner, and throw him out of their presence. The Pharisees were not interested in hearing the facts—i.e., that the man truly had been healed of his blindness. Rather, they were running a kangaroo-court with a preconceived conclusion—that Jesus was guilty—and were prepared to wear down the witnesses until they agreed with them. Unbelief claims to be scientific and rational, but refuses to face reality. When presented with reasonable evidence that is contrary to their preconceptions, proud and wicked men become shrill and belligerent. We see this when militant feminists loudly deny the statistically valid evidence of a direct causal correlation between abortion and breast cancer, or homosexuals forcefully demand that their 'lifestyle' is natural. They ridicule Christians as intolerant and bigots, whereas in reality they deny incontestable truth.

Depraved Doubters – Why do the Pharisees ask so many questions? Not to discern the truth about Jesus but to find loopholes to support their doubt. The act of giving sight to a man born blind should be sufficient to confirm his reputation and silence all opposition. Instead, the Pharisees deny the evidence and accuse him of being a sinner. When the man responded to their questions by enquiring if they wanted to become Jesus' disciples they answered with doubt about his origin; whereas previously they claimed to know of it (Jn 7.27). To men who don't *want* to be convinced, nothing will convince.

Expanding Enlightenment – In contrast to the Pharisees, the man who was healed was open to learning the truth about Jesus. Even before Jesus

revealed himself to the man (Jn 9.35-38), he came to understand who Jesus was. At first he confessed only what had happened: “I washed, and now I see.” (15) But soon he came to understand that the man who had healed him was at least a prophet (17) and that he must be from God because a person who was not from God could not perform miracles (33). The man’s enlightenment expands the more he considers the miracle that has been performed for him. So it is with those who have been spiritually enlightened and brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. They may not know fully how the Holy Spirit has saved them, and will not yet know the detail of God’s truth, but they will be open to it and grow quickly in their knowledge. They will first testify to the one incontrovertible truth—though I was blind, I have been washed and now I see. Their simple faith will confound the foolishness of those who are learned in worldly philosophies but hate Christ.

Spiritual Sight and Spiritual Blindness [August 1] **(Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 9.35-41)**

There are no miracles of healing the blind recorded in the OT, and other than Paul’s being healed by Ananias, all the miracles of healing the blind in the NT were performed by Jesus. Also, the Gospels record more instances of healing of the blind than any other class of miracle performed by Jesus. This miracle was, therefore, clearly intended to identify the Messiah (Is 29.18; Is 35.5; Is 42.7). After healing the man who was blind from birth (Jn 9.1-12), Jesus could have left him to get on with his life. However, since healing the man was not the primary purpose of his encounter with him, we find Jesus looking for him so that he can provide him with true sight. In this second encounter with the man we learn of spiritual sight and spiritual blindness.

Title – Jesus opens this teaching session with a question—an effective means of engaging a student. He asks the man, in effect, if he believes in the coming Messiah promised in the Old Covenant. He uses the prophetic title—Son of Man (35)—for the Messiah (Dan 7.13), that he applies most often to himself. The man’s response indicates that he is expecting the arrival of the Messiah and wishes to be directed to him.

Testimony – Jesus, having engaged the man’s full attention, is able to direct him to the Messiah through self testimony—“You have seen him, he is the one speaking with you.” This revelation tells us two key things: 1) Jesus knew that he was the Messiah, and 2) It is foolishness to look for another one. Some Jewish sects continue to look for the Messiah, some other religions posit an alternate, and most men reject Jesus as the Messiah. All these options are mistaken—Jesus is *the* Anointed of God, there is no other (Acts 4.12).

Trust – The formerly blind man likely recognized the voice of Jesus from their first encounter and knew, as he had stated (Jn 9.33), that Jesus was from God, and immediately believed that Jesus was the Messiah. His belief in Jesus as the Messiah included two aspects: 1) Trust that what Jesus said about himself was true, and 2) Confession that Jesus is Lord (Jn 9.38¹⁰)—i.e., God (Acts 2.36; Phil 2.11). Belief, or faith, in Jesus is not a blind leap into the void of the irrational. It is a trust that the information provided by God about Jesus is reasonable and reliable, which results in an act of the will to accept with our entire minds and hearts the truth about Jesus.

Tribute – True belief in Jesus must lead to worship of him as God. Belief is not a mere assent to specific facts, such as that God exists (James 2.19) or that Jesus lived 2,000 years ago. True belief leads to a willing desire to bring proper tribute to Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. This will include words of honour and praise in a form ordained by God (Jn 4.23), along with a portion of our time (the Sabbath) and substance (tithes). When people tried to worship Peter (Acts 10.25, 26) or Paul (Acts 14.15), they told them that it was not proper to worship a man. Similarly, when John offered worship to angels, they told him that they were creatures like himself (Rev 19.10; Rev 22.9, 10). In contrast, when the man who had been healed worshiped Jesus, Jesus did not rebuke or correct him for the act of worship. If Jesus were not God, then his accepting worship would make him reprehensible and less worthy of

¹⁰ The word *kyrios* is also used in verse 36; there it should probably be understood as ‘sir’.

respect than Peter, an angel, or Paul. But because he is God, all creation must fall before him in worship (Phil 2.10, 11). Most men today do not want to worship Jesus out of jealousy and hatred. Like the man who was healed of blindness, those whose spiritual eyes have been opened know instinctively that Jesus is worthy to receive glory, honour, and praise (Rev 4.11).

Tribunal – Jesus used the man’s recognition of his divinity to segue into a rebuke of those who choose to remain spiritually blind. Those who know and acknowledge that they are blind are the ones who turn to Jesus and ask him to open their spiritual eyes so that they can understand eternal truths and be saved from their sins. Those who think they have sight—professors teaching worldly philosophies; liberal ‘scholars’ in the seminaries; priests, rabbis, and imams of every false religion; ‘intellectuals’ writing for the *New York Times* and similar ‘rags’; and every politician playing paternalistic games with their constituents’ money and lives while rejecting God’s revelation—are blind to the wonder and majesty of Jesus and the work he completed on the cross. The incarnation of Jesus in itself judges and condemns them since they choose to reject him. Jesus does not blind them or actively condemn them in this life, they condemn themselves before his tribunal by remaining in their blindness and by choosing to reject him and follow Satan.

Thick – We have to conclude that people who stubbornly choose to remain spiritually ignorant are ‘thick’—like the thick-headed person who keeps his hand on a hot burner rather than admit he was mistaken in saying that the stove was turned off. Like the Pharisees, who believed that they held the keys to knowledge, they are not only blind to the truth about Jesus, but are blind to the fact that they are blind. Paul refers, in Romans 1.21-23, to this problem as self-delusion. Jesus tells us that if these people would only realize the extent of their blindness, there could be some hope. Their case is hopeless because they wilfully remain ignorant. There is more hope for a simpleton, a pervert, or felon who knows his ignorance, than for one who is smug in his ‘knowledge’.

Lessons on Loyalty

The Gate and the Thief [August 2] **(Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 10.1-10)**

In this third of the ‘I am’ teachings (Jn 10.7, 9), Jesus presents himself as the gate for the sheep. He contrasts those who enter by the gate with thieves, the Pharisees of his day and the false spiritual shepherds of the old economy (Jer 23.9-39; Zech 11.1-17; Ezk 34.1-10), who attempt to enter by false means. Today we will consider this contrast which teaches the *exclusivity* of Christianity.

As we have noted before, we are not to attempt to find spiritual significance in every detail of the parables and figures of speech that Jesus uses. For example, we can confuse ourselves and miss the thrust of the whole passage (Jn 10.1-21) if we view the shepherd of verse 2 as pastors in the Church and not, rather, as Jesus who presents himself as the shepherd in verse 11. Jesus is both the shepherd who enters by the gate *and* the gate. He uses multiple figures of speech to educate his hearers since they do not understand the import of his first allegory (2-5).

One Way – At the time of Jesus, the Jews viewed their form of traditional Judaism as the only way to God. They were not open to the changes in their interpretation that were necessitated by the arrival of the Messiah. Jesus tells them that the only way to be saved from sin and to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is through himself—i.e., through belief in him as the Son of Man (Jn 9.35). Any other suggestion as a way to reach Heaven is mere myth. The Jews could not accept Jesus as they had twisted God’s gracious provision of signs (sacrifices and holiness laws) pointing to the Messiah into a myth of works-based righteousness. Myths of the ancients—for example, how fire was brought to men by Prometheus, or evil was introduced into the world by Pandora—offered explanations of the unknown that satisfied foolish men who had rejected the truth of God handed down from Shem. Myths in our day continue to provide explanations for how natural systems originated, man’s meaning in the cosmos, how human systems should function, and how man can

get out of the mess he is in. Primal myths of our age include spontaneous generation of life from a pool of lifeless goo, the origin of species through mutation and natural selection, man as an autonomous being, law as either what men have agreed to through social contract or what judges have ruled, and that all religions provide a path to enlightenment. Jesus blasts all these myths to Hell and declares that anyone who presents alternative doctrines from his, for man's design or destination, and regulation or redemption, is a thief, stealing the souls of men and sending them to a lost eternity.

One Worker – There is only one true Prophet of God who speaks and works for God—Jesus. Confucius, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Shirley MacLaine, Madonna, and Tom Cruise are all impostors who lead their followers into evil depths and eternal destruction. They are the same as the Pharisees whom Jesus condemns as thieves and robbers. In verse 8 Jesus is not condemning true prophets, priests, apostles, evangelists, and pastors who, throughout the history of the Church, are sent by him as his messengers and co-workers. These men, however, if they are true to Jesus, do not bring their own message of salvation or provide a human scheme of worship. Their message is wholly the same as that taught by Jesus and never contradicts what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture. They have entered by the gate and do not attempt to climb into the kingdom by other means.

One Word – Jesus says that those who are part of his flock (the true Church) listen only to his voice as he calls each by name. This means that they are:

- *Chosen* – Shepherds know their sheep individually and will often give each a personal name. God had chosen, through election, each of his sheep and has also given them new names in Christ (Rev 2.17; Rev 3.12).
- *Called* – The Holy Spirit, on behalf of Jesus, has called each person into the kingdom, both by conversion and through the Word (Rom 8.30).
- *Careful* – Sheep are selective in whom they will follow. They won't follow the voice of any other shepherd. So God's people should be

careful and selective about what word they follow and ignore anything that contradicts what Jesus has provided in *his* Scriptures.

One Walk – Sheep follow their shepherd where he leads them, trusting him to supply them with shelter and sustenance. The proper response of Christians is similarly to follow Jesus where ever he calls them to serve (Jn 1.43; Jn 8.12; Jn 12.26; Jn 21.19, 22). As the Good Shepherd, Jesus ensures that his sheep are protected and fed as they follow him. It is only if they drift away from his protective care that they need to fear the dangers of the world. The false shepherds have no interest in the safety of the sheep or of feeding them. Their motives for ‘shepherding’ are to use the sheep to their own advantage—fleecing them by taking their property, exercising lordly power, or gaining prestige. We find these false motives throughout the visible Church—leaders who ordain homosexuals as pastors because it makes them think they are loving, women who aspire to the teaching-ruling office prohibited to them (1 Tim 2.11; 1 Cor 14.34; Titus 1.6) for the sense of power and ‘equality’ it brings, and pastors who introduce elements of worship contrary to God’s regulations because they think it will increase the size of their congregations. Jesus on the other hand, sacrificially protects his sheep and works for their good so that they can have lives of satisfying purpose in service in this temporal realm, and look forward to the fullness of eternal life in glory.

The Good Shepherd and the Hireling [August 3] **(Jerusalem, Fall 32 AD. Jn 10.11-21)**

Jesus continues explaining how his ministry and teaching are different from those of the Pharisees. He expands on an allegory he had just introduced—the concept of a shepherd leading his flock by name—by presenting himself as the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.1-4. This is the fourth of seven ‘I am’ revelations documented in the Gospel of John. In this section of his discourse, he teaches the *uniqueness* of Christianity—how it is different from all other religions.

Sacrifice vs Selfishness – As ancient Israelite shepherds would risk their lives to protect the sheep from lions, bears, wolves and other predators (1 Sam 17.34-35, 37), so Jesus puts his life at risk to provide protection for his sheep. Christianity is the only religion in the history of the world in which its leader and founder was selflessly willing to die so that his followers might have life. In all other religions, if death is part of their precepts (e.g., Islam, Mesoamerican religions, Canaanite cults, Druidism, etc.), it is expected that *others* will die to further the cause of the religion. We can see this contrast by comparing the leaders of Islamic *jihad* with Jesus. They talk of their willingness to die for their cause but work diligently to preserve their own lives while sending poor souls to Hell as suicide bombers. Jesus willingly died on the cross to set us free from the power of Hell.

Courage vs Cowardliness – False religions can engender a degree of fervent fanaticism that will encourage some adherents to offer their lives on behalf of a foolish delusion. However, in general, the leaders of these religions are not willing to die for their cause. Rather, they abuse and subvert truth to protect their own lives and to direct their followers to death. The flight of Osama Bin Laden to the mountains of Pakistan is an example of this tendency. In their deepest souls men, who lead the false religions of this world, know that their religion is a myth. They try hard to suppress this truth and they delude their own minds and the minds of their followers. They continue to spout fumes of poisonous rhetoric because of the sense of power it provides them over their mind-numbed disciples. They are boastful in words but cowards in practice because they know that ultimately their religious beliefs and practices are a mockery of God. Jesus, in contrast, was committed to the care and feeding of his sheep and courageous in action. Those who are now true shepherds in the Church, walking in the footsteps of their master Jesus, are also committed to the care and feeding of the flock and not to their comforts and commissions. They will not sacrifice truth for their own safety or people for their pleasure.

Intimacy vs Ignorance – Jesus knows intimately those whom he has chosen. Those who have been chosen by Jesus know him whom they

have trusted. Each true Christian has a personal relationship with Jesus and knows with certainty that Jesus is watching over his life from the glory of Heaven and has no doubt that Jesus will lead him safely through the Jordan of death. In contrast, no adherent of Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Juche, Sikhism, Spiritism, Judaism, Baha'i, Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, or any other religion in which there is a denial of Jesus as the God-man, born of a virgin, who came to earth to save sinners, can have an intimate relationship with the Divine person. Our intimacy with Jesus is based on the loving and trusting mutual relationship between the Father and the Son.

Extension vs Exclusion – Man-made religions are ethnic, national, cultural and parochial. They persist by drawing strict exclusion-boundaries including adherence to particular outward rituals, mannerism, and dress-codes. True Christianity, in contrast, is trans-national, trans-cultural and trans-ethnic. It is the only religion that draws all men (Rev 7.9). With the arrival of Jesus and the closure of the OT form of ceremonial worship, Jesus includes in his sheepfold both Jews and Gentiles who receive him as the Messiah and strive to obey God's universally applicable commandments. There is no national-ethnic distinction in the Church of Jesus Christ (Gal 3.28).

Determination vs Dependence – Christianity is unique primarily because of the uniqueness of Jesus. No other religion includes as its principle focus the God-man. Some religions have elevated men to 'divine status' (e.g., Jehovah Witnesses), others have their gods interacting with men through natural forms (e.g., Hinduism), and some have only human messengers who transmit their god's will to men (e.g., Islam). Only Christianity has Jesus—truly God and fully man, one person with two natures—who came to earth as the exact representation of God (Col 1.15; Heb 1.3). As God, Jesus is self-determined. He has authority and ultimate freedom to act and establish his destiny. He voluntarily laid down his human life and he restored it to himself. He was not subject to the whims of men. In contrast all the prophets, priests, rabbis, and imams of every false religion are mere ping-pong balls on history's table.

Receiving vs Resistance – As usual Jesus’ discourse divided those listening. The message about the uniqueness of Jesus and his way of salvation is *the* primary truth the world hates about Christianity. They can tolerate a good teacher who heals and serves, they can accept that some forms of moral standard must exist to control oppression, and they can even humour those who claim that God created; but they cannot accept that Jesus is the only way to God (Jn 14.6; Acts 4.12). As soon as Christ and his followers propose such an intolerant idea they are considered to be raving mad or demon possessed.

Commissioning the Seventy-Two – Lessons for Preachers [August 4] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 10.1-16)

Jesus commissioned seventy-two¹¹ other men—beside the twelve Apostles—from the disciples following him, to announce the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. These preachers were given specific guidelines for how they were to prepare the way for the final Judean preaching tour that Jesus would conduct before he completed his earthly ministry. We should not make these *specific* guidelines normative for Gospel preachers (as did some mendicant-order, monastic fraternities of the Middle Ages), but we can derive *principles* for guiding ordained workers (pastor-teachers, missionaries, and evangelists) in the Church today.

Paired Preachers – By sending the men out in pairs, Jesus is establishing the principle of plurality. A ministry, mission, or congregation in the Church of Jesus Christ is never to be a ‘one-man ministry’. The principle of plurality is shown by, for example, the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13.2) and the ordination of Elders in each of the NT congregations (Acts 14.23; Titus 1.5). It will never be the case in this world that every man can work with every other man in the Church (Acts 15.36-41), but ministries must be established

¹¹ Greek manuscripts read either 70 or 72 (in verses 1 and 17). Both readings have support from other sources (e.g., the Vulgate, Coptic, early Church fathers, etc.).

with a plurality of leaders; not with one man lording it over others, but with the men working in mutual cooperation and accountability.

Prayer's Produce – The evangelistic work of the Church is dangerous and difficult. Spiritual wolves of false religions, antagonistic God-haters and the piously apathetic will hinder on every side. Yet there are many people being ushered into the Kingdom every day as the Church continues to expand from a small mustard seed planted by the twelve Apostles on the Day of Pentecost in 33 AD, into the great bush of world-covering truth and salvation. This growth has not been the result of mere human effort, but is the reward for earnest prayer by God's people. The harvest is ripe and the resistance is strong, but prayer is productive.

Providence's Purse – The disciples were instructed not to take along extra supplies and to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they preached, who received them with grace and peace into their homes. Jesus may be indicating that their mission was one of urgency ("do not greet anyone on the road") or he may be countering the Pharisees emphasis on material goods and large feasts—they were not to shop around (7, 8) for better accommodations or more sumptuous fare. However, the primary message appears to be that those who proclaim Truth are to trust God to provide for their needs (Mt 6.25-34), and that those who are the recipients of the Good News are to provide for those who proclaim it—"for the worker deserves his wages" (1 Tim 5.17-18).

Peace Payment – Anyone who receives the Message about Jesus and the messengers whom he sends out, will be blessed with peace (5) which includes healing and enlightenment (8). In the Gospel of Luke, peace is more than just worldly concord and prosperity. It is the restoration of a relationship with God and the assurance of eternal life (Lk 1.79; Lk 2.14, 29; Lk 7.50; Lk 8.48; Lk 12.51; Lk 19.38). While the disciples provided physical healing for those in need, the purpose was to witness to Jesus as the Messiah. However, we are not to come to Jesus with the expectation of physical healing (2 Cor 12.8-9), but are to understand that the healing provided in his day was a sign that in him there is eternal spiritual healing. It is infinitely more important for us to have the crippling weight

of sin and eternal damnation removed from our souls than it is to have temporary infirmities lifted from our bodies (2 Cor 4.17).

Punishment Prophesied – In contrast to those who receive the Word, there will be many who reject it. Jesus reassures his disciples that God will not let the rejection of their preaching go unnoticed. He condemns the rejecters with a stern warning that they will suffer a punishment far worse than the razing of the prominent pagan cities of Sodom, Tyre and Sidon. It appears that Jesus repeats the prophecy he used about a year earlier, when he was preaching in Galilee and he warned the Galileans of the danger of rejecting his message. We considered the lessons of his warning in the meditation entitled, “Woe Upon Unrepentant Cities,” so we won’t consider them today, other than to note that these cities serve as the symbol for all of man’s hedonistic and idolatrous materialistic activities and all forms of false religion.

The key lesson for us to receive is that to reject the messengers of Jesus is to reject Jesus, and to reject Jesus is to reject God (16). Those who preach the Gospel can rest in the assurance that their work is not in vain. Those who receive the word will be joyfully admitted into Christ’s eternal Kingdom. Those who reject it will be held in store for the Judgment Day. We should not want any to perish under the eternal consequences of rejection, but we can be thankful that God is just, and that he will not let his truth be trampled under the feet of wicked men. Whether received or rejected, there is one message of truth: Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, and so the Kingdom of Heaven is near. This truth is not contingent on any person’s response. But how we respond to the message will establish our eternal destiny.

Return of the Seventy-Two – Lessons for the People

[August 5]

(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 10.17-24)

Power Principle – The returning preachers exult in the extraordinary and temporary power exhibited in the gift of demon exorcism that validated their preaching as heralds of the Messiah. Although there is

debate about whether or not pastors and elders are expected to cast out demons today, we should not miss the truth that the same power principle is still manifested in the Church—that is the power to expel Satan’s false teachings and spiritual darkness. As Jesus’ authority over truth and error, morality and law, and life and death continues to increase throughout the world, Satan’s dominion is diminished and he falls farther and farther from Heaven. Like the returning disciples who did not complain of fatigue, discouragement, or opposition, but expressed joy over their success, we can be encouraged that the preaching of the Gospel is the great demon-exorcism force that is crushing the head of Christ’s enemy—the Serpent (Gen 3.15; Ps 91.13)—and driving the Church toward ultimate victory. Even when we are opposed by antichrists like Islam, evolution, and homosexual perversion, we should never lose hope. God is pulling down Satan’s city, brick by dead brick.

Paradise’s Pen – It is proper to rejoice that the Kingdom of Darkness is being demolished. But that is largely rejoicing at a negative. It is like being glad that the main rival to our home team is losing games. That isn’t enough! Our team must also win games. Thus, Jesus says that there is something more important for us to rejoice in than even the destruction of demons—that is the salvation of the saints. All believers who have been saved by Jesus Christ from their sins, have had their names written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (Ps 69.28; Rev 3.5; Rev 20.12; Rev 21.27) with indelible golden ink that can never tarnish. Their names were inscribed from eternity (Rev 17.8). They were known to God from before their conception and are under his care every moment of their existence as he leads them to Paradise. A person could cast out demons in Christ’s name (as did Judas) and not be destined for glory. But anyone who truly has the surname ‘Christian’ (Acts 11.26) has had the demon of sin cast out and now has a personal loving relationship with the eternal God, which is to be valued above any power to work miracles.

Praising Providence – The truth about how to have a right relationship with God—through faith in Jesus and repentance of sin—is not something that the philosophies and religions of this world can grasp. Plato, for example among all worldly philosophers, probably approached

the closest to discerning truth, but to him God is little more than a vaporous ideal that man is to strive for. All man-made religions reject belief in Jesus as the only way to God, the only true means of wisdom, and the only source of eternal life. As such, man's attempts to find God are feeble flailing. Jesus praises the Father for the fact that the truth about how to be saved has been hidden from the philosophers and teachers of false religions. This might seem to be harsh. Don't Jesus and the Father want people to be saved? Of course they do (2 Pt 3.9)! But men must come to God on his terms (Heb 7.23); not in terms of their own invented prideful schemes. As Jesus implies (21), in our approach to God we must be humble like a little child who realizes that he doesn't understand how to do something and asks his father for help. God's way of unfolding his purposes and providences are sometimes a mystery to us, but they are pleasing to him and they are worked out for the good of his people (Rom 8.28).

Priority Purpose – Jesus, throughout his ministry on earth, often spoke of the unity of purpose between himself and the Father. In this passage he again reminds his disciples that his work is what the Father has committed to him—and thus, he does nothing else. The reason that he gives for executing the Father's work is that he and the Father know each other intimately in a way that no one else can. The degree of their intimacy is infinite because God's nature is infinite. Luke also includes the Holy Spirit in this unity of purpose (21). He tells us that Jesus was blessed with full joy by the Holy Spirit. This implies that the work that Jesus and his disciples were doing was fully in accord with the will of the Holy Spirit. Among the tri-unity (Trinity) of God there is a single common purpose and will that is manifest as a plurality of action in the work of salvation—God the Father plans, God the Son executes, and God the Holy Spirit empowers.

Privileged Perception – The disciples who accompanied Jesus for the three years of his public ministry were blessed with a great opportunity—they were allowed to see the work of the long hoped-for Messiah and to hear the teaching of the greatest preacher ever. The OT saints from Adam, Enoch, and Noah, through Abraham, David, Isaiah

and Jeremiah all looked forward to the coming of the one who would provide redemption from sin, but they had to accept his promises without the benefit of any eye witness account. Many, in the day of Jesus, in spite of their being in the presence of the majestic God-man, rejected the evidence placed before their eyes and looked for additional miracles. In contrast, we are not to look for miracles but rather are to revel in the privilege we also have. Our spiritual eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit and we have seen that what was promised to the OT saints has been fulfilled in Christ. We have the completed revelation of God to man with the eye-witness accounts of his life and the full explanation of the purpose for his death and resurrection. May we use it to our eternal advantage!

The Good Samaritan [August 6]

(Judea, Possibly in the Vicinity of Jericho, Fall 32 AD. Lk 10.25-37)

The Good Samaritan is probably the best known of Jesus' parables. A search on Google lists dozens of 'Good Samaritan' hospitals, numerous jurisdictions have passed 'Good Samaritan' laws that protect people who help someone in need from being sued if they make a mistake while offering assistance, and a person called a 'Good Samaritan' in our culture is considered to be generous and ready to assist anyone in distress without hesitation. Interpretations of this parable vary. Social activists say that Jesus was speaking against racial prejudice, some claim that Jesus was showing that those from other religions can have superior moral behaviour to Jews (or Christians), and others suggest that Jesus is teaching that caring for the needy in society (e. g., drug addicts, or those suffering from AIDS) is a prerequisite for admittance to Heaven.

What does this parable teach, and why does Jesus deliver it at this time in his ministry? To answer these questions we need to understand the context of his teaching: seventy-two disciples had just returned from announcing Jesus' final Judean preaching tour. They returned, excited over their ability to cast out demons, and Jesus warned them not to focus on temporal miracles and miss the importance of the greater spiritual miracle—that their names were written in heaven, they had been given

spiritual sight, and they were saved for eternity. It is at this point that a lawyer arrives and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. The encounter of the lawyer with Jesus and also that of Mary and Martha, that immediately follows this account, teach us about true spiritual sight. It is not provided by casting out demons or by study with erudite worldly philosophers or teachers, but by a heart filled with a desire to do God's will. In one case it is 'go and do!' In the other case it is 'sit and listen!' In both cases, it is 'be humble!'

Observe that the lawyer arose to test Jesus (25) and asked a question later to justify himself (29). Therefore, his sincerity in asking for directions to eternal life is suspect. However, Jesus ignores the ill intent and the purposed trap and capitalizes on the opportunity raised by the first question to direct the lawyer, his audience, and us, to the path to Paradise.

All 'spiritual' roads do not lead to enlightenment or to Heaven. There is only one route—the Law of Love (Lk 10.26-27; per Lev 19.18; Dt 6.5). The **only** way that we can demonstrate that we love God and our neighbour is by keeping God's commandments (Jn 14.15). Therefore, the path to Paradise is through obedience to the Law. To reach Heaven we must keep the Law, the whole Law, and nothing but the Law. Jesus confirms this in his answer to the lawyer (28). Paul also indicates that it is through obedience to the Law that we obtain eternal life (Rom 10.5; Lev 18.5), and James reinforces this teaching (James 1.27; James 2.8, 10). It is an incontestable fact that we must keep the Law in order to gain access to Heaven and only those who do keep it will be found there.

The lawyer did what all men do when they first come to understand what God requires. He began to tally his score against the Law. His immediate question is, "Who is my neighbour?" (29). Our question is always similar: "Okay, what laws must *I* keep?" In response, Jesus presents the parable of the man who fell into the hands of robbers. He tells us how three different men dealt with the situation (30-35). Two of these men were educated Jews who had been thoroughly trained in detailed examples of how to live out the Law. The third man was a Samaritan

who, even though he had access to the same OT Law in the books of Moses, was despised by the Jews as being a heretic and thus ceremonially unclean. There is no question that Jesus condemns, in this parable, those who are self-righteous and exhibit a pompous profile. He is also praising a liberality which is the fruit of a heart filled with compassion and treats all men equitably (36-37). However, we err greatly if we think that Jesus is laying out the specific paving stones on the road to Heaven.

The most important lessons from this story are not found in the parable itself, but in the final words of Jesus to the lawyer (37), “Go and do likewise.” Jesus is telling the lawyer to treat all men as neighbours, even ones from an ethnic group that he is prejudiced against. But, he is also telling him something of greater significance. He says go keep the *entire* Law, in all its fullness, with all its implications. The reason Jesus recounts this parable is not to direct us to specific things that we must do to earn a place in Heaven but, rather, to show us the utter impossibility of our keeping the Law. He deliberately chose a conditional act of kindness that would be difficult for the lawyer, just as he told the rich young ruler to go and sell all his possessions (Lk 18.22), to illustrate the challenge facing all men—the impossibility of keeping the Law.

What then are we to do? We are to keep the Law in every detail, or we won’t be given a place in Glory. But it can’t be done! No mere man can do what God requires. So in this parable Jesus directs us to two necessary conditions for inheriting eternal life: 1) We must come humbly to Jesus and say “Lord, I can’t do it! I can’t keep the law perfectly!” 2) We must believe in Jesus who kept the Law perfectly on our behalf. As a social outcast from men, Jesus became *the* Good Samaritan by showing true compassion toward mankind who was perishing from mortal wounds at the side of the road of life. Out of his own resources he provided succour and salvation so that we can live.

Sitting at the Feet of Jesus [August 7]
(Bethany, Fall 32 AD. Lk 10.38-42)

Dining – In Bethany, Jesus meets two sisters who appear to invite him to their home for dinner. We could attempt to obtain from this account a lesson on hospitality—i.e., that Christians should provide for those who are in need. Although it is true that we are to have open hearts for the truly needy—widows and orphans (Is 1.17; Jam 1.27)—the key lesson of this encounter is not that Martha was a good host with a generous heart. In fact, she is rebuked by Jesus for giving *too much* attention to ‘hospitality’ (41). Rather, we need to consider this account from another perspective. What we should learn isn’t that Martha invited Jesus to dine with them, but that Jesus dined with the women. Beside the fact that this was contrary to the cultural norms of that era, what we should note is that the women had the privilege of partaking of a spiritual dinner from the words and teaching of Jesus.

Diligent – Mary understood this and sat diligently at the feet of the Lord, listening to his teaching. We are to have the same attitude and posture when we approach God. We are sinful creatures coming before the Holy Creator. Our rightful place is under his feet (Eph 1.22) not reclining at his table. Yet he invites us to dine with him (Mt 22.1-14; Rev 19.9). When we come to his table we should not be presumptuous and take the best seats assuming that we are his equal, but be truly humble. This was a key message for the seventy-two disciples who had returned from their preaching tour with wonder at the power over demons that had been displayed through them (Lk 10.17-24). True spirituality is not shown by the power to cast out demons—after all Judas had that power—but by the humble heart filled with a desire to do God’s will; both to ‘go and do’ (Lk 10.37) and to ‘sit and listen’ (39).

Distracted – While Mary sat and listened to Jesus’ teaching, Martha was in the kitchen distracted by the preparations for the dinner. We probably should not read into this that she was concerned about show and ostentation. She was not trying to be a perfect hostess and to impress Jesus. Rather, she was doing what she believed was the best way for her to show respect for Jesus—by giving him a solid, well-prepared meal. All believers, at times, make the same mistake with respect to their approach to Jesus. They believe that the way to show him honour is

through applying *their* works. We really do think that our efforts please Jesus. For example, many in the Church today believe that what Jesus wants from them is the application of their creative talents in music for worship, and that he wants them to bring before him a feast of fine melodies and well-crafted poetry. Whereas, what he really seeks is humble hearts that feast on the rich teachings that flow from his mouth in the Psalms (Lk 24.44).

Distressed – Martha was distressed that her sister sat listening to Jesus and left her to do all the work of overseeing the preparations in the kitchen. Part of her distress could have been cultural—it was an impropriety for women in their society to participate in the discussions with men at dinner. But the other aspect of her distress was that she felt that her work was what was pleasing to Jesus, and that her sister should be helping with that work. She therefore tried to get Jesus to command her sister to help out. Martha’s reaction to Mary’s inattention to a particular type of work is not a sign of unbelief or worldliness on the part of Martha, but rather a sign of pride—she claims to know what is best for all believers in their service for the Lord. This same pride can be displayed even by modest folk in a congregation who volunteer to take on a task such as cleaning the washrooms, setting out the chairs for Sunday school classes, or dusting the pews on a weekly basis. They can develop an attitude that makes them think that their service is special and that when others don’t help with the ‘dirty’ jobs they are not really doing the Lord’s work. Over time they can develop a hardness of heart that begrudges those who don’t help out.

Dedication – Jesus rebuked Martha for her attitude, not her actions. We are not to understand from his rebuke that Jesus is teaching that we should be unconcerned about household chores or treat as unimportant the daily work associated with our livelihoods. Nor are we to understand from his rebuke that we are to do the routine chores of this world in a hurried and sloppy manner so that we can get on with the more important matters of feeding our souls. We can be sure that Jesus did everything he undertook with diligence, whether he was making a door for a neighbour in Nazareth, preparing a stew for his mother when she was sick, or

pleading with his Father in Heaven for his disciples. Paul reinforces this application of diligence in his writings when he reminds us that we are to do everything to the best of our abilities, for the Lord (Col 3.22-24).

Devotion – The problem was Martha’s attitude. She placed her devotion to material and temporal service (even though it was for a good cause—the care of Jesus) *above* dedication to the Lord himself. Notice the subtle distinction. There are many in the Church today who claim to love Jesus. Yet, they base this claim on such things as regular attendance at services, disciplined Bible reading, or sacrificial giving to missions. A Christian will do these things, but doing these things does not make a person a Christian. The Church contains many confused people who perform these actions expecting they will earn ‘merit badges’. A Christian is a person who knows Jesus personally and wants to know him better, and sits at his feet listening to his teaching.

Persistent Prayer [August 8]
(Bethany, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.1-13)

Plea – Prayer does not come easily, or naturally, to us. It is true that when things are desperate we can utter a ‘God help me!’ But the rest of the time we find engaging in prayer to be a challenge. This may be because we don’t fully understand its purpose, value its privilege, or believe in its power. We need to learn from Jesus how to pray, and why. Jesus conversed constantly with the Father in prayer—at his baptism (Lk 3.21), when he chose the disciples (Lk 6.12), before his betrayal (Lk 22.40-44), and on the cross (Lk 23.46); when he was alone (Lk 5.16), with, and for, his friends (Lk 9.28-29; Lk 22.32), and in crowds (Lk 9.16); and to praise (Lk 10.21), give thanks (Lk 9.14), make petitions (Lk 22.41), and display total trust (Lk 23.45). It is therefore no surprise that one of his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray. We need to come to Jesus with the simple plea, “Lord, teach us to pray.” This is a good prayer to strengthen our prayers.

Pattern – In response, Jesus provided them with a sample pattern for prayer. He had given this same model about a year before while teaching

on a grassy hill in Galilee. We looked at *Prayer's Prototype* when we studied the Sermon on the Mount, so will make only a few observations at this time:

- 1) Jesus considered this pattern for prayer important enough to repeat it.
- 2) The differences between this exemplar and the one in Matthew's account remind us that it is the essence, not the exact words, that we are to follow.
- 3) The opening invocation to our Father teaches that Christians have the privilege to address God intimately and directly.
- 4) The key components of the pattern should guide our prayers: praise and adoration, petition and ask, and penitence and appeal.
- 5) Our prayers are to be balanced between addressing God's interests and appealing for our personal needs.
- 6) Our prayers do not need to be long to be meaningful and heard by God.

Jesus presented this pattern without commenting on it. Then he focused their attention on the proper attitude for prayer through additional instruction that included two brief parables that teach how to apply the form of prayer so that it does not become a formality.

Presumption – The first parable focuses on the presumption we can have in our prayers. Jesus illustrates this by telling a story about a man who wakes up his friend late at night to borrow some food. We are not to attempt to find meaning in every detail of this parable. For example, it is inappropriate to suggest that the sleeping friend is God. God is not selfish and does not take offence at the requests of his people and say to them, "Don't bother me." Nor are we to suggest, as some have, that the other friend who has come from a journey is the pagan world coming to receive the bread of the Gospel. Some interpreters even attempt to find the Trinity in the three loaves. This kind of allegorizing only obscures the clear teaching with dark clouds. Rather we are to direct our attention to the man who asks for bread. Jesus' rhetorical question, "Which of you ..." indicates that the primary subject of this parable is the one asking, not the one answering. The one asking in prayer can be so confident that he will receive a cooperative response from his friend that he can presume to approach him with a request, even when he is asleep. It is this

boldness, or presumption, that Jesus wants us to notice and apply. We can go boldly, and even presumptuously, before God in prayer. We can assume that he will hear our prayers and answer them because he is truly our friend. This truth should encourage us to pray.

Persistence – Jesus commands us to be persistent in prayer with a three-fold repetition of imperative verbs that indicate completeness—ask, seek, knock. This teaches that we are to go continuously before God in our prayers. Our asking is to be passionately persistent. We are not to ask just once, or seven times, but seventy-seven times—in other words, we are never to give up asking God for those things we need and desire, that are agreeable to his will.

Promise – It is an incontrovertible truth that God answers prayer. The world may scoff at this truth but Jesus (also through three-fold repetition) states that the answers we seek for in prayer will be given to us. Natural men, steeped in sin, think that this means that God is like a vending machine filled with every kind of candy and chips. All we have to do is press the buttons and out will flow all the junk we could ever want to indulge our passions. Believers know that this is not the right illustration. At times God’s answer to our prayers will be: “No,” “Wait,” or, “I have something better than you ask for.” We know that God will provide green pastures and lead us beside quiet waters (Ps 23.2). These may not appear to be exciting, but they are wholesome and always exactly what is best for us. Our challenge is to trust and believe.

Provision – He illustrates this principle with a second parable that focuses on the type of provision he gives. He uses natural human affections, and argues from the lesser to the greater. A natural father would not be cruel to his son by providing a harmful substitute when he asked for food. If men behave this way, then how much more so will God who is perfect and entirely good? It is impossible for God to answer the prayers of his children in a way that will harm them. He will only do what ultimately is best for us. And, the most gracious good that he can give to us is the Holy Spirit who leads us from sin and damnation to everlasting life. This is encouragement to hope and pray!

Warnings of Woe for Unbelief

Jesus and “The Lord of the Flies” – The Sequel [August 9] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.14-28)

Amazement and Accusation – Caricatures stick. It is difficult to remove false labels. A president who trips going up the stairs to his inauguration, is forever thought to be a bumbling fool. Or a celebrity who misspells a word is always considered to be stupid. So it was with Jesus. About nine months earlier, in Galilee (Mt 12.22-29; Mk 3.20-27), he had faced a similar crowd and had been accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (“Lord of the flies;” 2 Ki 1.2). In this instance, some people were amazed at what he did, but others found the caricature compelling. So again, he presents essentially the same challenge to their inept logic. However, this episode is more than simply another demonstration of his divine power over demons. It is a response to those who seek signs from heaven. Jesus has just stated that the Holy Spirit will be *given* to any who ask (13). Now, in contrast, he *expels* an unholy spirit so that he can teach how he deals with all evil spirits. The miracle and his teaching confirm his mission to utterly destroy the imperial, intellectual, and influential power of Satan’s kingdom.

Atheistic Annihilation – Jesus counters their claim that his power comes from Satan by showing that it would be foolish for Satan to work against his own interests by driving out a demon from a person under his control. His question has an ironic tinge to it. The reality is that Satan’s disciples are divided amongst themselves, and thus destroying Satan’s kingdom. We see around us many atheistic and anti-Christian systems of philosophy and religion. They are in essence the same, being man’s attempt to find meaning in the universe without God and his word. They differ in their outward forms of hate and so end up destroying one another. We can ask “Where is ...?” (Is 37.13; 1 Cor 1.20) of each man-made dominion, religion and philosophy and conclude that it will come to nothing.

Applied Axiom – As the master logician Jesus shows the inconsistency of their double standard. If Jewish exorcists cast out demons and attributed their work to the power of God, then what he did must also be from God. Therefore, since the kingdom of God has come we are to expect the demise of Satan's kingdom and the growth of Christ's kingdom. And this is what we see. From a small band of dispirited disciples assembled after the resurrection of Christ, the Church has grown—both in relative and absolute terms—into a world-conquering spiritual force.

Anaemic Armour – Jesus expands on the progressive and pending total destruction of Satan's kingdom with a short parable about an armed strong man being overcome by an even stronger enemy. The 'strong man' probably refers to Satan, and the stronger man to Christ. The conquering of Satan and the division of the spoils began with the birth of Seth, who was in the line of the promised seed and a replacement for the son murdered by Satan's agent. It continued with the destruction of paganism by Israel's armies, the removal of Jezebel, and the return of the Diaspora from the Babylonian captivity. The pace intensified when Jesus dismissed Satan after forty days of fasting, when he declared victory on the cross, when the stone covering the grave's mouth was rolled aside on the third day, and when he sent the Spirit as tongues of fire. Like a snowball picking up mass and velocity as it rolls down a steep hill, the destruction of Satan's kingdom gains momentum—through the early Christianization of the Mediterranean world, the Evangel call to the north-men, the Reformation, the voyages of 18th-century missionaries, and today's explosive growth of the Church in the southern hemisphere. The final and eschatological defeat of Satan will occur on the day Christ returns from Heaven and casts Satan and his demonic hordes into the eternally burning pit of sulphur (Rev 20.10). Neutrality is impossible (23). We either are part of Satan's dying kingdom, or belong to Christ's victorious realm.

Aimless Aridity – Francois Rabelais (a French monk; 1494-1553) stated that "nature abhors a vacuum". Jesus illustrates this truth with the parable about a demon being cast out of a man but returning with more demons

because it found only emptiness elsewhere. If the place held by the demon isn't filled with the Holy Spirit through belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the man's state will be even more miserable than it was. This is an illustration of how it is with all of man's religious and philosophical adventures. Systems arise to replace older ones and men think they are wiser, but in fact dig the pit of their eternal destiny deeper. For example, replacing the myths about luminiferous aether or matter being composed of four elements, with the myth of evolution isn't progress in knowledge. Without belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, man's beliefs do nothing more than suck dry air from the spiritual desert into man's soul. Like the formerly demon-possessed man who doesn't believe, is a man who once claimed to believe and now is an apostate. His conscience is seared and his sins are more aggravated.

Approved Attentiveness – A woman in the crowd approved of his teaching and declared his mother blessed for having borne him. Jesus does not deny the truth of her statement, but responds by saying that the truly blessed are those who hear and obey the word—they are the ones who recognize their privilege in having the evil spirit of unbelief exorcised and the vacuum in their soul filled with the life giving Spirit.

The Sign of Jonah [August 10] **(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.29-32)**

Singular Wickedness – Today, 'wicked' has been usurped as slang. That the cool trend-setter plays a 'wicked' trumpet or wears 'wicked' *bling* means more to many people than that his hedonistic lifestyle is evil. You can also attend a Broadway musical called *Wicked* or buy sweets and candies from *Wicked.com*. In contrast Jesus speaks of a wickedness that surpasses all other forms of sin by being singularly, extraordinarily, and remarkably evil. It is a wickedness in which the majority of the Jews who challenged Jesus were immersed. But they were not unique. All mankind, as natural descendants of Adam and Eve, are engrossed by this wickedness which encourages us to reject the words of Jesus and ask him to validate himself through miraculous signs. There are at least three dimensions to this wickedness:

- *Rejection* – Jesus is truth (Jn 14.6) because he is God. To reject Jesus, is to reject truth and God. To believe anything that is contrary to the words of Jesus about God's creating, man's place in creation, and man's need for re-creation is not brilliance, naivety, or foolishness—it is wicked!
- *Resistance* – Unbelief is resistance. It is a deliberate suppression of truth. To think that we know more than God, and that the modern cosmogenic myths of a 'big bang' and 'natural selection' can usurp God as Creator, is not intellectual prowess or academic acumen—it is wicked!
- *Requiring* – Testing God is the ultimate hubris. For us to ask Jesus to prove his words through miraculous signs is akin to an ant saying to a size 10 shoe about to squish it, "Prove that you are bigger than me!" To play the I'm-wiser-than-you game with God is not idiotic—it is wicked!

Signed Witness – Jesus appealed to an historical figure to reinforce his case against his own generation. For Jesus, the account of Jonah was not a Jewish myth or a good children's fable, but rather an important and accurate witness against unbelief. Based on Jesus' acceptance of Jonah as historical fact, we must accept the account of Jonah as representing accurately what occurred both with a large fish in the Mediterranean and in the capital of ancient Assyria. It is not clear which of these two events Jesus is referring to when he presents Jonah as a sign. Previously, he had referred to Jonah's being in the belly of a huge fish for three days and being vomited onto the shore as a sign predicting his being 'swallowed' by the earth and of his resurrection (Mt 12.40). He could be referring to the same sign in this instance. However, it is probable that he is referring, rather, to the acceptance of Jonah's preaching (32) by the Ninevites as the sign that what he was teaching was true. While the Ninevites repented of their sin, the Israelites rejected the message of the prophets. The Jews of Jesus' day were just like their forefathers who rejected the prophets of God and their message. Many people today continue to reject Jesus as the true prophet of God and relegate his message of repentance and faith to a junk box in their intellectual attic.

Seeking Wisdom – Instead of being like the people of Israel at the time of Jonah, or the Jews of Jesus’ day who rejected the prophets and their teaching, we are to be like the Queen of Sheba (1 Ki 10.1-13) who came from a distant land¹² to hear the wisdom of Solomon, a prophet and teacher in Israel (Eccl 1.1). She believed Solomon’s message about Yahweh as the God of gods and King of kings. On Jesus’ commendation, we can be assured that she listened to the words of Solomon and repented of her sins, and is now in Glory waiting for the resurrection to eternal life. Like her, we should seek wisdom from the one who is a greater prophet than either Jonah or Solomon—Jesus. Although, some other religions claim to have revelation from God and even prophets from God (e.g., Islam), their ‘revelations’ and ‘prophets’ are merely the inventions of deluded minds. There is one, and only one, ultimate prophet of God, Jesus Christ. It is only to him that we can go if we are seeking wisdom.

Sentence Warned – The generation hearing Jesus did not have as much faith as some Gentiles who heard the words of God’s prophets in previous eras. Jesus warned them that those Gentiles would rise in the judgment and condemn them because they had heard the greatest prophet and had clearer evidence that God’s Messiah had come into the world. However, we must not think smugly that his words applied only to the Jews of his generation. There are many today, within the bounds of the visible Church and in Western culture, who have heard more about God’s creation, law, and governance, and about Jesus—his miraculous birth, perfect life, substitutionary death and victorious resurrection—than the citizens of Nineveh or the Queen of Sheba ever did. On the Judgment Day, at the end of time, the king of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba are going to ask, with incredulity, our generation, “How could you not have believed? You had so much evidence that God hates sin and requires everyone to repent and believe in Jesus!” Do not think that what I have written here is just my opinion or that there are other ways to be reconciled to God—like observing Sharia law derived from the *Qur’an*, by meditating on Nirvana, or by living according to the *Golden Rule*.

¹² She probably came from the southern Arabian Peninsula or the territory of Ethiopia across the straight from Arabia, at the mouth of the Red Sea.

You know in the bedrock of your existence that God exists, that he demands perfect obedience and that you are a sinner. You know, without doubt, that only the death of Jesus can atone for your sin. Do not reject his teachings and have an ancient king and queen assign you to eternal damnation!

The Light in the Body [August 11] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.33-36)

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus used a similar illustration about not hiding a lamp, but putting it on a stand so that its light can be put to maximum use (Mt 5.15-16). However, in that instance his purpose was to encourage those who are believers and disciples to live so that the world is illuminated for Christ. In this instance (33), he changes the use of the imagery to focus on how we respond to his teachings—the light that shines within us.

Purpose – Light is necessary for life; without it all life on this earth would cease to exist. Tiny seedlings send their sprouts to find light and by the end of winter, many Canadians, affected with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) or the ‘winter blues’, delight in basking in the sunshine on the beaches of the Carolinas or Florida. In the same way, we all become afflicted with *Spiritual* Affective Disorder if we do not have the light of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit shining into our hearts and minds. The reason that Jesus came into the world was to bring the light of eternal life to the world (Jn 12.46). God did not bring the lamp of the Gospel so that it would be hidden. He sent the lamp of Christ so that men might see the light, repent of their sins, and believe that Jesus died to provide salvation from sin. The use of a lamp for the purpose of spiritual illustration is a fitting response to the challenge from the Pharisees. They looked for signs to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus wouldn’t concede to their demands, but instead accused them of being blind to the light of truth emanating from himself.

Pupil – If we are having difficulty reading under the light of a 40-watt light bulb, generating fewer than 300 lumens, we can increase the

amount of light by putting in a 100-watt light bulb that radiates at 1,700 lumens. However, changing the light bulb is useless for a man who is blind. Even if we crank up the lumens to the 50,000, or so, that we receive from direct sunlight, this will not help a person whose eyes cannot receive light. When our pupils, irises, and retinas work correctly, we can receive light and bring a world of image, colour, motion, and communication into our lives. However, when there is a malfunction, a clouding over, or a tear, we receive less and less light and eventually end up in darkness. So it is, in the spiritual realm (34). When our ‘eyes’ function properly we receive life-illuminating light into our minds, hearts and souls, and every aspect of our being is fulgent. However, when our spiritual eyes are weak or blind, our inner-beings are shadowed and dark. We are filled with the lusts of the eyes (1 Jn 2.16), the pride of the haughty eye (Prov 21.4), the wandering eye of the fool (Prov 17.24), and the corruption of the eye that winks at evil (Ps 35.19).

Protection – If we want to receive light effectively with our natural eyes, we must protect them from damage. We can wear protective goggles when we work where dust, particles, sparks, or droplets of tainted blood can reach our eyes. We can also wear sun glasses to reduce the impact of ultraviolet light that may contribute to the development of cataracts. Jesus, in effect, tells us (35) that we need to wear spiritual goggles and sun glasses to protect our inner existence and to ensure that the light of the Gospel does not grow dark. There are many specks and sparks of sin that can damage our spiritual eyes, against which we must wear protection, including: partiality, prejudice, pleasure, popularity, pride, power, and possessions. What are the remedies to protect against these hazards and dangers? They are:

- *Priorities* – It is difficult to protect our spiritual eyes if we associate with people who lead us to the suburbs of Hell, enter Satan’s hangouts, and imbibe the philosophies of death (Ps 1.1). Our priorities must be right.
- *Prayer* – We can add to Paul’s list of armour in Ephesians 6.10-17, the goggles of prayer. Praying in the Spirit on all occasions (Eph 6.18) will keep our minds focused and enable us to distinguish truth from error.

- *Practice* – We must sincerely desire to obey Christ. There is too much lip-service in the Church from people who claim that they want to know what the Holy Spirit would have them do, and yet reject God's clear teaching and commands. We must put obedience into practice.

Pervasiveness – When we open the curtains in the morning and pull-back the blinds, light floods into the house. It is the same way in the spiritual realm (36). Many, who have reached adulthood and have then become Christians, have reported the amazing transformation in their lives as the light of Truth opens to them new realities that they never knew existed. The pure light of the Gospel, when unobstructed by sinful presuppositions and prejudices, clears away all the shadows of self-delusion, superstition, myth, and illogic. Although many people today think that it is unscientific to accept God as the Creator, and irrational to believe in Christ and the miracles associated with his life, in reality they have it backwards. The only truly rational person can be the one who accepts all of reality for what it is—a transcendent, infinite, and eternal God who fabricated and holds together, moment by moment, the physical universe by sheer thought; and who alone defines meaning and morality for man and offers eternal hope beyond the wall of time. Without light from the Spirit of God, man's life is mere drudgery as he lives out his genetic program until the synapses transmit the last nerve impulses. Without the light of Jesus Christ radiating within us, shadows lengthen, darkness pervades, and endless night falls.

Condemning Hypocrisy [August 12] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.37-48, 52)

Challenging Habits – It has often been observed that habits can be good or bad. Good habits include giving thanks for our food, brushing our teeth after each meal, and turning off the TV when doing homework for school. It is bad habits (like adding salt to everything or biting our finger nails) that we must try to expunge from our daily lives. Bad habits can also affect our spiritual lives. This is one reason why Jesus made a point of challenging the bad religious habits of the Jews. Many of these

consisted of traditional rites that had been handed down from their ancestors and were either unhelpful for developing spiritual maturity, or were contrary to the direct teaching of Scripture. When invited for a meal in a Pharisee's home, Jesus neglected the ceremonial washing of his hands before partaking of the meal. We might ask, what harm would it have done if he had washed his hands before eating? Clearly, Jesus was not suggesting that good sanitary practices are to be neglected. He was dealing with a heart-problem rather than a hand-problem. He used the Pharisee's religious zeal for outward cleansing as a rebuke to the pollution that fouled their hearts and welled up as greed and all forms of wickedness. In addition, Jesus would not participate in any religious practice that was not commanded by God in Scripture. To do so would have endorsed the assumption of authority by those who did not hold the prophetic office. We need to learn from this that true religion consists of a love for God displayed in a love for mankind *and* a strict obedience to God's commands. As James teaches, true religion is both true faith and correct practice.

Classes of Hypocrites – Jesus included the attitude and practice of both the Pharisees and the lawyers within the scope of his rebuke—with three rebukes to each group. Their inclusion reminds us that all mankind is, by nature, filled with haughty disdain for the teachings of God. All mankind, whether leaders in the Church or in the civic arena, outwardly religious or not, young or old, teacher or pupil, rich or poor, is called to account by the woes that Jesus proclaims against all forms of hypocrisy that only *claim* a love for God.

Condemning Hypocrisy – In particular Jesus condemns:

- *A neglect of justice* – He rebukes them for their concern about paying a tithe on garden herbs while disregarding justice—presumably for the poor. Notice that Jesus endorses tithing, in contrast to what many in the Church today believe, but requires that our proper religious practice must be accompanied by a concern for the truly needy if we claim to love God.
- *A love of recognition* – Men who seek honour from other men are really not worth honouring. Subduing pride is among the hardest

things that we can ever do. However, if we have a true love for God we will walk humbly before men and seek only God's glory and honour.

- *Poisoning followers* – Many people are led into Hell by false religions that teach men to reject Jesus as the only Anointed One of God. But even in the Church there are false teachers who are subtly, like unmarked graves, doing the same thing (2 Pt 2.1). We could not begin to list all the falsehood that is spewing out of the pulpits and theological schools of the land—from end-times twisting, to pushing a prosperity-gospel, to rewriting Paul's teachings on justification in 'new perspectives' that are old heresies—that if it were possible would deceive even the elect.
- *Acting above the law* – Like Raskilnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, whose contempt for society leads him to believe that he is above the law, there are many in leadership roles in society or the Church who think that God's laws don't apply to them and claim superiority to judge others' consciences. We see this particularly among 'ecumenical' leaders who mouth the mantra of toleration but despise Christians who hold to the precious truth that salvation is found only in Jesus (Acts 4.12).
- *Rejecting Teachers* – Those leaders who built cemetery monuments for the prophets who had been killed for preaching God's true message, were not honouring the prophets or respecting their message. Rather, they were, in effect, ensuring that the prophets and their message remained in the grave. A modern equivalent is for a congregation or seminary to use 'Calvin', 'Knox' or 'Westminster' in its name, but to have no respect for what these men taught about God as creator, salvation by grace through faith, or how God is to be honoured with correct worship.
- *Hiding Truth* – During the Middle Ages, many in the Church attempted to keep the Bible from the common people with the claim that it could only be understood with the help of a trained interpreter. They especially objected to the use of contemporary language translations. The Church, at that time, was following in the footsteps of the Jewish leaders from the days of Jesus. In many respects things are not all that different today. For many, the Church is a closed club

or secret society that they wish to keep for themselves and their friends. They obscure the message with ‘holy’ language, cling to ‘gifted’ teachers, object to the use of modern-language translations, and avoid contact with the debauched lest they be stained. They pretend to have a desire to see Christ proclaimed and sinners brought to salvation but in fact are hindering those who are entering.

Jesus was not polite to those leaders in the OT Church of his day. Today, his message is no less intolerant. He has no time for those in the Church who are hypocrites, and in his words, ‘have not entered’ into knowledge themselves.

A Guilty Generation [August 13] **(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 11.49-51, 53-54)**

We noted in our previous meditation that Jesus condemns those leaders in the Church and society who hypocritically claim to hold the keys of knowledge and yet don’t open the doors to let in unbelievers and the immature so that they can learn about the wondrous work of Jesus.

Compounding Guilt – How does God respond to hypocrisy in the Church? Ironically, it is not by washing his hands of it. The Church is the bride of Christ (Rev 21.2, 9), and God—in all three persons of the Trinity—works in, and through, the Church to bring about the redemption of all of his people. God’s desire is that the Church would be pure (Eph 5.26, 27; Phil 2.15) in this age to exhibit his glory, and as a witness to the sinful world of his just demands and perfections. So he continues to send into his Church prophets and apostles (49) to call the Church back to its first love. In the OT economy the office of Prophet was a formal office, but even among the school of the prophets there were hypocrites, so God raised up prophets from among kings, judges, and governors who had not been specifically trained in the Jewish religious schools (e.g., Gideon, David, Daniel, Nehemiah). In the NT era, the Apostles were from diverse backgrounds. Some like Peter were not trained in the religious schools (Acts 4.13), at least one (John) came from the family of the priests, and one (Paul) was a trained rabbi. So it has

been since the times of the Apostles. God continues to call men from various walks of life who speak with a prophetic voice, rebuke the Church, and direct it to repentance and to the observance of what has been taught by Jesus and the Apostles. Some in the Church listen and respond and the Church goes forward powerfully from one generation to the next. Others reject the teaching of the prophets and drag portions of the Church into Hell. Regardless, God is not without a witness to his perfect standards for the Church in each generation,

Charged Generation – The generation of Jews at the time of Jesus was especially culpable for rejecting the prophets. It was that generation that had the incredible blessing of receiving the two greatest prophets of all—John the Baptist (Mt 11.11) and Jesus—and many of the people and most of the leaders rejected both of them. God pruned that branch of rejection from his Church at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and holds them doubly accountable into eternity for the death of all the prophets from Abel to Christ (1 Thess 2.15, 16). We cannot, however, think that they alone are culpable. Our generation is also blessed with two prophetic witnesses to the truth in the completed revelation of Jesus Christ—the Old and New Testaments. We also have the collective wisdom of the ecumenical Councils, the accumulation of 2,000 years of considered dialogue on the essential doctrines of the Faith, and many providential witnesses to the working of the Holy Spirit through revivals and reformations since the days of the Apostles. If we reject Jesus and his true prophets, as did the Jewish leaders of his day, we also will be charged, condemned, and consigned to Hell for an eternity of eternities.

Canon Guidance – The order of the books in the OT in our Bibles is based largely on the order that was used in the Latin Vulgate from the Middle Ages, and, to an extent, the order of the books in the Greek OT translation (called the Septuagint). The order of the books in both the Greek and Latin versions of the OT is not the same as the order that was accepted by the Jewish rabbis before the time of Christ. In both the Latin and the Greek OT, the books of Chronicles usually appear following the books entitled *Kings*. However, in the Hebrew order, 2 Chronicles is the last book of the canon. Thus, Jesus’ in referring to the prophets who were

killed from Abel (Gen 4.8) to Zechariah (2 Chron 24.20-21), is essentially saying, “From the beginning to the end of the Bible”. By making this reference, Jesus endorses the Hebrew OT canon—which does not contain the books of the Apocrypha—as Scripture. This is one reason why Protestant Bibles do not include the Apocrypha as part of the OT—another reason is that no NT writer quotes from the Apocrypha.

Countering Guerrillas – We have noted previously that the enemies of Christ and truth, whether in the Church or the world, cannot be successful in their attempts to undermine Christ’s kingdom with rational discourse since their position is built on false presuppositions and advocated with false logic. The only hope—a misguided one at best, since Christ will have the victory (1 Cor 15.57; 1 Jn 5.4)—of sabotaging the work of Christ is to use force or farce; repression or ridicule. So this is the direction that the leaders at the time of Jesus turned when they saw that their arguments and teachings were not winning the people and silencing Jesus. We read that they began to oppose him fiercely. They besieged him with questions in the hope that they could find a mistake in his answers. They used a form of verbal guerrilla warfare, just as insurgents and enemies of the state attempt to use harassment and sabotage. We find the same tactics used today by the atheistic evolutionists, radical feminists, and homosexual lobbyists. They generally refuse to engage in rational debate because in their hearts they know that they cannot prevail over truth. Instead they call Christians names like ‘flat-earthers’, ‘bigots’ or ‘Nazis’; attempt to drown out preaching or prayer vigils with loud catcalls; or use perversions of the legislative or judicial systems to drive truth from the public forum. Thanks be to God, that their tactics are ultimately doomed and, in the end, God will silence them all (Rom 3.19).

Warning about Witnessing [August 14] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.1-12)

Luke indicates that challenging Jesus’ authority and teaching was not giving the results for which the Pharisees hoped. Instead of turning people away from Jesus, their attacks resulted in many more coming to

hear him, if only out of curiosity. Jesus used the assembly of about ten thousand witnesses as a forum for instructing the disciples (probably the seventy-two) in how they should be entirely different from the Pharisees. We can read between the lines and hear him saying: “Don’t worry about the Pharisees, they are nothing! Instead, take note of these seven principles to guide your witness for the Kingdom.”

Pharisaical Perversion (1) – First, don’t listen to their teaching. It is full of idle chatter, flattering words, and obstinate talk. It has the appearance of substance but is full of hot air; the flatulence of digesting fungi. Sadly, the Church throughout all generations, continues to be plagued with vain boasters and hypocritical traitors who are more interested in their own pleasure, prestige, position, or power (2 Pt 2.1-22); than in rendering to God the glory that is his. Do you want to be an effective instrument for the furtherance of the Gospel? Be openly honest, speaking and living the simple truth.

Publicised Parlance (2-3) – Second, remember that the ‘walls have ears’ and Heaven has an omniscient ear. We easily forget, when we are slandering our brothers and sisters in Christ, our co-workers, or our neighbours that there is only a gauze of mist separating us from the other realm. Although we can’t see to the other side, Heaven sees and hears all. It is so easy to speak self-righteous piffle. It makes us feel ‘good’ when we can ‘whisper’ the faults of others in gossip, e-mails, or chat rooms; especially if we can criticize people in our denomination or congregation. But our words will become known (Eccl 10.20). The impolite injunction is: “Shut up!”

Proper Perspective (4-5) – Third, don’t be feeble-kneed. Don’t be concerned about potential abuse, including the threat of death, which may come your way for speaking the transparent truth. If you had a hundred dollars and I asked for a dime, would you give it to me? To someone with a billion dollars, a million dollars is equivalent to the dime for the person with one hundred dollars. Apply this concept to the infinite time of eternity. Even though you might value the years of your life at a million, million dollars; from an eternal perspective eighty years

are not even a blink. Our worry must never be about how to eek out one more hour in this life—especially if it is at the expense of truth. Our ultimate concern should be what will happen after death. Do not be intimidated into silence. Be fearless for Christ!

Providence’s Protection (6-7) – Fourth, remember that God feeds the birds. No bird worries about where he will find his next seed. God always provides for the needs of all his creatures. When you pull out your hair in worry about tomorrow—about provisions for the stomach, protection from the spiteful, or a paycheck in times of economic turmoil—think of God counting the hairs as they drop to the ground. Heaven knows all, and the Father in Heaven cares for the least of his creatures that flit through the trees. But, he *cherishes* the littlest of his children that flee to him in trust. Why do we doubt that he will bring us through the evils of life and the events of death? Why do we doubt that he stands loyally by our side now, and as we cross the river of death?

Professing Proclamation (8-9) – Fifth, stand with him. How we stand firm for God, is by acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and as *the* Lord over all men. Acknowledging Jesus is not just taking him as your personal pacifier and letting the rest of the world have their comforting teddy bear—whether it is Allah and his prophet, Buddha, or Krishna. Some presidents, popes, and pastors play games with syncretism, and suggest that any religion is better than no religion. This is Satan’s great lie! Therefore, before the court of men, we must present the evidence that Jesus, the whole Jesus, and nothing but Jesus can meet the deep needs of mankind. If we take such a stand he in turn will acknowledge us as his brothers before the court of Heaven.

Proscribed Profanity (10) – Sixth, obey the Spirit. The Pharisees knew in their hearts that Jesus was the Messiah, but they rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit. They might have been excused for questioning who Jesus was, based merely on the external evidence of miracles and his teaching, if that was their only sin. But it was unforgivable to reject the internal call of the Spirit. Likewise, if the Holy Spirit stirs your heart and calls you to attend the King’s wedding banquet and you dismiss his

invitation in favour of your love-affair with the world, then there is no hope for you.

Provided Persuasion (11-12) – Seventh, speak with assurance. If you have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit and have attended to his invitation to join Christ's household through adoption, then you have been endowed with royal lips that speak with the authority and grace of the King. So when you are confronted with the irrational drivel of pagan religions, pandering media, and perverse philosophies, you can present confidently the reality of Jesus who is: both God and man, creator, law-giver, sovereign governor, and saviour. This is truth, regardless of what men may think or care. And, because it is truth, you can stand before the meekest or mightiest and declare that Jesus is Lord!

Warning about Worldliness [August 15]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.13-21)

Wished Arbitration – Sometimes during a discussion a person will raise a topic that has no relevance to, or contradicts, what is under consideration. It appears that this is what happened while Jesus was instructing his disciples on how to live out their witness to truth. Jesus had just mentioned the serious matter of being called to present a defence before those who hate him, when someone in the crowd asked him to play the role of arbiter between himself and his brother over the matter of the family inheritance. It seems that the man had not been listening to the substance of what Jesus had been teaching. It is like someone asking a doctor how to heal a skin rash when his real problem is terminal cancer. However, we must not miss a key point. The man was listening to Jesus to some degree and realized that he was more than just a teacher of moral platitudes. The man believed, even if unspoken, that Jesus had ultimate authority and dealt with matters truthfully. It is not surprising, therefore, that he would seek justice from the one who ultimately will judge the thoughts and actions of all mankind. Rather than rebuking him for what appears to be foolishness, Jesus asked him, in return, a rhetorical question, "Who appointed me a judge?" The implication is that Jesus is in fact a judge, appointed by God. Although, at that point, his role was

not to act in that capacity, so he turns the circumstances into another teaching-moment.

Warned Avoidance – The man may have had a just complaint and was being defrauded by his older brother of the younger-brother's share, or he may have wished for more than he was entitled to. In either case, Jesus warns the man, and all his hearers, to be unconcerned about accumulating possessions in this life. Greed can easily engulf us. If someone came along and freely handed out \$100 bills arbitrarily—to some one, to others more—you can be sure that the person who got only one, would feel slighted that he did not get the same number as others, instead of being thankful for receiving an unexpected gift. Jesus didn't come to earth to take the civil magistrates' place as judge, but he does demand of us proper judgement. He directs our attention to the dangers of harbouring a sense of injustice and greed in thinking that we have a right to material possessions or that the accumulation of physical possessions is the measure of meaning. Ultimate happiness does not depend on our having an abundance of this world's goods. We all need to learn this lesson.

Worldly Abundance – Worldly abundance can be very dangerous, as Jesus points out in the parable that follows his warning. It certainly isn't wrong for us to be blessed with productive circumstances (such as good soil), or to be industrious, or to enjoy the fruit of our labours. These, in themselves, aren't the root of the problem with wealth. The real problem is focusing our hearts and minds on wealth itself (1 Tim 6.10). Accumulating wealth cannot satisfy men because, in general, it leads people to a number of mental afflictions:

- *Congratulation* – Like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4.30) they consider their 'own' accomplishments, and don't acknowledge God's gracious hand.
- *Cares* – They worry about how they will store and protect their wealth.
- *Covetousness* – They are never satisfied, always grasping for more—for bigger barns, bank accounts, houses, cars, yachts, and companies.

- *Conceit* – They are confident that their goods will last for many years, and that they will be around to use and enjoy them.
- *Carnal* – Their hope's horizon is things acquired by wealth that promote bodily pleasure. They cannot see beyond time and space, into eternity.
- *Complacency* – They rest on their wealth as if it is sure to endure for a lifetime, without considering the transitory nature of all riches (Mt 6.19).
- *Closefisted* – They think only of how to satisfy their own ends, not how to advance the work of Christ's kingdom. Even wealthy benefactors think of the legacy that they will leave, rather than the glory of God.

Weighty Allegory – God's indictment of those who seek and depend on the riches of this world is explicit: they are fools—morally, intellectually, and practically—and are in a class with those who deny the existence of God and his governance of the universe (Ps 14.1). Their foolishness is displayed in a number of outcomes: 1) their hands are separated from their wealth without warning, in an instant; 2) their supposed fortress of wealth cannot prevent death's pale horse from dragging them into Hell; 3) they leave all their wealth to the next generation that will be even more foolish than they are. The death of the worldly rich fool is as miserable as the death of a worldly profligate—heartless, hapless, and hopeless.

Wisdom Applied – As it is, all men must die (Heb 9.27) so someone might conclude that it is better to have lived and died rich than to have lived and died in abject poverty. To shut this mental trap-door Jesus reminds us that the meaning of our lives is not measured by the toys we accumulate on the way to the grave, but by the strength of our relationship with our Creator. The most foolish aspect of materialistic wealth-accumulation is that it causes its practitioners to overlook the most critical reality of all—they are not prepared to meet God on his judgment throne. To be prepared, we must be rich toward God: 1) with the merits of Christ's work on the cross applied to our account through faith (Jam 2.5); 2) dressed in the robes of righteousness (Rev 3.18); and

3) in good deeds, the fruits of righteousness (1 Tim 6.18). It is better to be destitute of the world's riches, but rich towards God for eternity.

Warning about Worry [August 16]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.22-34)

One dimension of worldliness is a focus on material possessions—either an inordinate quest to obtain them or sinful dependence on them. Jesus dealt with that focus in his response to the man who asked him to arbitrate between himself and his brother over the division of the family inheritance. He turns now to a related dimension of worldliness—worry about not having sufficient possessions to stay alive (or be comfortable). He reuses an illustration from a year previous in Galilee—in the *Sermon on Mount*—to make this point.

Principle – To overcome worry we need facts—although some folks don't want to be confused by facts. For example, if you were worried about getting smallpox, it would help to know that there is a vaccine to control the virus and that the last known case was in Somalia in 1977. Jesus gives his disciples basic facts that should help us overcome worry about not having enough material goods to survive. The principle that he gives us is that life is more than food and the body more than clothes. To the world rotting away in sin, life appears to be nothing more than a brief blink of 70-80 years in 'endless' cosmic time of 13 billions of years. So for a man whose horizon is only this world, eking out a few more seconds is all the meaning he can understand. For the Christian, however, our time in this world is really a confinement. Real life begins after physical death (Jn 10.28; Phil 1.23). 'Clothes make the man', if Mark Twain is to be believed. Jesus, however, says differently. True Christians are not driven by the latest fashions from Dior, Lauren, or Armani. They are concerned about having one garment alone—the robe of Christ's righteousness (Rev 3.18) wrapped around resurrection bodies (1 Cor 15.43).

Providence – Do we really believe that God will provide what is *needed* for our material existence in this world, for as long as he has planned to

keep us here? We don't, if we worry. Jesus points to the birds again—previously he spoke of sparrows (Lk 12.6)—to remind us that God works out his providences. Do not misunderstand the primary meaning of this example; the point isn't that we can go through this life with casual frivolity and no forethought or work, since even the ravens have to scavenge for their food. The emphasis is on God's *providing* for all of his creatures, especially his own sons. What can worry accomplish? Absolutely nothing of merit. We cannot change God's plan for our lives and add an inch to our stature or a second to our tenure, so why do we think that we can change his providences when it comes to providing rations for our tables or raiment for our torsos?

Perspective – It is because of weak faith that we worry about having enough to eat, something to wear, or a place to lay our heads. It is sad that people will trust governments or insurance companies to provide for their needs before they will trust God. They appeal to cold-hearted bureaucrats before they will turn to the God who made man and provided him with a meaningful role, a garden full of the most pleasant fruit-trees imaginable, and the most beautiful wife any man has ever had. Men depend on human systems that cannot be truly fail-safe, yet they ignore the one who designed systems—such as DNA replication—that, even with the consequences of sin, function effectively for generations. God clothes the non-rational world in intricate order and beauty that is breathtaking, even though each component's future is but destruction. Why wouldn't he take care of his people who are destined for eternity? We can only say, "Get a grip man, put things into perspective!"

Priorities – If only Christians would really listen to what Jesus says, they would be content and at peace. Our neighbours, who do not know Christ, are pagans—they are caught up with false religions that make man, nature, or a vain imagination into a god; or they are irreligious and hedonistic. As pagans, their philosophy of life places priority on physical pleasure and is summed up by the bumper sticker slogan, "He who dies with the most toys, wins." We, in contrast are to "seek his Kingdom;" which means we are to ask for admission to it, desire its advancement, and look forward to its final appearance. When this is our priority, we

stop flailing and grasping for the possessions of this world and let them sink into the ocean of empty wishes. Then God sends our way flotsam from the wreckage of others' hollow desires that is more than sufficient to supply all our needs.

Prospect – Our biggest challenge in living without worry is our lack of trust. We take vacuous substitutes rather than trust our Father when he says that he has prepared a Kingdom for us in the 'there and then'. Even when we believe in Jesus as creator and master of the universe, and trust him to bring us safely into eternity, we have doubts about his ability and willingness to protect and provide for us in the 'here and now'. The solution to our lack of trust is not to fill our sock drawer with more insurance policies, bundles of cash in rubber bands, or a mitten full of gold Maple Leaf coins. Nor is the solution to install generators, stockpile canned goods, or harvest non-hybridized vegetable seeds. While none of these worldly measures is wrong in itself, if we believe that any of them can provide ultimate safety we are bigger fools than the pagans because we know better. The solution is radical. We need to sweep away our self-delusion. We must divest ourselves of anything, other than Christ, that we depend on and instead subsist on the gracious handouts from God. We will be truly surprised. The person who can travel light on his pilgrimage to Glory can be content and at peace with God and the world.

Warning about Watchfulness [August 17]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.35-48)

Doubled Parable – Jesus expanded on his comment regarding seeking the Kingdom with a parable. Then Peter asked if that parable applied to 'them'; presumably meaning the core disciples. Jesus didn't directly answer Peter's question. Rather he added a second, similar parable, to reinforce the teaching of the first parable. It appears from the second parable, that the compass of his teaching includes all mankind. Even though some think that this double-parable might apply only to Christians or even more specifically to preachers, it appears that Jesus has a message that leaves no room for anyone to have an excuse for rejecting the Gospel or not seeking the Kingdom. We should note that

Jesus is still about six months from going to the cross and completing his ministry on earth, and yet he is already thinking beyond the crucifixion and resurrection to his second coming and the consummation of the ages. He will expand on this teaching as the time of his crucifixion approaches.

Dressed Preparation – The parables, first, assume that Jesus is returning. He, as the incarnation of the Godhead, is the ‘master’ of the parables who returns from the wedding banquet. All men are to be dressed in the robe of Christ’s righteousness (Rev 3.18) and waiting for his second coming. Anyone who is a faithful servant of Jesus will be constantly vigilant, expecting him to come at any time. Faithful servants will not create artificial systems that suggest he could *not* return until some particular millennial event occurs but, rather, will always expect that he could return at any moment, including tonight. Anyone who is not expecting the return of Christ and anticipating it with excitement is either an unfaithful Christian or an unbeliever.

Divine Provision – The parables, secondly, indicate that Jesus is returning to distribute promotions. They speak of amazing truths. Anyone who the master finds faithfully waiting for him on his return, will be served by the master himself. We are not given any detail, through these parables or elsewhere in Scripture, about how Jesus will serve us but we can surmise that when we arrive in Glory—either through death or through the bodily transformation of those who are caught up to meet the returning Lord (1 Thess 4.17)—we will be invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19.9) where Jesus will serve his bride, the Church, from his table. If this is the truth hinted at by the parable, it should not surprise us. It will be the same Jesus serving at his table in Heaven who washed his disciples’ feet in the upper room, before serving them the tokens of his body and blood sacrificed on their behalf. At the completion of the communion meal in Heaven Jesus will then honour his brothers and sisters with rewards that will include possessions and kingdoms (Mt 19.21; Mt 25.34; Lk 22.29, 30; Heb 12.28; Rev 22.5). How exactly this will be fulfilled is not spelled-out in the Bible, so we need to trust, in hope, that Jesus will reward his people beyond what we can imagine.

Diligent Patience – These parables also teach that Jesus will return at a time when men least expect it, just like the coming of a thief when the household normally would be sleeping. We are living in the last days—the final age of this world—and are well into the last age, and are approaching the end of history. Figuratively, we are deep into the night, as indicated by the second watch that ran from 9 pm to midnight and the third, from midnight to 3 am. As a result, the return of Jesus appears to be long delayed and many scoff at the idea of his coming (2 Pt 3.3, 4). However, true believers in Jesus will not allow the apparent delay of his return to discourage them. Rather, they will be patient, staying awake spiritually, until his ‘knock at the door’—the shout and the trumpet blast (1 Thess 4.16)—indicating the end of time and the beginning of eternity. True patience, while awaiting the Lord’s return, does not consist of sleeping away the remaining time until he comes. Rather it is diligent service in which Christians work as faithful stewards in the household of faith and as dutiful subjects of the nations of the world which ultimately belong to Jesus the King. The majority of mankind, in foolish naivety, dismisses this teaching as nonsense. They ignore the truth that Jesus will return, and that at his return he will sit as judge of both the righteous and unrighteous.

Dispensed Punishment – These parables indicate that Jesus is returning to dispense punishment. As the righteous judge of all mankind (Ps 98.9) he will punish everyone who does not wait for him and receive him with joyful anticipation. The sober truths about punishment that are taught in the second parable include the following:

- *Congruous* – It will be appropriate and fitting to the nature of the crime—rejecting Jesus. Ignorance of the specifics of God’s revelation about Jesus is not a sufficient excuse to avoid eternal punishment for as Paul says, all men know God’s righteous decrees and are without excuse (Rom 1.20).
- *Commensurate* – There are degrees of punishment. The more one rejects knowledge about Jesus, the more severe his punishment will be. Being faithless in knowledge is more culpable than being ruthless in ignorance.

- *Complete* – Jesus, the master, will cut to pieces anyone who rejects him as Lord and consign him to an eternity in Hell.

The apparent delay in the return of Jesus to Earth is not a delay at all. It is, rather, God's working out his purposes—giving men time to repent of their rebellion and compounding the severity of their guilt if they persist in it. So therefore, wait and watch for the Lord's return!

Warning about 'War' [August 18] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.49-53)

Most men, if they consider Jesus at all, believe that he was a mere man like Siddhartha Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed. They think of him as a moral teacher who was a bit deluded about his role and also an effeminate sort of fellow. The concept of Jesus being the righteous judge of all mankind, as we noted in our previous meditation, is hard for men to fathom. In this section of his teaching he expands on his purpose for coming to earth—to bring *division*. Ultimately Jesus came from Glory to Earth to extend the battlefield in the great war between Satan and God, and to fight the decisive *Battle of the Cross* that guaranteed him the victory. In this passage Jesus teaches that the war was not completed fully with his victory on cross. All of Jesus' disciples must continue to fight battles between good and evil until he comes from Heaven with his host of angels to end the war for all time. But our battles are not like those pursued by the false religions of the world, such as Islam, that force conversions with guns or wipe out with bombs those they perceive to be infidels. The way of Christian warfare against evil is spiritual (Eph 6.10-18); executed with prayer and the power of persuasive preaching.

Conflagration – Islamic *jihad* breeds insurgents and terrorists who will use planes as flying 'bombs' or nuclear explosions to cause *destructive* fire that consumes their enemies. Jesus, in contrast, sends a different kind of *decisive* fire; a fire that divides mankind into two elementary categories—those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God and as their saviour, and those who do not. It is only this division of mankind—not divisions along racial, ethnic, linguistic, social, or economic factors—

that has any relevance for eternity. The fire that Jesus sends on the earth appears to be multi-faceted, and may include the fire of:

- *Pentecost* – On that day Jesus poured out the Spirit, in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2.3), who opened the mouths of the Apostles. This unleashed a message that warms the hearts of believers but consumes the consciences of unbelievers with a tormenting blaze.
- *Purification* – In the Bible, fire is a symbol for refining (Zech 13.9) As such, it purges the dross of wickedness but leaves the pure metal of a refined golden faith in the crucible of God's providence. Thus, the fire that Jesus sends separates out those who are meant for the Kingdom.
- *Persecution* – One aspect of the fire of purification is persecution. God uses persecution of the Church by false religions to burn off the chaff of the unfaithful and the cares of worldly passions.
- *Punishment* – Fire is also a symbol for judgment (Heb 10.27; 2 Pt 3.7). Those who reject and persecute Christ and his Church will, in the end, be subject to an eternal holocaust of torment (Rev 20.15).

Jesus longed for the fire to be kindled since it would mean that his sacrificial work had ended, and the building of the Kingdom was nearing completion.

Crucifixion – Jews start their calendar with creation, which occurred by their reckoning in 3760 BC, the traditional Chinese start counting years from when Emperor Huangdi supposedly invented the calendar in 2637 BC, Moslems start their calendar with Mohammed's flight to Medina in 622 AD, and most of the world today uses a calendar decreed by Pope Gregory XIII that was based on a mistaken calculation in the Middle Ages for the year in which Jesus was *born*. But none of these are the right point at which to base the measurement of time, since everything in history is, and should be, focused on one point—Jesus' death and resurrection. This event is the anticipation of all the OT promises and the root of all meaning since that point. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus there can be no explanation for why there is evil in the world and no hope for escape from its grasp. As Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 15.13-19, without the resurrection of Jesus all is futile. This is the reason that Jesus looked forward to his baptism with fire on the cross. He knew

that it would snuff out Satan's wildfires spreading through the valleys of this earth and throw open the flood-gates holding back the refreshing water of life. Jesus had his eyes and heart set upon the salvation of his people.

Conflict – At all times before, and since, the resurrection of Jesus two kingdoms have been at war—the Kingdom of Heaven and the Dominion of Satan. Prior to the central event of history on Golgotha, it was difficult to see clearly the definition of the two sides in this great war. Jewish believers in the true Messiah were a relatively insignificant segment of a small 'island-nation' in a restless 'sea' of pagan humanity. But since the defining event of history, the Church has prospered and grown to such an extent that there are believers in Jesus in every nation and their total number accounts for a significant and growing proportion of humanity. Since Satan has been conquered by his eternal enemy he is stressing out as he sees his dominion withering away and his subjects being captured by faith in Jesus. This is why the Gospel does not bring peace, in the sense of worldly ease and leisure for the world. Rather, it brings division, as Satan's remaining slaves struggle against and resist the inevitable victory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the resistance of all false religions and philosophies is based on an irrational hatred of Jesus, their only means of attack are repression or ridicule. Thus, we find family members who remain in Islam, Hinduism, or Judaism hating those who receive Jesus as saviour. Since Christianity is destroying Satan's kingdom it is more divisive than all man-made religions which are united in their hatred against Christ.

Warning about Warnings [August 19]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 12.54-59)

Jesus concludes his series of warnings with a caution to heed the evidences and signs that God has graciously given to us. In this warning he addresses, in his usual picturesque way, the same truth he communicates through Psalms 14.1-7 and Psalm 19.1-14, and through the Apostle Paul in Romans 1.18-32. This truth is that men know innately that there is a God to whom they must be reconciled and give a

final account of their lives. The evidences we perceive with our natural senses confirm and support the knowledge of this truth. Simply, Jesus says in effect, “If you claim you can discern all that is important through the use of your natural senses, then use them and you will see that what I say is true.”

He opens this discourse with a reflection on man’s ability to make reasonably accurate predictions about the future (e.g., to predict tomorrow’s weather) based on repeated observations of natural phenomena. His example seems, at first glance, to be fairly simplistic, but in fact it is based on a profound truth. In the history of philosophy, one topic that has caused much discussion is the ‘problem of induction’. It is the question of how empirical evidence can be used to derive truth—in particular how we can generalize about the properties of classes based on observation of particular instances, and how a sequence of past events can be used to presuppose future events. The reality is that no philosophy or religion, except Christianity, is able to give a meaningful and complete answer to this problem. Every worldview that is based on anything other than the Triune God of Scripture is challenged to explain causality and repeatability, and either begs the question or rests on an arbitrary *a priori* presupposition. From a naturalistic perspective, the universe is nothing more than existential random events and there is no ground for expecting the future to be like the past. Non-Christian religions define a god that is either subject to random events (e.g., we live in an open universe), is an impersonal force with no volition, or is capricious. Only Biblical Christianity, with the God of providence, is able to rationally justify inductive conclusions. Jesus reminds men that when they predict the weather they are living in God’s universe.

Since we live in a coherent universe created by God, and accept the existence of causal relationships in natural phenomena and can derive predictions from them, we should also expect that there are spiritual consequences associated with the acceptance or rejection of truth. To do otherwise is wilful hypocrisy. This was the situation with the Jews of Jesus’ day who refused to heed the evidence, in his teaching and miracles, that he was the Messiah. They did not judge the facts rightly

because they came at them with a predetermined bias. Their rejection of Jesus and his corroborating evidence is no different from the way men behave today. They ignorantly and foolishly reject God's truth wherever they find it—in natural revelation or in Scripture—because they do not *want* to know truth. As Paul says, they suppress the truth.

The suppression of God's truth clouds man's ability to act rationally in every area of life. Because men throw out God's commands and his explanation for the origin of sinful behaviour they invent useless schemes for reengineering human nature. They think that educational, social, economic or political programs will give meaning and purpose to man's existence and eliminate dysfunctional behaviour. They claim that they know better than God about what is best for mankind. They reject his standards for marriage and the relationship between a husband and wife (one man with one woman; with the man as the head of the household) and the allocation of time (such as keeping the Sabbath holy), and disrespect his authority over life and death (e.g., they endorse abortion and euthanasia). They also claim, foolishly, that man is better off with no religion or with a religion other than Christianity. Finally, they ignore the overwhelming evidence in nature of God's creative hand and the increase of entropy in the genome resulting from man's sin. Instead they cling irrationally to the myth that complex specified information can increase under the 'hand' of unguided chance through natural selection.

Jesus tells us that if we are sensible, we will face up to all of the evidence to truth that he has provided and settle our case out of court. His point is that we must reconcile now with God by accepting his word as truth. If we do not, we will have to appear before his tribunal and be judged eternally for rejecting all of the sufficient evidence he has given to us in this life about his creation and law, our sin, and his provision of Jesus as saviour. Do not misunderstand his point about paying the last penny. He is not suggesting that there is an intermediate state such as Purgatory, in which we will slowly work off our debt of sin. He is speaking hyperbolically. A person who owes thousands of talents of gold and is thrown into debtors' prison has no means of earning anything, not even a

tiny copper coin, with which to pay his debt. But our situation is even worse if we reject God's truth claims. Anyone who stands before God in judgment, and is condemned to Hell, will be charged with an infinite crime against his majesty. Infinite, means *infinite*! All the fractions of pennies we can accumulate could never pay an infinite debt. If we understand the weather signs and take warning when we think foul weather is coming, then we have an even greater reason to heed the spiritual signs and take warning when we know for certain that the fires of Hell are coming on men who reject Jesus. The message is simple: take warning from the natural evidence and spiritual warnings, reconcile, and avoid the trial!

Repent or Perish [August 20]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 13.1-5)

Communicated Calamity – “Did you hear ...?” This is a common way for many people to begin a conversation. They like to be the ones bearing news. It fills their dull existence with a sense of importance since it lets them feel that they are ‘in the know’ when others aren’t. This psychological factor is one reason why gossip is so pervasive. Another reason that gossip prospers is that people have an unwholesome interest in calamity. We see this when they sit transfixed before their televisions after a disaster and listen to the reporters examine and re-examine the sparse facts of the event. Our interest in the misfortune of others is attributable to two tendencies in sinful human nature: 1) a sense of superiority that makes us believe that this kind of thing happens to others, but not to us; and 2) a native belief that people, in some way, get what they deserve and that those who suffer from misadventure are getting their just desserts.

It is possible, though unlikely, that those people in the crowd who brought the news of Pilate's actions against the Galileans were merely reinforcing Jesus' warning to make peace with God before it is too late. However, it is more likely that they brought the news with the haughtiness of a gossip, believing that the Galileans suffered justly for some great sin (e.g., rebellion against Roman rule or a hidden evil);

otherwise God would have prevented it from happening. It appears that they present this spiteful innuendo to test Jesus and to determine whose side he will take, or to challenge him to explain why God permits bad things to happen to ‘innocent’ people?

Circumspect Consideration – Jesus does not take up the challenge as the Jews might have expected. He does not justify the Galilean zealots’ plots or acts of terror, nor does he condemn them for any particular sin or even for their rebellion against the lawful authority of the civil magistrate. On the other hand, he doesn’t comment on Pilate’s cruelty. Rather, he accepts as a temporal reality the universal presence of evil and the intimate connection between original sin and particular suffering. However, he does not turn the discussion into an abstract path by dealing with questions such as: why the innocent suffer, degrees of evil, whether or not God directly punishes all sinful actions in this life, or how God defends his unfolding providence that includes the presence of egregious evil. Instead, he uses the news as an opportunity to warn his hearers of a far more serious disaster that will befall them if they do not repent of their own sins.

Common Condition – In response to the news about Pilate’s abuse of the Galileans, Jesus refers to another contemporary event—the collapse of a gate- tower near the pool of Siloam that killed eighteen people. In reference to both of these calamities he asks essentially one question of his hearers: “Do you think that those who suffered in the calamities were greater sinners than their neighbours?” There are a number of lessons we can take from his question:

- 1) The implied answer to his question is that all the inhabitants of Galilee and Jerusalem were equally sinful. With comprehensive inclusion this does not stop at Palestine’s borders. It encompasses all mankind who sinned in Adam, are filled with sin from birth, and are under God’s curse.
- 2) Calamities are the result of the general pervasiveness of sin. They arise from man’s wicked actions against other men and prevalent negligence and from the curse on nature (Gen 3.17-18; Rom 8.18-22) resulting from man’s sin. This includes typhoons in Indonesia, planes

flying into towers in New York, car bombs in Baghdad, collapsing buildings in earthquakes, and genocide. Calamity can happen to anyone because all are human.

- 3) We are not to measure guilt by calamity. Although there is a degree of direct connection—for example those who engage in sinful practices are more likely to suffer the effects of their sinful actions, or those who live in lands that adhere to false gods will reap more evil consequences—being killed or not, is not a direct measure of a person’s unrighteousness or righteousness. The clinching evidence against the idea that a person’s suffering must result from his *own* sin, is Christ’s death at Golgotha.
- 4) We must not be smug about our situation. God doesn’t bless us because we are more holy, by nature, than our neighbours. Therefore, we must not heap censures on those who are afflicted more than others. This was the mistake that Job’s supposed friends made when they accused him of some great wickedness that led to the calamities that came upon him.
- 5) Rather, we must live in constant thankfulness, confessing that it is only by the grace of God that we are not consumed.

Why are men appalled at the presence of evil? Why do they shake their fist at God accusing him of being evil because evil fills the world? Ironically, man’s disgust at the presence of evil shows that he knows that evil is ultimately abnormal (i.e., not how God made his perfect creation), and that there is a final standard—God’s—against which all actions and events are to be judged. In our hearts, we all know that calamity is the lot of man since the Garden.

Challenging Caution – Since physical death is inevitable and justly deserved by all men, the most important question is not, “Why are there calamities?” but rather “What is to be done about death?” This is why Jesus turns the issue away from physical death to eternal death. Only repentance of our sin against God can provide escape from a death—eternal death—that is far worse than meeting with temporal calamity. Thus Jesus says (twice): repent or perish!

Cultural Calamity [August 21]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 13.6-9)

Pharisaic Hearers – Gossips brought Jesus news of a contemporary calamity and he, in turn, called them to consider the eternal calamity that will befall every person who does not repent (Lk 13.1-5). However, judgement does not come just on individuals who fail to heed God's word and repent. It falls also on nations and entire cultures that reject Jesus as Lord. So Jesus extends his message about the need for repentance to the nation—through an illustrative parable of a fig tree. His hearers would have had some understanding that he was speaking of their nation since God, through the Prophet Isaiah (Is 5.1-7), had already used similar imagery. Although individual Jews, including Anna and Simeon, the disciples, Nicodemus, and thousands at Pentecost believed in Jesus and repented of their sins, the bulk of the nation of Israel and most of its leaders rejected him as the Messiah. They had been given a three-fold time (symbolizing the three years of his teaching ministry on earth) to repent, but on rejecting Jesus, God rejected them and instructed that they be cut down. The sign that the Jews as a nation—clearly this does not apply to individuals who repent, since God retains a remnant (Rom 11.5) even to this day—have been cut down for their rejection of the Messiah, is shown by the calamity that fell upon them when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Purged Hypocrites – We, however, must not think that this parable applies only to the nation of Israel 2,000 years ago. We all live as corporate beings in families, churches, nations, and civilizations and are held accountable under God's covenantal dealings with mankind for our corporate relationships. When Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28.19) he is not telling them to expect that only a few solitary individuals will be plucked from the fires of Hell. Rather, he really means that *entire* nations are to be brought into conformity with his word and will. Contrary to popular thinking, even among Evangelicals today, Christ is Lord of the nations (Ps 2.1-12) and the laws of nations are to conform to his Law as given in the Bible, and as summarized in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13.1-7; 1 Pt 2.13, 14).

History, since the time of Christ, shows the application of the parable of the fig tree to all hypocritical nations that reject their former profession of Christ. As the Gospel spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia Minor, entire nations were converted to Christ. However, as they became complacent and smug in their ‘Christian’ culture, they no longer had any sense of the need for continual repentance, reformation, and return to their obedience to Jesus Christ. Like fig-less fig trees, with showy leaves but no fruit, these nations no longer produced fruit that was the evidence of their supposed profession. As a result, God’s patience expired and he said, “Cut it down”. Islam, a form of the anti-Christ, swept through that part of the world, starting in the mid-seventh century, and forced into *dhimminic* servitude the nominally-Christian nations. Over the following millennium-and-a-half, the vestiges of true Christianity were wiped out by the *jihad* of Islam. In the same way, the Roman Empire that became nominally Christian around the time of Constantine, was overrun by Vandals adhering to Arianism. The remnants of the Roman Empire eventually succumbed to the Islamic Turks. Europe, from about the time of Charlemagne until recent times, has been considered to consist of ‘Christian’ nations. The remnants of true Christianity are fading quickly under the pressures of secular humanism. In turn, these secular nations of Europe appear to be on the brink of the abyss. Because they have rejected Jesus as Lord, they will likely be given over to the nations—which again will be Islamic. We in North America must not think that we are immune. We sit, as nations and congregations, in much the same situation as Israel at the time of Christ. We have been blessed with the presence of the truth from God, but it can be easily removed if God says, “Cut it down!”

Patience’s ‘Hour’ – God is slow in exercising his anger in punishment. He withholds judgement, giving all mankind time to repent. This parable speaks of three years (a full time) and then an allowance of even more time—an extra year to produce holy fruit (Lev 19.23-24). With ancient Israel, their final punishment did not come on the day that they crucified their Messiah. Rather, they were given another generation to repent, and God graciously saved many from among that nation. We are now in

patience's last hour, and as individuals, congregations, and nations we can expect to see God exercise his vengeance against any who persist in not bearing fruit for his Kingdom.

Productive Harvest – True religion must bear fruit. God will not tolerate unproductive bareness. False religions, ultimately, breed nothing but hatred and misery. In contrast, Christianity is to bring peace into a world at war with God and hope to a world in despair. Our profession of religion must be more than the leaves of piety in self-righteousness or the blossoms of protestation of 'Lord, Lord' (Mt 7.22). It must bear fruit—the fruit of a righteous life (Phil 1.9; Gal 5.22-25), the fruit of worshipful praise (Heb 13.15); the fruit of loving works (Col 1.10), and the fruit of saving sinners from Hell (Col 1.6; James 5.19). Our prayer, desire, and passion should be to see our lives producing an abundant harvest of fruit every day that God gives us on this earth. May it never be said that we have just taken up space, wasted the valuable water of life in the vineyard, and blocked the sunlight with our show of leaves so that others cannot grow. May the Master never say of us, "Cut it down!"

Healing a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath [August 22] (Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 13.10-17)

Informed Hearers – This is the last reference in the Gospels to Jesus being present at a Synagogue on the Sabbath. He took seriously God's desire that his people assemble regularly for worship—which includes attending to the teaching from his Word. Some who claim to be part of God's people, seem to be inflicted with 'Sunday-itis', which mysteriously cures itself by Monday morning, and find excuses for missing one or more of the corporate meetings of the congregation. Notice that the woman of this account, who had been crippled for many years, was able to find a way to be present to hear God's word proclaimed. You might think, "If Jesus were present, I would make it out to hear him teach." The truth is that wherever his word is proclaimed faithfully by preachers of the Gospel, Jesus is present and speaking to his Church. They teach the same message as Jesus taught and demonstrated in a living parable on this Sabbath.

Immediate Help – It appears that the woman did not come to the Synagogue to meet with a ‘faith healer’ or to see miracles performed. She came to hear God’s word proclaimed and to join with the assembly in praise. Jesus took the initiative and called her forward, informed her that she was freed from her infirmity, placed his hands on her, and healed her. In contrast to this woman, many today think of the Church as a place to find physical healing and go to see ‘miracles’ performed and even hope to be the recipient of a miracle. If we understand correctly the purpose of this true miracle, we will see that it is an object lesson. It points to the reality that Jesus can loose mankind from the crippling grip of Satan and provide spiritual straightening. The immediate help that we need is not to have our physical infirmities lifted but to have our souls—that are bent double by sin—straightened out by the Saviour (Ps 146.8). Like this woman, everyone who has been straightened spiritually by the hand of Jesus should adore and praise him today, and every day.

Indignant Hardness – The synagogue rulers misunderstood the outcome of true religion—to provide for the needs of others *and* to do what is morally right (James 1.26-27). Too many in the Church forget to maintain balance and either make religion into strict adherence to a particular code of conduct or into mere service for man. When we become hardened to the work of grace that Jesus performs through the Spirit in hearts and lives, we tend to one extreme or the other. On one side, we give up performing works of mercy or getting involved in culture-changing activities because we conclude that this world is destined for destruction; we enclose ourselves in pious cocoons of self-righteousness as we await our transformation into eternal butterflies. On the other side, we slog through service for the physically and spiritually crippled with a weight of compulsion and no sense of vision or hope; like worms in dark tunnels we feel like we are eating the dirt of the world. In either case our hearts become harder and harder. As sinners saved by grace *for* service (Eph 2.8-10) we should be like puppies running free and joyously bouncing through each new day in service, holy obedience, and praise.

Inconsistent Hypocrites – Jesus calls Jewish leaders hypocrites at least ten times—whether they were Pharisees or, as in this case, Synagogue rulers. It is clear that anyone who calls for strict adherence to a law and yet finds ways to work around that law to his own advantage is viewed with disgust by Jesus. The Jews, by the time of Jesus, had developed a system of intricate rules related to what kind of work was or was not permissible on the Sabbath. They had even gone to the extent of including in the *Mishnah* (oral laws that they claimed were as binding as the written law in Scripture) a rule that prohibited tying knots on the Sabbath. Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount*, shows how the *Mishnah* often contradicts the intent of God’s Law in Scripture. Here, he challenges their foolishness by pointing out that they broke their own rule when they untied the knot of an ox or donkey to lead it to water. While we must keep the Sabbath holy (Ex 20.8-11), we must be careful to observe it in the spirit it was given to man—as a day of blessing to focus our attention on the eternal Creator and to relieve us from the drudgery of sin-cursed work. We must not forget the truth that the Sabbath is a merciful gift from God.

Inferred Hope – While the Sabbath is a gracious gift of mercy for us, so it is to be for all mankind. Jesus demonstrates this by loosing the woman from her crippling infirmity on the Sabbath. He specifically uses the word ‘loose’ (set free) to contrast what he did with the loosing (untying) of an ox. He argues from the lesser to the greater. And, he intends for us to extrapolate the lesson to an even greater loosing—the loosing of the soul from eternal bondage to sin, Satan and suffering. Acts of physical mercy are clearly included within the proper observance of the Sabbath. But more important, spiritual loosing is included. The greatest work of mercy that we can perform on the Sabbath is to loose a sinner from bondage and lead him to the water of life in Jesus.

Inclusive Humiliation – By his teaching Jesus shamed the leaders. Everyone who despises Jesus’ teaching will be humiliated. It may occur in this life when his hatred of Jesus and hypocrisy are made visible or it may be reserved for the Day of Judgement; but it is certain! Those who love Jesus will be delighted in what he is doing in saving sinners and will

leave the humiliation of the wicked to God. He will confound the foolishness of the worldly-wise!

Kingdom Growth [August 23]
(Judea, Fall 32 AD. Lk 13.18-21)

In these two parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, Jesus reinforces the truth that the initial size or apparent insignificance of something is not a valid measure of its ultimate importance or impact. This is especially true in the case of spiritual and eternal realities where God will not allow men to claim glory for themselves (1 Cor 1.18-31). Jesus delivered these same parables, in a collection of *Kingdom Parables*, earlier in the year when teaching by the Sea of Galilee. At that time he had been publicly rejected by the Pharisees, and in response taught the crowds about the real nature of the Kingdom of God. In this instance, his instruction appears to be focused on preparing the disciples to face discouragement when the Gospel would be rejected by their nation. These parables can also encourage us when we see the ‘Christian’ West in moral and spiritual decline and the apparent ascendancy of Islam. When evil flourishes and Christ, the Church, and Christians are ridiculed and despised we should remember the key lessons of these parables:

Church – When Jesus speaks of the ‘kingdom of God’ he is likely including in his scope all believers—past and present; those glorified and those alive on earth. Although Jesus is king over all nations (Ps 2.2, 8, 9; Rev 19.16) and thus his kingdom includes the entire world, it appears that his teachings about the kingdom of God refer specifically to the commonwealth of the saints who are united in Christ and have as their desire the advancement of Christ’s reign. However, when applying these parables to the Church, we are not to think that this *must* exclude the world. At the end of time, when all of the wicked are thrown into Hell (Mt 25.41; Rev 20.15), the inhabitants of the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3.13) will be conterminous with the Church.

Comparison – Jesus draws his similes from the domestic world of farming and the kitchen so everyone in his audience could understand his

examples. It is important that we notice how he uses these comparatives as it gives us a model for how we should communicate truth. We must not obscure truth (whether relating to the Gospel or to some other domain of knowledge) with complex concepts or dense language. Simplicity is essential for clarity. However, it is more important to see what Jesus, as the God-man, is doing when he uses this picturesque imagery. He is condescending to communicate with us on our terms. God, who is infinitely transcendent, would be entirely unrealizable in human experience if it were not for the fact that he has chosen to communicate to us in anthropomorphic terms and forms that are suitable for our finite natures and limited ability to comprehend. The unknowable God becomes truly knowable because of what he has communicated through his spoken revelation (recorded in Scripture), natural revelation (the evidence of his handiwork in creation), and his Son (the manifestation of Deity in human form (Col 1.15; Heb 1.1, 2)).

Commencement – It is obvious that Jesus chose two examples of very small things—a tiny seed and a micro-organism—to emphasize the small beginning of the kingdom of God. When we trace the history of humanity from Adam to the time of Christ we see that those who were in the Church represented only a tiny portion of humanity. For example, Noah and his family were the only ones preserved from the Flood, Abraham and his family were called out from the vast populations of Mesopotamia, and Judea was an almost insignificant province in the Roman Empire. After the resurrection of Christ, the disciples, in turn, numbered only a few dozen until the Day of Pentecost. However, with God’s work we are not to measure the results from a consideration of only its inception, anymore than we could judge the size of the Amazon by measuring a stream in the Andean plateau not far from the Pacific Ocean.

Conclusion – In God’s kingdom we are never to be discouraged or to despair over what appears to be insignificant and by an apparent lack of success. The beginning is not the end. Things looked dismal on a Friday afternoon 2,000 years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem, but by the following Sunday morning light was breaking through the eternal

spiritual darkness. Even when some of the disciples had gone north and returned to their fishing boats, within a few weeks the light became brighter as thousands aligned themselves forever with Jesus. Over the centuries lamps were set aflame along the shores of the Mediterranean and down the Indus, Rhone and Rhine valleys. More and more lights blinked on in the islands and distant lands. In some places (e.g., the Middle East and West) some lights have now burned out. But new lights are blazing in sub-Sahara Africa, Latin America and northern Asia. Hear the conclusion of the matter: Christ hasn't finished building his Church!

Consequential – The mustard seed grows into a large plant that not only bears more seed but also becomes a nesting place for birds. The yeast not only buds to produce more yeast but serves a purpose creating air pockets in dough and making the bread more palatable. These examples are indicative of what the growth of the Kingdom is like. Not only are the seeds to generate more seeds but the product of their growth is to be of service. The Church is not just a self-perpetuating institution. The Church, by its presence in the world, will have a consequential influence on mankind. The church is culture changing. It transforms not only the individuals who make it up but also entire societies in which it grows. Pray that God will extend his Kingdom.

The Elect are Preserved by God [August 24] **(Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 10.22-29)**

Significance – It is late in the year and cold, and Jesus is walking in the area of the Herodian temple called Solomon's Colonnade. Both the place and the timing are significant. It has been about two months since he last appeared in the temple, at the Feast of Booths. He *chose* to appear in the colonnade named after the wisest of the OT kings, at a place of traditional instruction, and at the time the Jews revered as the Festival of Lights in which they celebrated their liberty under Judas Maccabeus at the rededication (thus, *hanukkah*) of the temple (165 BC) after it had been desecrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (168 BC). He came to confront the unbelief of his enemies and declare again that he was the Messiah or Anointed-King, who was wiser than Solomon and who

provided true light through his teaching and offered a greater (spiritual) liberty than that obtained briefly under the Maccabees.

Solicitation – The Jews surrounded and pressed him, and demanded that he be clear about whether he was the Messiah. Their request for a statement is not so that they can honour him but rather so that they can do him harm. Much of his teaching, particularly in Jerusalem, had been veiled so that he would not be arrested before the time decreed for his crucifixion. The Jews were continually looking for an opportunity to accuse him of falsehood and they hoped that they could find a blatant pretext for arresting him. We will see, in the next meditation, that he states clearly that he is God and that the Jewish leaders, thinking he blasphemed, were prepared to stone him to death.

Statement – He responded, and said, that he had told them that he was the Messiah. He had done this, not through an explicit statement such as, “I am the Christ,” but rather through use of messianic terms in reference to himself, such as: “Son of God” and “Son of Man.” The problem was not that his statements were unclear, but that they were unwilling to hear and believe. Men today respond to God’s truth in the same way—they reject Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and display an unwillingness to accept the clear declarations of the Bible that Jesus is the God-man, the creator, and sovereign lawgiver.

Signs – Jesus then pointed to the miracles that he performed in his Father’s name as evidence that he was *the* messenger from God. The primary purpose of miracles is to validate God’s messengers—prophets, apostles, and Christ. Although we must believe that God can perform miracles at any time, and that he may do so, we are not to *expect* miracles in our day because God is not giving new direct revelation. With the completion of his revelation in the Bible, God no longer uses miracles to validate his message. Those in the Church who seek healing miracles are mistaken both about the purpose and the application of miracles. Rather, we are to accept Christ’s validated word and to look for the final revelatory miracle that will forever vindicate Jesus as Lord—his coming again from Heaven to raise the dead (1 Thess 4.13-17).

Sheep – The doctrine of God’s election is despised by many in the Church and ridiculed by the world. Our finite and sin-polluted minds make us believe that we know better than God how things should be and that he really cannot mean what he says—for example, “those he foreknew he also predestined ... those he predestined he also called” (Rom 8.29, 30). We cannot outthink God and must not suppose that we can understand how he can elect some to eternal salvation and reject others and, equally, hold all men responsible for their thoughts and actions. Whatever we think about election, we must not miss the point that Jesus declares it to be true. The reason the Jews who challenged him would not believe was because they were not his sheep given to him by the Father (29). Only those who are Jesus’ Sheep will respond to the Gospel message and follow him. And, Jesus only knows, lovingly, those who are his sheep. Nevertheless, those who remain in obstinate unbelief are held guilty and soundly condemned for rejecting Jesus Christ.

Salvation – Jesus not only teaches the truth about election, but also about the eternal preservation of those who have been saved. It is impossible for anyone who has received Jesus as saviour to lose his salvation. Jesus gives us eternal life. We do not earn it and it cannot be purchased, it is a gift (Jn 3.16; Rom 6.23; Eph 2.8, 9). Therefore, receiving salvation is not dependent on anything we do and cannot be lost by anything we do. Jesus is explicit about this assurance when he says that no one can snatch his sheep out of his hand. The ‘no one’ must include our own selves. Salvation, once given, is eternal. This does not mean that believers will not sin. Nor does it mean that we have a licence to sin. The preservation of the sheep involves our following and obeying the voice of our master and eating where he leads us. This means that we should do what Jesus requires of us as defined in his Law. It also means that God will never allow those who are truly his sheep to do anything that could ultimately lead to their being lost to Satan. He will keep us from sinning, and when he permits us to sin he will discipline us and bring us back to the fold through true repentance. The preservation of the sheep does not depend on the ability of the sheep. It is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who defends and preserves his flock (28). Their defence also

rests in the hands of the omnipotent Father (29). God's plan for the salvation of the sheep in Jesus' flock cannot be thwarted or aborted. His sheep cannot be kept from an eternal life of joy and happiness with Jesus.

Jesus is God [August 25]
(Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 10.30-39)

Same Substance – Early confessions of faith used in the Church to define orthodoxy, such as the *Nicene Creed* (Constantinople, c. 381 A. D.) and the *Athanasian Creed* (early 5th century), express the belief that Jesus—God the Son—is a unique person but of the same substance as God the Father. This belief did not develop from traditions within the early Christian Church. Rather, it is the explicit teaching of Jesus that the early Creeds incorporated to ensure that those who held to heresies¹³ were identified and circumscribed. For example, when Jesus was teaching in Solomon's Colonnade he stated that, "I and the Father are one." Although it is true that Jesus and the Father have a common purpose with respect to the preservation of the sheep (Jn 10.28, 29), in this instance he is not speaking of their united strategy, nor is he suggesting that in some way he and the father are the same person just operating in different spheres. Rather, as the Greek indicates ('one' is neuter, "one thing"), he is speaking of the substance that he and the Father share—the essence of Deity. Jesus is God (Jn 20.28; Phil 2.6; Col 2.9).

Jesus did not walk around Judea and Galilee saying, "I am God." But, when asked explicitly (Jn 10.24) to defend his right to interpret the Law and forgive sins, he proclaimed his Messianic role and office. It is clear that the Jews who were listening understood his statement to be a declaration of essential unity with God, since they accused him of blasphemy by claiming that he was God (33). For a man to declare himself to be God is blasphemy, unless it is true. And, it can only be true in the case of the Son of God, Jesus Christ

¹³ E.g., Arianism: the Son is a created god, both a distinct person and a different substance; and Modalism or Sabellianism: the Son is a mode of God, not a distinct person.

Seizing and Stoning – The Jews did not want to consider the possibility that Jesus is truly God. Instead they wanted to silence him by arresting him to get him out of the way, or stone him to death (the punishment for blasphemy; Lev 24.16). We must not think that the Jews were in a special class of men who are to be hated and ridiculed for their rejection of Jesus. They are representative of all mankind. Men, born in sin, do not want to hear that Jesus is God because, if he is, then he must be worshiped and obeyed as God. Men do not want to accept the provision God has made through Christ for atoning for man's sins. They would rather attempt to appease God's wrath against sin through their own efforts, and even think that in the name of 'religion' they can defend God's honour by executing violence. Their vile practices have the veneer of piety but are nothing more than proud self-aggrandizement.

Substantive Signs – Jesus courageously responds to their threatening by an appeal to the evidence of his Deity: his own works, the proclamation of the Scriptures, and the accord between his actions and the Father's will. Do not make a mistake by thinking that Jesus was courageous because he is God. His divine nature was veiled during his incarnation. He had to suffer temptation (Heb 4.15) and persecution (Jn 15.20) just as we do. Jesus was tempted to be afraid as much as any man. His courage came from his absolute trust that he was doing the Father's will and that no man could deflect God's purposes. So he calmly asked his opponents to indicate which of his miraculous works was the cause of their attempt to stone him. Even if they would not believe his words about his deity, they should have believed the miracles he performed (32, 38) because no one can do the work he did unless he is God. We should approach the Christ-hating world with the same calm courage. We know that nothing will happen to us without the express permission of our Heavenly Father, and our lives should be lived so circumspectly that the enemies of Christ will have nothing with which to accuse or reproach us (1 Pt 2.11-12).

Scriptural Support – Jesus then challenged them by quoting from the Law (the Scriptures)—the standard they claimed as the source for their indignation against him. He referenced Psalm 82.6 to show that those appointed as judges stood in the place of God and are called 'gods' (see

also, Ex 21.6; Ex 22.8). He argued from the lesser to the greater. The Jews could not logically accuse him of blasphemy for using the term ‘Son of God’ when his calling and mission were superior to that of a human judge. He answered the fools according to their folly (Prov 26.5) by showing the illogic of their argument. We can use the same approach and point out the logical inconsistencies that people consistently pursue. For example, the evolutionist who believes that there are only natural causes cannot logically, from his own presuppositions, defend the idea that anything can be immoral or that there is such a thing as love or beauty. Or, the person who claims that he believes the Bible, which cannot be broken (35) and is therefore inerrant, cannot logically claim that the virgin conception and resurrection of Jesus are historical and at the same time reject the reality that God created the universe in six 24-hour days.

Sanctified Service – Jesus’ final defence of his Deity is his own adherence to the Law that they claim to love. He declares that there is a unity of purpose and practice between what he does and what the Father does (37). He keeps the Law in perfect obedience and thereby shows that there is total consistency between the will of the Father and the work of the Son. For us to be effective witnesses for Christ, our ways must conform entirely to God’s Law.

Principles of Discipleship

Refuge and Reflection [August 26] **(Perea, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 10.40-42)**

Refuge – Jesus withdrew from the antagonism and unbelief he found among the Jewish leaders and many of the people of Jerusalem by going to Perea, a non-Jewish territory across the Jordan River from Jericho. It appears that this visit to Perea may have been for a number of reasons. The primary reason for this first (of two¹⁴) withdrawal from public view may simply have been because he was tired and needed to recharge. In

¹⁴ The other is recorded in John 11.54, and occurs just prior to Jesus’ trial and crucifixion.

his human nature, while on earth, Jesus had to face the challenges of being tired, hungry and thirsty just as any other man. In his case, however, he had the additional stress of carrying the weight of his mission to save mankind from their sin. From his example, we learn that we must not allow the pressures of the sinful world to overwhelm us and should take time for recreation, refreshment, and retreat.

Reflection – Taking time out for rest does not mean that we are to replace one pressure-filled activity with another. The way of rest for a Christian is not to leave work on Friday afternoon and fill the weekend with a stressful trip to the cottage or to pack Saturday and Sunday with household chores, shopping, and sports. Although we legitimately can, and should, take vacations to rest, God instituted the Sabbath, (Hebrew for ‘cease’ or ‘rest’) at the end of his creative week of work, as a perpetual blessing for mankind (Mk 2.27) and as the primary means by which we can take refuge from the legitimate demands of the other days of the week. In the account of Jesus’ withdrawal, there is an implied example of how we are to observe and keep the Sabbath. In going to the place where John had been baptizing, Jesus returned to the starting point of his ministry. He may have gone there to remind himself of the purpose of his mission at the place where the Father had made the declaration: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” In the face of strong opposition and cause for discouragement, it was good for him to reflect on his objective and on the support he had from the Father. This would prepare him to face the Pharisees again and the upcoming challenge of the cross. When we take time for rest, it should also include reflection. This is a key aspect of Sabbath worship where we lift our eyes from this sin-stained, decaying world and gaze on the glory of the infinite beauty of the God who created, sustains, and saves. Our thoughts move from the mundane to the eternal and we are reminded that we are not products of chance events in a random universe, but cherished participants in the outworking of God’s providence.

Reinforcement – Many people came to Jesus where he was resting. We note, from what the Apostle John tells us, that they were supportive believers in Christ. Some had heard and believed the message of John the

Baptist when he preached repentance and pointed out the Messiah to them. Others came along to meet Jesus when he returned to their territory. They all came together to encourage him and to be encouraged by him. When we come together with like-minded believers in the congregation of the saints (called-out, holy ones), we are reminded that we do not face the challenges of the world alone and gain the same kind of reinforcement that Christ would have received from the support of this believing crowd. We all find it very encouraging when the church building is full of worshipers on Sunday. This should reinforce in us a desire to mutually encourage one another by being present at the stated services of the congregation (Heb 10.24-25).

Ratification – The people who heard John preach about Jesus bore testimony to the truth that Jesus was the Messiah. John’s work and witness teaches of:

- *Preparation* – John brought before the people the reality of their sin and the need for repentance. He ploughed hearts so that the soil was prepared to receive the seed of the Gospel from the lips of Jesus. All of us have a similar role. We are often presented with opportunities in which we can speak with our neighbours about God’s righteous demands so that when, God willing, they hear the Gospel preached they will repent and believe.
- *Preaching* – All that John said about Jesus was true. It was his preaching about Jesus that led the people to believe that he was the Messiah. This reinforces the Bible’s teaching that it is primarily preaching (Rom 10.14) that God uses to make Jesus known—not concerts, drama productions, or the latest ‘method’ used to attract and entertain the crowds.
- *Portents* – It is not miracles that direct people to Jesus, it is proclamation. The people noted that “John never performed a miraculous sign,” yet his words had an impact. Many witnessed Jesus perform miracles and yet they turned away in disbelief. People in the Church today seek miracles for the wrong reasons. Their purpose was to vindicate and validate Jesus as the Messiah. Their purpose is not to convince and convert.

Response – Even though John was dead, his preaching still had an influence in the Transjordan region where there were few educated Jews and leaders of the religious sects. It seems that God is reminding us that not many will be saved from among the elite—university professors, intellectuals in the media, opinion leaders, and politicians (1 Cor 1.26-27). They are generally too full of their own opinions to have time for the simple, plain truths of Scripture. God gathers the majority of his people from among plain folk who have little respect in this world and whose share of what it offers is meagre. He offers them salvation which they receive with joy and eternal thankfulness.

The Narrow Door [August 27]

(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 13.22-30)

Nearing Death – As Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem to face the final challenges in his work of salvation—his trial and crucifixion—it is ironic and yet appropriate that someone would ask him about the number of people who are going to be saved. It was an important question, at that time, since Jesus would undoubtedly have been pondering this exact question during his period of refuge and reflection in Perea. In his divine nature he knew exactly how many were among the elect whom he would save. But, in his human nature that, for a time, veiled eternity he would have wondered if all of his persecution was worth enduring. That he didn't flinch from the final journey and the trials to face him indicates that he was convinced that there was nothing of greater importance in the entire universe than displaying God's love for lost sinners through his ultimate sacrifice.

Narrow Door – The question was asked in a negative form, “Are only a few going to be saved?” In fact many are going to be saved (Rev 7.9), but Jesus does not answer the question directly since it was probably formulated to trap him—if he said that few would be saved the people could lose hope, whereas if he said that many would be saved they could become cavalier, assuming that salvation was cheap and easy. Instead, he capitalizes on the question to move the lesson from a consideration of the count to the conditions. He first focuses on the narrowness of the way.

Although he emphasizes personal responsibility in making an effort to enter through the only possible way to salvation, he is not suggesting that a person can earn salvation through works of merit. Rather, as we know from his earlier teaching (Jn 10.9; see also Jn 14.6), he is presenting the reality that there are not many roads to Heaven and that all faiths are not true faith. Salvation from sin is found in Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4.12). In this age of false tolerance and feigned objectivity, we must stand firmly on the side of Divine truth that says that many will try to find ways to reach Heaven through counterfeit religions, but without belief and faith in Jesus as the God-man their schemes and programs are worthless.

Negligent Denied – Jews at the time of Jesus believed that they had a divine right to enter the Kingdom of God because various Covenant administrations had been made with their forefathers. Jesus teaches that a time comes when the door will be shut and no one can claim a right to have it reopened. The immediate application of the door being shut was when the nation of Israel rejected the Messiah a few months after this teaching, and the Gospel was presented to the Gentiles. The door may also be shut when a person hears the Gospel and turns away in unbelief or when he dies without having received Christ as his saviour. The final shutting of the door will be on the Day of Judgement when God balances the eternal accounts. For every person there comes a time when the door will be shut and it will be too late to enter. At that point, each of us will either be sitting with Jesus at his glorious wedding banquet or will be standing outside knocking. Then those standing outside will not be able to claim admittance because they had respect for Jesus as a good teacher, had been part of his social setting (i.e., being part of a local congregation), or had known many things about him and had even taught theology in a seminary. If we do not love Jesus *now*, a time will come when he will disavow knowing us and he will shut us out of the Kingdom forever.

Nightmare Doom – In general people are clueless about how serious a thing it is to reject Jesus as their saviour. Most people, if they think consciously about God and eternity, are convinced that they will scrape

through. They believe that a ‘good god’ couldn’t send them to Hell—after all they are not terribly bad; just a bit selfish, a bit lustful, a bit greedy, and a bit hateful. Jesus does not countenance that false hope. He calls them ‘evildoers’. When it comes to the matter of eternal judgement, there are no degrees of sin. As James (James 2.10) says, if we break one command we have broken all of them. Every evildoer outside the door of Heaven will be sent away into a doom that will make even an amalgam of every disturbing psychological anxiety and debilitating physical ailment seem like Fantasy Island. Jesus does not itemize the particular calamities that are pending, but uses weeping and gnashing of teeth to describe the unbearable consequences of being cast into Hell. God is good. He has shown this by sending his Son to take the punishment of those who believe in him (Rom 5.8). But, God is also just. He will not absolve anyone who rejects Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Nations’ Delight – To aggravate the burden of rejecting Jesus, those who are cast out will see the believers’ glory—at least on the Day of Judgement, and possibly into eternity. The self-pious, proud, but unbelieving, Jews of Jesus’ day will have to endure seeing despised Gentiles from every nation streaming with great delight into Glory (Lk 13.29-30). This will aggravate their misery. It will be the same for all rich men, beautiful women, strong athletes, popular singers, and effeminate beauty pageant judges who scorn Christ and laugh at Christians. They will see those whom they hated and despised dwelling eternally in blessed light and favoured immortality. Indeed, those who are thought to be the last in this world will be first into eternity. If you have read this far today, and you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you should heed the dire warning from his lips and make every effort to enter through the narrow door. If you are a believer, then rejoice that you are saved for all eternity.

Responsibility for the Desolation of Jerusalem [August 28]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 13.31-35)

Pharisaic Pretext – Herod was undoubtedly interested in finding out who Jesus was (Lk 9.9). However, to say that he was seeking to kill

Jesus is likely false. Therefore, when the Pharisees came to Jesus with their message it seems that they were luring him back to Judea where they hoped to have an opportunity to arrest him. It is ironic that they pretend to help Jesus by warning him of an enemy, when in fact it was they who were his enemy. Sin has often hidden in this ‘friendly’ disguise since the day Satan pretended to offer enlightenment to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Instead, he brought us only blackest darkness. We need to be aware of this duplicity that is hidden in everyone who hates Christ and his laws. Their purpose is always to destroy anything, including the Church, that reminds them that Christ is King.

Pointed Putdown – Jesus went along with the Pharisees pretended purpose in coming to him and indicated in his reply that he would not go elsewhere because of a threat from a man. Instead, he gave the Pharisees a message to take to Herod that was really directed at them. In calling Herod a ‘fox’ he was implicating the Pharisees. They were the ones who were crafty and deceitful, and preying with the intent to kill.

Priority Purpose – His message to them is that he had to continue fulfilling his mission without permitting anything to get in the way. He was directing his schedule, not any man—be he a king or religious leader. His reference to three days in which he must work, is symbolic. He was not suggesting that he would arrive in Jerusalem in three days or that his tasks would be completed in the next few days. Rather he is speaking prophetically of what would be required to accomplish his work on earth in the three days allocated to his death and resurrection. We should note his reference to driving out demons and healing, rather than to his teaching ministry. He likely spoke of these representative signs of his authority as a reminder to the Pharisees that he was from Heaven. He had told them previously that even if they wouldn’t believe because of his teaching, they should at least believe because his miracles attested to his origin (John 10.37).

Prophet’s Place – The evidence that he had in mind the three days related to his death and resurrection for the completion of his ministry, is given by his reference to the necessity of his death in Jerusalem. He must

die in Jerusalem, not in Perea or even Nazareth, just as it was decreed that he be born in the City of David—Bethlehem. Beside the decree of God, his death in Jerusalem was required because it is there that God appointed sacrifice for sin.

Pathetic Pity – His ministry, to this point, had been focused on offering admission to the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jewish nation, whose religious life was centered on Jerusalem. And, on mentioning the city, he began to lament its rejection of him as the Messiah. He came to offer the residents eternal protection and they would soon throw him to the Roman wolves. This would be the decisive factor in his rejection of the Jewish nation and the opening of the doors of salvation to the Gentile nations.

Persistently Perverse – Jesus was handed over to crucifixion according to the set purpose and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2.23), yet he makes it clear that each person who rejected him would be judged according to his own unwillingness to receive salvation from his hand. We can never make God's election and predestination an excuse for not repenting and believing. Each one of us is personally responsible for how we respond to the message about Jesus Christ. If we persist in rebellion and rejection, we will be held liable for every drop of the innocent blood that dripped from his wounds.

Plundered Patrimony – The 'house' that Jesus refers to could be any, or all, of the temple in Jerusalem, the city, or the nation of Israel. In fact, all three are now desolate. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD and an abomination was erected in its place. In spite of what many believe, the millennial age is not going to be ushered in when a replacement temple is built in Jerusalem. The temple is now the New Testament Church (2 Cor 6.16). The old city is also desolate and no longer God's holy city. The holy city is the Church (Heb 12.22). The modern nation of Israel or ethnic Jews, again in spite of what many Christians think, are not God's special nation. The true Israel, and spiritual seed of Abraham, is the Church (Rom 9.6; Gal 6.16).

Personal Profession – Everyone who disregards Jesus is destined for the same doom. Those who have been raised in Covenant families and who reject Jesus will be left desolate, as were many of the Jews of his day. The children of Christians today are most culpable if they disown Jesus because they have been blessed with a rich heritage—the complete revelation of Jesus in the Bible and godly parents who showed them the way of salvation. No one can claim a right to the Kingdom of God based on his heritage. The only ones who will be saved are those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah and who look forward to that day when he will come again to this earth to complete his work of redemption, by raising the dead. You, and you alone, have to make the profession of faith: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’. Don’t let it be too late.

Sabbath Salvation vs Spiteful Selfishness [August 29]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 14.1-6)

Spying – A leader among the Pharisees, under false pretences, invited Jesus to his home for a meal. Like a cat waiting for a mouse to appear in a hole in the wall, his intention was not to honour and serve Jesus but to hound and slander him. Jesus undoubtedly knew that the man’s intentions were not right. Nevertheless, he used the invitation as an opportunity to teach truth about the true nature of the Sabbath. His attendance at what would have been a lavish meal shows that the Sabbath, as a day of rest, is not a day for Spartan-like self-denial, but rather it is a day to rejoice in the goodness and blessings that God has provided mankind. There are too many people today who fear population growth and proclaim resource scarcity. They do not believe God when he *blesses* mankind with the words: “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” (Gen 1.28; Gen 9.1) Christians should never be ashamed to enjoy the spiritual and temporal blessings of the Sabbath—rejoicing in a spiritual feast during worship and enjoying a temporal feast from the bounty with which God has endowed his creation and his faithful people.

Sufferer – As part of their plot to catch Jesus in a trap, the Pharisees placed an ailing man opposite Jesus at the dinner. The man was probably

suffering from a serious heart condition or a failing kidney and was disfigured with swollen limbs and facial features. He was likely a dupe, with no idea that he was being used as a decoy. His sad plight was made worse by the Pharisees' heartless use of his condition as an instrument in their evil plot. This is the first indication, in the account, that the Pharisees were only concerned for their own interests and positions and had no love for their neighbours.

Sabbath – Jesus knew exactly what they were up to. He knew why the sick man had been placed opposite him and he knew that the Pharisees thought that they could confound him with an impossible dilemma—if he ignored the man's situation he could be charged with having no compassion; but if he healed the man he could be charged with violating the Sabbath. The mistake they made was to apply their own interpretation of the Sabbath law (Ex 20.8-11). Even true Christians make the same mistake and try to force the Sabbath into a box that fits their own interpretations. Many today view the Sabbath as an archaic institution with no relevance for us. Others view it as just a day off from work, in which they can do as they please—such as watching football or visiting the mall—once they have attended a morning worship service. Others try to place the Sabbath in a straight-jacket and squeeze from it any sense of its true meaning—first as a sign of eternal fellowship with God, and secondly as a sign of eternal deliverance from sin. So being fully aware of their false pretences, Jesus immediately raised the issue of the Sabbath and turned to the legal experts and asked them to give a proper definition of the meaning of the Sabbath. He asked if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. On another occasion he had asked if it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Lk 6.9).

Salvation – Rather than pushing the Pharisees for an answer, he answered the question by taking action—he healed the man. He also asked him to leave the house—likely to save him from embarrassment as the pawn in the Pharisees' despicable game. The point of this healing miracle was not to demonstrate that he is the Son of God. By this point in his public ministry his miracles had attested to his origin. Rather, the purpose of this healing is to help us better understand the true meaning of

the Sabbath. We are certainly to take from his example the message that it is proper for us to undertake works of mercy on the Sabbath. In this, there is also a second indictment of the Pharisees' lack of concern for true neighbourliness. But of even more importance for us is the message that the Sabbath is *the* day of salvation. The healing of the man is a type or sign that God provides eternal rest on the Sabbath. It would be on a new Sabbath, a few months later, that Christ, in rising from the dead, would forever break the bonds of sin and suffering and provide eternal hope.

Standard – Jesus concludes his instruction on the meaning of the Sabbath by asking a practical question of the Pharisees—would they rescue their son or ox that had fallen into a well? His choice of examples is astute and piercing. As a rhetorical question, the expected answer was that they would rescue their own son or ox. Notice the subtle difference, however, in how Jesus put the question this time; in contrast to the form of his question when he healed a man's shrivelled hand on a Sabbath, in Galilee, many months previous (Mt 12.11). This time, he doesn't contrast the value of the life of a man to that of a sheep that has fallen in a pit. Rather, he brings a third charge of selfishness against the Pharisees by pointing out that they would act in their own interest on the Sabbath to protect the life of a family member or to preserve their property, but they had no concern for the wellbeing of a neighbour. Jesus shows what real neighbourliness consists of—concern for our fellow man in need—and teaches that God set the gold-standard for true love by providing salvation through Christ.

Silence – The Pharisees' plot had backfired and they were confronted with their faulty interpretation of the Sabbath, their guilt for trying to catch Jesus in a breach of the law, and their selfish attitude toward their neighbour. They had no response to Jesus and remained silent because they knew they were accountable before God (Rom 3.19).

Pride and Prejudice vs Humility and Hospitality [August 30]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 14.7-14)

Jesus was attending a Sabbath banquet at a Pharisee's home and the Pharisees attempted to catch him in a dilemma—heal a man on the Sabbath and break the law or not heal and show a lack of compassion. As we saw, the Pharisees' plot backfired and they were confronted with their faulty interpretation of the Law, their guilt for trying to trap Jesus, and their selfish attitude toward their sick neighbour. Jesus counters with additional challenges to their selfishness.

Pride – We can all think of people—at work, in our school, or possibly even in our congregation—who are full of pride and pushily attempt to manipulate circumstances to get ahead and gain worldly recognition and respect. One of the classic examples, in literature, of this kind of person is Mrs. Bennet in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*. All of her actions are motivated by the kind of pride Jesus condemned in the Pharisees. For example, the first time she visits Mr. Bingley's house she remarks that they dine with “four-and-twenty families.” Her desire to advance her daughters through invitations to banquets, dances, and other social gatherings is so despicable that it is difficult to find anything likable or worthy about her.

Popularity is the vain ambition of many. It is exhibited across a spectrum of our society; from girls who demand that their rich fathers throw them extravagant 16th-birthday parties, to employees in the chain-of-command who relish mentioning that they were in a meeting attended by the CEO, to drug dealers who want their name feared on the street, to homemakers who wish to be recognized as the chairperson of the PTA. We all play the same game as the Pharisees at the banquet who wanted to be seen and admired by all. Jesus reminded the participants at the banquet that those who seek recognition are setting themselves up for a humiliating deflation (Prov 16.18). Yet, we think that this rule doesn't apply to us. If we need to be reminded of the fleeting nature of popularity, we just need to look at one of the volumes of *Marquis Who's Who*, from 1899 onward and see how many names we *don't* recognize.

Humility – We need to purge out of our system the vile dross of cultivating a care about what others think of us. It is the approval of God,

not that of men, that we should be concerned about. True humility before God has three parts:

- *Attitude* – We must truly believe that everything we have—intelligence, skills, resources—is a gift from God. No one *is* accomplished before God, and he isn't impressed by our status in society or the Church. All of man's accomplishments are made possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit—by general (often called *common*) grace or by saving grace.
- *Action* – Because we do not deserve rewards or recognition of any kind, from God or man, we should act out of this knowledge. We should strive to serve, not for success; to be of value, not to gain a victory.
- *Acquiescence* – When Jesus advised the guests to take the lowest places at the banquet he was not giving them a formula for success. Pretended humility is more disgusting than open ambition because it is hypocritical. While there are exceptions, it is generally true that people who prove to be of value in a job or a congregation are eventually recognized. But our service must not be motivated by the possibility of reward but by love.

Humility is a fundamental requirement of living the Christian life (Mt 18.4; Eph 4.2; Phil 2.3). However, it is not something we can know we have nor is it something we can work at by thinking poorly of ourselves. If we think we are humble, we are not being humble! Humility is a 'negative' virtue—the absence of pride. To be humble, we must imitate Christ, and simply not continue thinking about ourselves (Phil 2.1-8).

Prejudice – Jesus extends his lesson on selfishness by rebuking the host of the banquet for his prejudice. His motivation in inviting his friends, relatives, and rich neighbours, while excluding others, was to repay an obligation and put them in his debt or to be seen socializing with the 'rich and famous' and to buy recognition and status. Jesus is not censuring family gatherings (e.g., a Thanksgiving meal) when he told the man not to invite friends and family, but is, rather, condemning the misuse of hospitality to feed pride.

Hospitality – Real hospitality is selfless. It is to be offered without any hope or expectation of receiving repayment or reward—thus Jesus’ instructed the man that he should have invited the poor, crippled, lame, and blind because they could not repay or reward him. We are instructed to be hospitable (Rom 12.13; 1 Tim 3.2; 1 Tim 5.10; Titus 1.8), and our hospitality must be:

- *Genuine* – We must not invite people to our homes or to our fellowship lunch because we want to get something out of them. For example, if we decline to invite a person passing through, but invite someone we hope might stay in the congregation, then our motivation is false (Heb 13.2).
- *Generous* – Our hospitality is to be given to everyone as a joyful offering to Jesus, out of love; and not observed as an arduous duty (2 Cor 9.7; 1 Pt 4.9).

It is difficult for us to trust God. However, as we live out our lives for Christ, in a Christ-like manner, we need to stop worrying about gaining the approval of men who are dying to Hell. Instead, we must live for Heaven, with true humility and true hospitality, and leave the rest in God’s hands!

An Eternal Feast [August 31]

(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 14.15-24)

Eats – While Jesus was attending a banquet at a Pharisee’s home he rebuked those present for using the banquet to further their selfish pride. One of the guests, hearing Jesus speak of rewards for the righteous at the resurrection, expounded on the blessing it will be for those who get to eat with the coming Messiah. Ironically, he was sitting at a feast with the Messiah and had missed entirely the point of Jesus’ rebuke. He incorrectly assumed, because he was a Jew and likely a Pharisee, that he would be among those who would eat at God’s eternal feast. Jesus answers with a parable that exposes the dangers of a false confidence among those who attempt to play games with God.

Entreaty – The parable opens with a man who has prepared a great banquet to which many have been invited. We are to understand the ‘man’ to be God who has sent out his Gospel invitation to the world. In receiving this parable we should focus on God’s invitation of many guests. Jesus is not dealing here with the doctrine of election and the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work in our soul. He declared that truth previously (Jn 6.44, 65; Jn 10.22-29). Rather, he is now dealing with the offer of salvation that God makes to all mankind, his entreaty to men to receive the invitation, and man’s responsibility to respond to that offer. We should note four key dimensions of this invitation:

- *Greatness* – It is a great banquet. God is not niggardly. He has prepared an eternal feast that is beyond anything we can imagine (1 Cor 2.9).
- *Gift* – It is a banquet to which men are invited, not a supermarket. The food is freely offered—we don’t pick it, nor do we have to *pay* for it (Is 55.1).
- *Generality* – Many guests from the world are invited. This is not limited to the covenant community of Jews or those in the Church (Jn 3.16).
- *Generational* – Everything is prepared and the invitations now sent out. This is as true for us as it was for the Jews of Jesus’ day (2 Cor 6.2).

Excuses – In the ancient world guests were invited to a banquet on a specific day and, based on the number accepting, the host would prepare sufficient food. When the food was ready, the host would send his servants to call the guests to assemble for the actual meal (Est 5.8; Est 6.14). This context helps us understand the situation in the parable, since the guests would have already formally accepted the invitation, and shows how lame their excuses were. They all knew about the banquet and should have been preparing to attend, but when the time arrived for the dinner they all begged off. Each of their excuses is clearly fabricated in an attempt to disguise their unwillingness to attend. No one would buy property without having examined it first and no one would buy oxen without first ensuring that they were healthy and capable of ploughing. Similarly, no one would decide to hold a marriage ceremony on short

notice. While each of the undertakings in the excuses is legitimate in the right situations, they are clearly foolish answers given to the messengers and nothing more than a colourful package filled with air. The reality is that they did not *want* to attend the banquet. The spiritual application is clear. People everywhere allow the valid interests of this world (property, the means of production, and family relationships) take precedence over spiritual welfare and attendance at the feast that God has prepared through Jesus. They settle for inferior temporal substitutes that in light of eternal realities have less substance than vapour. What sort of excuses do you make to avoid going to God's banquet? What keeps you too busy to respond to God's invitation?

Exploited – Those who were originally invited—historically the Jews who rejected Jesus, and today those growing up in the covenant community, the Church—made excuses for not attending the banquet, so the host sent out his servants to bring in the disadvantaged and exploited. God saves people from all classes of society, but it seems that those who are the most educated, have a Christian heritage, or have the most material advantages quickly turn away from God. In response God opens up a special place in his kingdom for the weak and insignificant of the world; not because they are exploited but because they have no worldly power and he can show the power of his grace through them (1 Cor 1.26-29). They cannot afford the luxuries of the world and are truly in awe that God would pull them from the slum and give them the hope of a kingdom and a seat at the eternal wedding feast of his Son.

Excess – Even with the calling of the Gentiles into God's kingdom and the opening of the feast to every disadvantaged group, there is room for more. There is no limit to God's grace—it is sufficient to save all mankind. The invitation of the Gospel excludes none except those who exclude themselves through excuses. The last sermon, entitled "Excuses," that D. L. Moody preached (1899-11-23 in Kansas City) was based on the text of this parable. He was ill, with pains in his chest, and had to hold himself upright on the pulpit. As sick as he was, he preached the Gospel and some fifty people put their faith in Christ on that Thursday evening. A month later he was dead. Moody compelled men to

come to the eternal feast with his dying breath. You still have a living breath with which to respond to the invitation.

Exclusion – Do not ignore God’s invitation to attend the eternal feast. God is angry with anyone who rejects his invitation with excuses and will exclude him forever from the banquet with his Son. There is no room for ‘maybe’, no time for ‘later’. Grace despised is grace denied.

The Cost of Discipleship [September 1]

(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 14.25-35)

Crowds – At a private banquet in a Pharisee’s home Jesus had instructed the host and guests about the choices they had to make—service over selfishness, humility and hospitality instead of pride and prejudice, and attendance at God’s eternal feast versus faulty excuses (Lk 14.1-24). After leaving the banquet, he confronted the crowds following him with a similar message of personal responsibility. Their enthusiasm for him was tainted by their selfish interest in seeing miracles or with false messianic expectations. So he challenged them to face rationally the costly consequences of being his true disciples, or followers. In our day, someone setting out to become a doctor or engineer must be aware of the costs and be willing to endure the hardships to reach the goal. The cost of Christian discipleship is similar, and the path should not be entered upon lightly or with a cavalier attitude. If you claim to be a disciple of Jesus, you are to assess the costs and be:

1. **Committed** – Jesus uses colourful imagery to emphasize the point that we are to love him more than anything else in the world (Mt 10.37). He does not mean (26) that we are literally to hate family members or even ourselves or we would violate the law of love (Mt 5.43-48; Eph 5.25-33). Rather, our love for him must be so strong that, comparatively, our love for family and self is ‘hatred’—we are to love the giver of all good things more than the gifts we have received. In some ways it is hard for us, who have grown up in the ‘Christian’ West, to understand what Jesus means. Those who have become Christians in a Muslim culture understand more fully. They

know that by becoming Christians they have been cut off from their families and that at any time they could forfeit their lives to violent and fanatical Christ-haters.

2. **Crucified** – When we align ourselves with Jesus, we must be prepared to face crucifixion for the advance of his kingdom. This does not mean that we will all be nailed to crosses—our ‘enlightened’ society uses more subtle forms of intimidation and persecution—although in countries dominated by Islam and Hinduism, Christians are tortured and executed for their faith in Christ. In Jesus’ day, when a criminal carried his cross through the city to the site of execution, he was visibly admitting his guilt under law. In a similar way, we are to be prepared publicly to identify ourselves with Christ even if that means we will be subjected to derision, scorn and abuse.
3. **Counting** – Aligning with Christ has a significant cost associated with it—giving up our sinful desires (from our sin-polluted natures) to live by the world’s standards. If we are not willing to give up our cultivated lusts and lies, cherished grudges and gossip, and clamouring for parties and pleasure; then we are not willing to count the cost of following Jesus. We must be wise stewards of the physical, intellectual, and material resources given to us by God, and must not embark on building a Christian life if we are not willing to apply watchfulness and self-denial to complete it.
4. **Calculating** – It may appear that the analogy in verses 31-33 is just a restatement of the one used in verses 28-30. However, the example of the king considering waging war focuses on a different dimension of the cost of being a disciple than calculating if one has sufficient resources to build a tower. The point of the second illustration is *not* that Christians are at war with the world (although they are to be!) and are to be willing to fight to the death. If that was the message then suing for peace with Satan as the opposing king contradicts this. It seems that Jesus is telling us that we need to calculate if we can really fight against *him* with our natural and temporal resources. The

point is, we cannot win a war against Jesus and must be willing to give up our autonomy and become his subject.

5. **Constructive** – Jesus used the illustration of salt’s effectiveness at other times to indicate that Christians are a preserving or seasoning influence in society (Mt 5.13; Mk 9.50). Here (34) he focuses on the property of salt as a preservative, its value for stanching wounds, or as an antiseptic. In brief, Jesus says that just as salt is useful and has constructive value, so the Christian’s life is to be useful and constructive. We are to live out our lives in a way that will build up the Kingdom of God. This means that we will often have to give up our own desires. Christians who live selfishly are like salt that has lost its usefulness.

Challenge – There are three ways, in this passage, that Jesus presents us with the challenge of being a true disciple. First, the five illustrations we have just reviewed set the benchmark for counting the costs of discipleship. Second, he says three times—which means that it is without question—that anyone who lives for self and not for him cannot be his disciple (26, 27, 33). If we don’t have the attributes of disciples, then we aren’t disciples! Third, he says (35) that we must listen to his instruction. As always, listening to Jesus is not just hearing what he says but doing it. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was approaching the crucifixion and was living the life of sacrifice he expects from his disciples. He presents these principles with a life-and-death urgency. Discipleship is serious business and we are to take it seriously—no equivocating, hesitancy, or bargaining; just obedience!

Made Alive in Jesus

Seeking and Saving Sinners (Part 1) [September 2]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 15.1-7)

Sinners – Jesus had a magnetic personality. When he joined a group standing nearby or entered a room he become the focus of attention—whether he was teaching, holding a child, performing miracles, or

debating with the Pharisees a crowd gathered. The Jewish leaders were attracted, like spectators at the scene of an accident, hoping to see some gore. But, it was always they who were left bloody after a verbal battle with Jesus. The common people were attracted for many reasons—from curiosity to expectation—and Jesus didn't disappoint them. They came away healed or satisfied in body, or saved and enlightened in spirit. It is, therefore, not a surprise that we find those despised by 'proper' society clustering around Jesus.

Sneering – The Pharisees sneered at Jesus' engagement with sinners. They thought it inappropriate that someone who claimed to be a religious teacher would associate with people who had rejected the moral standards of their religion. There is no question that many (most) in the Church need to learn to be more Christ-like by interacting with, and influencing for good, those who *we* might consider hopeless. However, do not misunderstand the import of this incident. Jesus is not faulted by the Pharisees for offering alms or for providing social-welfare services. His 'fault' is that he treated those who made their living from dishonest means—tax collectors who skimmed a cut, and prostitutes—as beings worth engaging. Also notice that Jesus did not dismiss the mutterings of the Pharisees as balderdash and walk away. Rather he also engaged with them by patiently presenting three parables dealing with recovery of lost sinners (Luke 15.1-32). The key message is that all men, whether producers of lucrative pornographic films or university professors teaching literary deconstructionism, are sinners who need to be saved from their sin.

Sheep – In the first parable, Jesus uses the example of a shepherd in order to appeal to the men and boys in his audience. He used this same basic parable previously (Mt 18.12-14). However, in that instance he used it to illustrate the truth that God preserves those who are his elect. In this case, the hundred sheep appear to represent the totality of mankind. Jesus speaks hypothetically and asks us to imagine that all men had been saved, but one.

Seeking – Even if we have never worked with sheep, we all know that they can be a bit foolish and have a tendency to wander away from their shepherd. The OT uses this characteristic, calling us all sheep for having wandered away from our Creator (Is 53.6). The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and seeks the one lost sheep. Do not suppose that the shepherd is himself foolish by leaving the sheep unprotected. None of Jesus' audience would have thought that. They understood that the chief shepherd would have had assistants who he would have left in charge of the sheep. The important point is that it is the shepherd who is responsible for the sheep and who cares for them, who goes out to find the lost sheep. Jesus is teaching that God—he as God—is actively going in search of sinners who are lost sheep. God proactively seeks out the lost of mankind to bring them to salvation.

Saving – A lost domestic sheep has no chance of survival in the wilderness. It will become the victim of wild animals, get caught in a hedge and starve, or fall into a crevice and be injured. A lost sheep is helpless and needs a saviour. Mankind is in the same situation. Since we wandered from God, in Adam's first sin, we have been caught in Satan's lion-jaws and entrapped in the briars of false religions and philosophies, and have fallen into the deepest depravities our minds can invent. Without Christ as our saviour we are without hope and will die in our sins in the lonely desert of eternal night. But Christ comes after us, picks us up, puts us on his shoulders, and carries us home.

Satisfaction – There is great satisfaction on God's part over the salvation of a sinner. He takes pleasure in saving sinners and rejoices in their salvation. But God does not revel in his victory over Satan in private. He makes a spectacle of saving sinners. He calls his friends to rejoice with him. The entire Church on earth and in Heaven (7) and angels (10) rejoice with him when a sinner repents and is saved. Many in the Church today seek after sign miracles and miss the greatest miracle of all—turning hearts of granite into living cells and wills of lead into joyful wonder. There is nothing which should thrill us more than hearing of a sinner who has turned to Jesus and being at the celebration of his conversion in baptism. Our voices can ring with pride in our God when

we sing Psalm 98.1-2: “His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known.”

Solemnity – Jesus concludes this first parable with a solemn warning. For illustrative purposes he had hypothesized that the ninety-nine sheep were those who had already been saved. However, lest the Pharisees think that they were included among the saved, he suggests that the only person who is truly saved is the repentant sinner whom the Pharisees despised. The self-righteous Pharisees thought that they did not need to repent because they believed that they were better before God than the ‘sinners’. The reality is that both the self-righteous and the most blatant pervert need to repent. Not a single one of us is righteous before God (Rom 3.10). We are all lost sheep who must be saved by Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We all must repent.

Seeking and Saving Sinners (Part 2) [September 3]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 15.8-10)

Appraised Soul – In his previous parable (Lk 15.1-7), Jesus used a lost sheep as an illustration that would appeal more to men and boys. In this parable he uses an illustration that would appeal particularly to women and girls—a lost coin that had likely been attached to a wedding headband or necklace (the equivalent of our wedding ring). Although the coin would have had intrinsic value, it also would have had sentimental value to the woman. So it is with the souls of men before God; each human soul has intrinsic value or worth (Mt 16.26) since men have been created in the image of God. This is one reason for why murder is wrong. In addition, each soul is precious to God because, as the universal father of all mankind (Acts 17.29), he cares for all the beings he has created—from the smallest sparrow to the pinnacle of his creation, mankind. Therefore, he has no delight in seeing us lost in the darkness of sin and depravity.

Active Sweeping – A coin, once lost, cannot crawl back to its owner. The owner has to go searching for it. Jesus’ analogy of the lost coin applied to a person would have surprised many from his Jewish

audience. They believed that they could earn a place in Heaven if they kept the outward aspects of the Law. The analogy is just as devastating for anyone today who believes that somehow God will let him into Heaven if his works are ‘good enough’ or because he has made a ‘decision for Christ’. The truth is the opposite—mankind is not the volitional actor that initiates salvation, rather it is God who actively goes searching for lost mankind—as illustrated by the shepherd searching for the lost sheep (Lk 15.1-7) and the woman looking for her lost coin. You have probably heard a story of a woman who has lost her diamond engagement ring and has sought hard to find it, including tracing garbage bags to the dump. Her efforts expended in recovering the ring are equivalent to what is meant by the woman sweeping and searching her house until she found the coin. When Adam committed the first sin that brought destruction on us all, he did not go searching for God, but rather hid from him. God came into the garden and went searching for Adam. In the same way God, in Christ, came into the world and searched out lost mankind who had attempted to hide from him. The Holy Spirit continues searching out the lost on behalf of Christ. He looks for souls in all of their hiding places—rationalizations for not accepting the message about Jesus, attempted escapes into oblivion through worldly stimulants, or covers of intellectual snobbery—and calls out to each of us, “Where are you?”

Applauding Supporters – When most people hear about the rescue of miners who have been trapped for days underground or that passengers have been airlifted from a sinking ferry, they are relieved at the salvation of lives and applaud the rescue missions. In contrast, they are generally not pleased to hear of the salvation of souls in the spiritual realm. In countries dominated by Islam, a person who converts to Christianity and professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is cut off from his family or even killed. In the West, most people think that a person who accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour is a kook who has ‘found religion’. But this is not how God views a conversion to Jesus. The woman in the parable, as a picture for God, called her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her when she found her lost coin. In the same way, God calls us—his friends—to rejoice with him at the salvation of a lost soul. There really should be

nothing in this world that brings more joy to our hearts and singing to our lips (e.g., Ps 20.5; Ps 35.9) than God's work in salvation and the deliverance of a soul from Hell. The baptism of a repentant unbeliever is the most amazing event we can ever witness, and we should celebrate it with joy.

Angelic Satisfaction – There is no salvation for fallen angels since Christ did not take on the form of angel-kind and suffer and die on their behalf (Heb 2.16). Those angels who rebelled with Satan are now his demons who, in fits of jealousy of mankind and rage against God for favouring mankind with salvation, try to drag men into the pit of Hell. In contrast, those angels who did not rebel against God remain his true friends. They do not display jealousy about God's saving humankind. Instead they split the heavens open in triumphant song when Christ appeared on earth (Lk 2.13-14) to initiate the redemption of mankind. And now, Heaven rings with the peals of angelic praises each time a sinner repents and is brought forever into the household of God.

Afflicted Self – We must not miss the significance of the concluding words of Jesus in this parable, "one sinner who repents." This statement points to the harmony, consistently presented throughout Scripture, between God's sovereign action in salvation and human responsibility in responding to the indwelling Spirit. God saves *and* man responds. Salvation is not a passive process administered externally to humans. As a man or woman is brought back to life spiritually through the seed of new life implanted by the Holy Spirit and converted, he or she *must* respond by exercising faith in Jesus as saviour and by repenting of sin. Repentance is a key manifestation of the reality of conversion that must be displayed to show that a person has come to a realization that he is afflicted and polluted with sin and that he must confess his sin before God.

The Parable of the Gracious Father [September 4]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 15.11-32)

Jesus has presented two parables (Lk 15.1-10) in which he teaches that God actively seeks out and saves lost sinners. In this third parable he continues the theme and extends it by focusing on God's gracious reception of a converted sinner. This parable has often been misunderstood. It does not teach that the lost son was a believer who had gone astray, nor is it dealing specifically with the conversion of Gentiles and the jealousy of the Jews. Rather, in context, it deals with wayward mankind lost in sin, the process of conversion, and the reception by God the Father. So although this parable is often called the *Parable of the Prodigal* (wasteful) or *Lost Son*, it should probably be called instead the *Parable of the Gracious Father*.

Rupture – The sons can be understood to represent two classes of mankind, with God as the universal father. One class consists of those who are blatant sinners. The other is those who appear to be upholding the obligations of the Covenant—whether or not they are truly converted—who, in this case, are the Pharisees who had grumbled that Jesus was eating with open sinners (Lk 15.1-2). However, a key point of this parable, as we will see, is that *all* mankind must repent and come to the feast prepared by the gracious Father.

Rebellion – The younger son rebels against his father by asking for his inheritance. He in effect declares his father dead, or wishes him dead, and is determined to go his own way. He believes that he controls his life and destiny and that he has no need for his father's superintending hand. This is the state of mankind as born in sin, as Paul describes him (Rom 1.21-23), who wants to enjoy the fruits of God's creation but not acknowledge God.

Result – The result of this rebellion is that the son ends up in a far country—a symbol for mankind being far removed from God. He squanders the gifts graciously given to him by his father and uses them for all types of wickedness, thinking that he can find meaning and true joy through the false hope of freedom that sin provides. He consumes the capital his father has provided and ends up living like a brute beast—a pig, a despised and unclean animal to a Jew. We see this lived out by

many young people who, like Paris Hilton, squander their inheritances in debauchery. It is the same, in general, where men consume the moral and spiritual capital given by God in a downward spiral of sin (Rom 1.24-32). They end up in a land where spiritual famine reigns, slavery to sin represses, and perpetual dissatisfaction rules.

Repentance – Realizing the state of his depravity, the younger son repents of his sin—“I have sinned against heaven and against you [his father]”. Jesus is not teaching that there is anything naturally in a man—who is dead in sin—that can awaken him to the reality of his spiritual death. He does not deal with the cause of a sinner’s awakening to reality—God implanting guilt, a memory of God’s goodness, and a stirring to seek his Creator. Rather, he deals with the *outward* response of someone who has been brought to his senses by the Holy Spirit and confesses his sin and begins the journey back to God.

Reception – Many unbelievers claim that God is harsh and austere. But, like the father in this parable, God is filled with compassion and runs out to meet the returning sinner. He welcomes the repentant prodigal and, by hugging him, protects him from those who would have stoned him to death (Dt 21.18-21). God’s eternal arms around us protect us from the accusing darts of Satan. Then the robes of sin are stripped off and robes of righteousness through sanctification are provided to him. He is adopted into the household in a new relationship with the Father and given authority (as signified by the ring).

Rejoicing – As we have seen in the previous two parables, there is great joy in the Church and in Heaven among the angels over a sinner who repents. So God throws a party to celebrate the return of a sinner. This party will last for eternity as the marriage supper of the Lamb (Mt 22.2-4; Lk 13.29; Rev 19.9).

Resentment – Jesus’ hearers would have understood the significance of the feast—not only were repentant sinners (i.e., the prodigal son) invited to dine, but God (the Father) was eating with them! This in particular would have offended the Pharisees and scribes who could not understand

why Jesus welcomed open sinners (Lk 15.2). So he addresses their objection by dealing with the resentment of the older son in the parable. The older son represents sons of the Covenant who believe that they have a special place in the Kingdom. Although the older son is Jewish, so is the younger son; and this parable is delivered in the context of Pharisees objecting to Jesus' welcoming repentant Jewish sinners. Therefore, this parable does not specifically address the admittance of the Gentiles into the Church, as many suppose. Rather the older son represents all those who think that their status in the Church, their works, or their observance of particular rituals should provide a sufficient warrant for them to sit at the eternal banquet table (29). But, the father in the parable dispels that presumption and pleads with his son to repent of his resentment and humbly join the feast (28, 31). This is a warning not only for the Pharisees but for everyone in the Church who may have been preserved by God from pursuing an outwardly wicked life. We must never resent the reality that salvation is all of grace (Eph 2.8-10) and we all must repent of our sins and have a desire to join the feast of Jesus.

Good Stewards for Christ (Part 1) [September 5]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 16.1-9)

Stewardship – The steward (or manager) of this parable can represent the Pharisees of Jesus' day or all mankind who has been given stewardship over God's creation (Gen 1.26). Like the steward, the Pharisees failed in their responsibility to use their leadership positions correctly, and attempted to usurp the place of the Messiah. We also have irresponsibly wasted the gifts that God has given to us; whether they are talents, material goods, or spiritual resources. The abuse of our stewardship occurs in at least the following areas:

- *Tenancy* – Failing to acknowledge God's ownership of all creation (Ps 50.10; Pa 104.24) and our subservience to him.
- *Thanksgiving* – Being unthankful for God's temporal goodness and mercy toward us (Dt 8.11-18; Rom 1.21).
- *Tithing* – Neglecting to repay the tribute-portion of our prosperity that God requires (Mal 3.8-10; 1 Cor 16.2; 2 Cor 9.6-9).
- *Time* – Wasting time (Eph 5.15-17) and misusing it (Ex 20.8-11).

- *Treasure* – Receiving the great treasure of the Gospel (Mt 13.44; 2 Cor 4.7) and hoarding it rather than sharing it (Mt 28.19-20).
- *Talents* – Applying our God-given talents to the pursuit of our selfish desires rather than for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom through helping the needy and encouraging the hurting (1 Pt 4.10).

The thief says, “I will take what is *yours*.” The selfish man says, “I will keep what is *mine*.” The Christian man says, “I will share what I have been *given*.”

Sacked – Like the steward, we have been challenged to account for our management and have been fired from our duties. Adam, as our federal representative, mismanaged the produce from the fruit trees that God had placed under his care and was expelled from the Garden. We all follow his example and, if we unrepentantly continue to misapply the resources God has placed in our care, we will be fired into Hell (Rom 14.10-12; 2 Cor 5.10).

Scheming – The steward, realizing his loss, began scheming about how to provide for his future. His self-reflections are indicative of mankind who is found wanting before God. Men without Christ are all in the same situation as the steward—unwilling and unable, due to moral infirmity, to work diligently for anything of eternal value and too proud to beg God for forgiveness.

Shrewdness – The shrewd steward came up with a plan: instead of repenting of the mismanagement of his master’s resources he decided to steal from his master to provide funds for his future. This is the way of the world. Rather than humbly confessing guilt, men in every walk of life use God’s resources to further their own goals. Consider the following examples:

- The worldly philosopher, who claims that there are no moral absolutes and that all of reality is individually and empirically derived, assumes that he can communicate with his peers through a common language, and he becomes irate if a student cheats on an exam. He robs God of his *rational capital* to advocate his own pernicious opinions.

- The hedonist, living for his next sensual experience, demands his ‘rights’ and decries the ‘injustice’ of being infected by a terminal disease without considering that he has justly received the consequences of his ways. He robs God of his *judicial right* by seeking justice but refusing to accept it.
- The politician who espouses tolerance and diversity shows the emptiness of his position when he endorses ‘prayer’ by the leaders of false religions but refuses to support the rights of Christians to worship freely, educate their children, and speak out against the endorsement of sinful practices. He robs God of his *moral authority* by perverting truth.

Salute – The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. It is a backhanded salute. He was not commended for having stolen from his master but for coming up with his apparently clever plan to advance his own cause. As image-bearers of the Creator, man is very innovative but nevertheless his schemes are warped. It is only after a time that we see the full consequences of them. Consider a few examples: China’s ‘one-child’ policy, advanced by abortions, has resulted in a massively imbalanced demographic ratio that is going to wreck havoc as the population ages. Socialism’s reliance on the supposed innate goodness of man and paternalism has spawned a generation of irresponsible subjects who subsist on handouts that are funded by stealing from the productive. Social ‘reformers’ pushed for the removal of corporal punishment and are reaping the wind of increasing youth violence.

Storing – The sons of this world are experts at coming up with schemes to advance their personal gain or causes. But their brilliance burns briefly, lasting for at most a generation. In contrast the sons of God, who are careful to keep his precepts, are often not quick to advance their worldly prosperity. But sadly they are also ineffective in their efforts to advance the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven. The problem is often that they live between the two worlds and are torn by conflicting priorities. Jesus exhorts us to make a clear choice and apply the same kind of diligence, but not by improper means, that the world does to advancing

its goals. We are to take all of the talents and resources (here called *worldly wealth*) God gives us and to apply them for eternal purposes. We are to store up a vast multitude of saved friends into eternity (1 Tim 6.17-19). This is our calling as good stewards for Christ!

Good Stewards for Christ (Part 2) [September 6]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 16.10-18)

Jesus taught about Christian stewardship through a parable in which he spoke of a shrewd manager who effectively used the resources available to him to win friends. He now continues presenting the theme of stewardship through a series of diverse instructions, which are recorded briefly by Luke.

Trust Earned – First, the right to be a steward in his Kingdom does not arise automatically from being part of his household; it must be earned. We earn the privilege of representing Jesus by being faithful in whatever duties he assigns us. It is often the case that young people who grow up in the Church, or are recent converts, want to take on ‘great things’ for Christ. They are not satisfied with being initially assigned duties such as serving at a fellowship lunch, greeting newcomers, collecting the tithes and offerings, or teaching a Sunday school class. They want to do something that they perceive to be more ‘meaningful’, such as leading in worship or preaching. Jesus presents a simple test of readiness—can they be trusted with the small things? Can any of us be trusted with the small things? Are we scrupulously respectful of the property of others? Do we keep appointments and show up on time? Are we diligent to follow through on our commitments and promises? Is our prayer and Bible reading disciplined? Are we faithful in returning to God the tribute he is owed in the tithe of our income or in keeping the Lord’s Day holy? If we fail in any of these areas, why should we be trusted to organize a ministry, lead an outreach mission, or take on a responsible office in a congregation? Jesus knows where we are, even if others in his household do not. He knows how much responsibility he can give us. Our responsibilities will grow only in proportion to the trustworthiness we have displayed in the ‘little things’.

Targeted Engagement – Second, true stewardship focuses on the interest of the master. A steward, by definition, is not looking out for his own interests, but for the interests of his master. In Christ's household it is no different; we cannot use our position to further our own ends, but must have a devotion to advancing our Lord's goals. Jesus knows how tempting money can be, and how easily a quest to acquire material possession can distract us from the work of the Church. It is possible that Jesus was thinking of particular Roman coins that would have been in circulation in the Palestine of his day. These coins showed the two-faced god of the Roman pantheon named Janus; in one pithy statement he dismissed both the lure of money and being two-faced. As a general principle, the world's quest for money is to be renounced by all who claim to be Christians. God and money are mutually exclusive masters. A love of money will drive us away from God and into slavery (1 Tim 6.10), but a disdain for money will drive us to dependence on Jesus. Listen to him: "You cannot serve both God and money!"

Treasured Earth – Third, the measure of your stewardship is ultimately decided between you and God, and comes down to what you treasure in your heart—the heavenly or the earthly. The Pharisees sneered at Jesus—at his person and preaching. They concluded that he was a failure because he was a poor itinerant, followed around by an insignificant band of disciples. They assumed that their ability to accumulate riches, and success at it, was a sign of God's favour. So they believed that Jesus had no right to lecture them about money. But in reality they were terrible stewards of spiritual riches and deluded in thinking that they were the legitimate guardians of God's truth to their generation. On the outside they professed to believe God's truth, claimed to have spiritual knowledge, and appeared devoted to the exercise of religious ceremony; but their hearts were cesspools of covetous filth. Jesus put them in their place by disparaging their illicit love of detestable earthly things. We must be careful that we are not found under the same indictment. A love of the world is eternally ruinous.

Torah Edicts – Finally, as faithful stewards we must obey the law of the household laid down by the house-master. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the Law had been proclaimed until the days of John the Baptist, when he (as Messiah) began preaching the good news. But, lest any of them think that the Law no longer applied to them, Jesus repeats what he had told his audience on a hillside in Galilee—the Law is unchanging, no stroke of it can disappear until the end of time (Mt 5.18). He then selects an example to challenge their misunderstanding and abuses. Jesus says that their unjustified manipulation of the law for financial gain, by viewing marriage and divorce as a means of advancement (through dowries and marrying into wealth), is adultery. We also must obey the Law of God summarized in the Ten Commandments, and detailed in both the Old and New testaments (e.g., Leviticus 18-20 and Matthew 5.17-48). This is not a popular subject today, in society or the Church. Men don't want absolute standards and they don't want to be told what to do. Today, we don't use marriage for financial gain so much as people in the past did. A more pertinent example for us is the fourth commandment. Almost everyone today in our society and in the Church breaks God's Law as they undertake or support commercial activities on Sunday—whether operating or visiting stores or engaging in, or attending, professional sports. We make up all kinds of rationalizations for why this is okay (just as the Pharisees tried to justify themselves). In the end they are a waste of breath. Jesus says, if we are to be good stewards in his household we will obey his commands (Jn 14.15).

The Rich Man and Lazarus [September 7]

(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 16.19-31)

Jesus continues to challenge the sneering Pharisees, who believed that their wealth and status were signs that they were good stewards of the temporal, religious, and moral resources that God had given the Jewish nation. Through this parable he warns of the danger of remaining in covetous unbelief and under the delusion that being rich can be equated with being righteous.

Even though this passage is usually included among the parables of Jesus, it differs from the other parables in that, instead of using physical or temporal examples (such as fishing, farming, or shepherding) to represent spiritual realities, it narrates events occurring in the eternal realm. The fact that the account mentions Abraham may make it more than just a representative illustration. It may be that we are to understand it to be presenting a narrative of actual events (similar to what is recorded in Job 1.6-12). Regardless, we should focus on the key lessons of the sober realities that Jesus presents.

Two Temporalities – We cannot doubt that there are two temporalities—represented by people with possessions and others in poverty—that will continue to the end of time (Mt 26.11). Nor should we expect that God’s reasons and ways will be clear to us when we see the allocation of wealth to the undeserving Hell-bound, but affliction as the lot of the heirs of Heaven. However, it is not our responsibility to understand his providences but to obey his precepts and heed the lessons:

- *Wealth is Worthless* – The rich man in the account remains nameless. He was among the ‘rich and famous’ whom others admired and envied, but his name was not inscribed in the records of Heaven, and just like all other men he died and then was buried in obscurity.
- *Riches don’t Reprove* – The rich man was not condemned for being rich or for how he became rich. Abraham, probably as a deliberate contrast, was wealthy and is not tormented in Hell. The rich man’s problems were trusting in riches and misusing the stewardship with which he had been entrusted (Prov 14.21; Prov 19.17; Prov 21.13; Prov 28.27; Is 3.15), by not ministering to the crippled beggar placed at his door but treating him as a dog.
- *Poverty doesn’t Protect* – Lazarus was saved and went into Heaven, not because he was poor, but because he believed in, and depended on, God.

Jesus is not censoring prosperity, but condemning unbelief; he is not extolling poverty, but exhorting belief.

Diverging Destinations – Both rich and poor must die. Nothing can postpone the inevitable. And, there are only two destinations afterwards:

Heaven or Hell; Paradise or punishment; comfort or consternation. Jesus presents the reality of both as certain and indicates that Heaven will correct all the evils of this world perpetrated against believers, whereas Hell only compounds them. We should consider the following solemn truths derived from this account:

- 1) When people leave this world their souls continue to exist in a state of separation from the body. There is no intermediate place for souls (Lk 23.43), no annihilation of the wicked, and no such thing as ‘soul-sleep’.
- 2) Angels escort believers into Heaven and, by implication, demons escort unbelievers to Hell.
- 3) Many people ask: “How could a loving God send anyone to Hell?” The real question is: “How can a *just* God *not* punish in Hell?” Jesus viewed the rich man’s selfishness and unconcern for his soul as a warrant for eternal punishment. Abraham’s indictment is: “You got your reward on earth!”
- 4) Hell is eternal and infinite separation from God. No one can pass over from Hell and enter Heaven.
- 5) Hell is a place of painful torment (23, 28) where even a drop of water would be welcome, but no request can be granted and there can be no relief from the pain. Hell is not an eternal New Year’s Eve party.

Prophetic Priority – The rich man in Hell made the mistake all unbelievers make. They claim that if God would give better evidences of his existence, set out his requirements and laws more clearly, or demonstrate unequivocally that Jesus is the God-man, they would believe. Jesus silences this false claim:

- *Signs Harden for Conversion* – Signs are confirmatory not convincing. They are designed by God to validate his prophets, in particular Jesus. But, in general, signs are not his means for leading people to salvation. The Pharisees claimed they wanted signs but then chose to ignore all the prophetic and miraculous signs that validated Jesus. And, when another Lazarus returned from the dead, they sought to abolish the evidence (Jn 11.38-53). People today would rationalize a real miracle as the work of a charlatan or claim that it wasn’t convincing enough. They attempt to hold God hostage

to their standard for evidence, therefore we must not think that miracles are effective instruments of evangelism.

- *Scripture Heralds Christ* – A messenger rising from the dead could say no more than the Scriptures, so Abraham leaves the rich man's brothers to the teachings of Moses and the prophets. Notice that it is the OT that they were to hear and heed. The OT does not present a different message from the NT. The OT is the word of God pointing to Jesus Christ. Foolish Christians today think that they know better than God how to attract people to Christ. God's method for presenting Christ is by preaching his truth from the Bible (Rom 10.14-15; 1 Cor 1.21).

Living Faithfully for Jesus [September 8]

(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 17.1-10)

Fault – After Jesus had taught the Pharisees about what is involved in being a true steward of God (Lk 16.1-18), he turned to his disciples to warn them not to be like the Pharisees. He acknowledges that the disciples were going to sin. No one in this world (other than Jesus) is without sin. He doesn't minimize this reality, but his concern is not so much with their personal sins—these can be forgiven. The bigger problem is when someone, who claims to be a righteous leader or steward of God's truth, leads his followers into sin (Rom 14.13; 1 Jn 2.10). Leading a 'little one' into sin, through bad teaching or example, is such a serious offense that it would be better for him to throw himself into the sea, never to be seen again. We must not think that this applies only to *leaders* in the Church. We all have our own 'little ones'. In the Church small children look up to the older kids, and the older kids to the teens, and the teens to the mature adults. They all watch and emulate. Do not be like the hypocritical Pharisees whose behaviour was entirely inconsistent with their lofty claims. Instead, be on your guard that you set the best possible example in word and action for anyone who looks up to you. If you corrupt the truth of Christ, and persist in rebellion, you will face eternal woe—just like the Pharisees.

Faultless – Displaying a truly forgiving spirit is a key indicator that a person is qualified to stand as a role model in the Church. However, before such an attitude can be displayed, there are two prior conditions that must be met. First, you must be essentially guiltless of the sin that is being challenged, and forgiven (Mt 7.3-5). Second, you must be willing to rebuke the sin. It is wrong to think that we are being spiritual if we ignore our brother's sin. A failure to be honest about sin is a front before man and an affront to God. It is the essence of hypocrisy to 'preach' what you won't practice and the epitome of cowardliness to avoid confronting sin.

Forgiving – Of course, our approach to rebuking our brothers and sisters in the Church must be carefully conditioned by love and a true concern for their well-being and must be carried out in a Biblical manner.¹⁵ The charge here to 'rebuke him' is not a licence to abuse a brother, justification to gossip about his sin, an excuse to embarrass him, or an endorsement for cultivating a grudge; but a challenge to lovingly restore him (Gal 6.1). At the heart of restoration is to be our willingness to forgive every brother who sins against us with an overflowing, habitual, and unlimited spirit of forgiveness (1 Cor 13.4-6). God's standard, as displayed in Christ, is to forgive his people daily of all their rebellion. We are to adhere to this model and counteract sin by forgiving much.

Faith – The disciples understood that the power to forgive in this way is not natural. It requires a truly loving spirit, but more than that it requires faith to overcome the hurt caused by sin, obediently live by God's standard, and trust that he will work out the recompense for all abuses of our sincerely offered forgiveness. Love motivates a forgiving spirit but faith mobilizes it. Jesus' responds to their request with a short parable in which he teaches about the power of a small seed of faith. On first consideration it might appear that he is rebuking them and indicating that it only takes a little bit of faith to have a forgiving spirit. That is probably not the correct way to understand what he is teaching. It may be that Jesus is emphasizing the *kind* of faith, rather than the *size* of the

¹⁵ Lev 19.17; Ps 141.5; Prov 27.5; Eph 4.2, 15; 1 Thess 2.7; 1 Tim 5.20; James 5.19-20.

faith. If our faith is of the right kind, even if very small, we can accomplish great things for God. Faith that can forgive, is faith that is:

- *Alive* – True faith is implanted in us by the Holy Spirit and has a different quality to it than the world's faith—it is spiritual not natural.
- *Advancing* – True faith grows and increases—it may start as a tiny seed but it does not stay that way. Growth is the evidence that it is alive.
- *Active* – True faith is more than confession or mere words, it is worked out in obedience (James 2.14-26).

Faithfulness – It is our Christian duty to rebuke and forgive fellow believers who sin. This does not require an extra-ordinary kind of faith but rather a sincere faith evidenced through simple obedience. This is why Jesus follows the lesson on faith with one on faithfulness (7-10). As servants of God, we are to perform our duties ungrudgingly and without any expectation of recognition. Our reason for serving God is not because of what we *might* yet receive, although this will be great according to his promises, but out of thankfulness for what we have *already* been given—ininitely more than we deserve! True faith is lived out in faithfulness, faithfulness is displayed by obedience, and obedience submits selflessly in service to whatever God requires of us—as commanded in his revealed will in the Bible. This brings us to the conclusion of Jesus' lesson on stewardship (Lk 16.1-17.10). As good stewards in God's house we are not to look out for our own interests, accumulate wealth in this world, create schemes to advance our own cause and pride, or to ignore the needs of those placed at our 'doorsteps'. This was the way of the self-righteous Pharisees. It is also the way of all who have not believed in Jesus, repented, and received salvation, and who are on the road to Hell. Rather, our attitude is to be humble like slaves and our heart is to be applied to service (Eph 6.6) because we are on our way to Heaven!

Faith in the Face of Disease and Death [September 9]
(Perea, heading toward Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 11.1-16)

Appeal – Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus informing him that their brother Lazarus was sick. There is no recorded appeal for help in their message, but it is implied. They likely knew that it would be unsafe for Jesus to return to Judea because of the intentions of the Pharisees to arrest him, so they did not ask Jesus to come to them. However, their faith in him was sufficient that they knew that he could deal with the situation from a distance and, because of his love for Lazarus, they assumed that he would deal with it immediately. We should have this same kind of faith—trusting that Jesus can act on our behalf from Heaven and that he will, because he loves us.

Assurance – On hearing the news, Jesus gives the messenger an encouraging reply to take to the sisters—the “sickness will not end in death.” At this point Lazarus was already dead, and had died shortly after the messenger left Judea (6, 39). Jesus also knew that he was dead (14), so in his reply he is teaching the sisters, the disciples, and us what it means to have a deep faith and trust in the Son of God. We can imagine how discouraged the sisters must have felt when the messenger returned with the words of assurance, and yet their brother was already dead and buried. They must have wondered why, if Jesus loved them, he let this happen; why he didn’t come; why he could heal others (like the nobleman’s son, Jn 4.43-54) and not their own brother; and why he said these events would not end in death when it already had. Therefore it is important that we listen to the rest of his message: this happened for God’s glory and so that Jesus, as God, could also be glorified. Jesus urges us to believe that God’s love for us will be displayed to his glory, and in our best interests (Rom 8.28), no matter how discouraging the circumstances might appear at the moment. We need to learn to wait on God in trust.

Abeyance – Jesus compounds their perplexity by staying another two days in Perea. This abeyance in action was deliberate. Jesus was teaching that God’s schedule is not ours, his providences are not ruled by us, God can perform the apparently impossible, and we must trust that God really does know what is best no matter how bleak things may seem. When we

are faced with disease, disappointment, discouragement, or delay we must live by faith, not by sight.

Assessment – After the two days in Perea, Jesus informed the disciples that he was going to return to Judea—the time had come for him to undertake his final tasks as the saviour of mankind, which would be initiated by the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. The disciples thought that they were helping when they told him of the dangers he would face from the Jewish leaders. They displayed an unsanctified attention to temporalities. Their watches were not synchronized with God’s time and their compasses were not pointing to God’s north. They were still not able to understand that true faith follows the path God has laid out and is not deflected by the world’s priorities. So Jesus’ assessment of their weak faith is reflected in his instruction to use the time God has given to us for his work. When we walk in obedience to God’s purposes and plan we cannot stumble for we are performing God’s will.

Asleep – The disciples seem to have forgotten about Lazarus, so Jesus reminds them of his sickness by informing them that Lazarus was asleep, and implying that the reason for his return to Judea was to visit Lazarus. Still focusing on temporal realities, they assume that Jesus is talking about natural rest that furthers the recovery of those who are ill. The disciples’ response suggests that since Lazarus was sleeping, and would presumably recover, they felt there was no reason to go back to Judea to face the hatred of the Pharisees. Jesus elevates their thoughts to the spiritual and eternal plane by informing them that Lazarus was physically dead—so the purpose of his return to Judea was for a greater reason than to apparently visit a recovering friend. Nevertheless, Lazarus was *asleep*, since his death was only temporary, and he would be raised to continued life in this world—and ultimately to eternal life. True faith sees the light at the end of the Valley of the Shadow of Death and heads unswervingly in that direction. Death, in general and in particular for a believer in Christ, is temporary and therefore likened to sleep (1 Ki 2.10; Acts 7.60; 1 Cor 15.51; 1 Thess 4.13-18). Jesus is not teaching here, as some suppose, the concept of ‘soul-sleep’ in which those who die go into a

form of suspended animation. Rather he is reminding us that all mankind will be raised from the dead—believers to eternal life and unbelievers to eternal damnation (Jn 5.28, 29; Acts 24.15; Rev 20.13).

Admonition – Jesus could have prevented Lazarus from becoming sick or from dying of the sickness. However, God’s ultimate plan included using his death to teach the disciples about the kind of faith they must have. True faith believes the facts about Jesus—virgin conception, meritorious life, ransoming death, and conquering resurrection, etc. But it also believes that Jesus, as the Creator of the universe, can accomplish anything—including raising the dead. Jesus was glad that he had the opportunity to raise Lazarus from the dead so he could prepare his disciples for his own pending death and give them hope beyond it. We must not be like Thomas who, here, unthinkingly claims a willingness to go with Jesus wherever he leads, but then turns to doubt when death confronts him (Jn 20.25). Our faith must trust Jesus in life, and through death, into eternity—because he will raise us up on the last day.

The Comfort of the Resurrection [September 10] (Bethany, near Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 11.17-32)

Death’s Decay – It was Jewish custom to bury a body as soon as possible after death (Acts 5.6) because decay would set in quickly. The Jews believed, superstitiously, that the soul of a dead person would then remain around the grave until the third day and after that depart for eternal realms. It may be that Jesus delayed his visit to the sisters and Lazarus’ grave to ensure that there would be no human expectation for Lazarus other than bodily decay (Jn 11.39). On his arrival at Bethany, Jesus went directly to the tomb without visiting the sisters. His actions were designed to teach an important lesson not only to his disciples but to the sisters and us about faith and eternal realities. From the world’s perspective death is potent; decay the prospect—an enemy from which there is no hope of escape. From Christ’s view point, death is passing.

Copious Comforters – Around Martha and Mary were many comforters. Since they were apparently from a prominent family, even

the Jewish leaders and their wives came from Jerusalem to comfort them. We should not be cynical about the intent of these mourners; they may have been sincere and may have tried to provide real comfort. Undoubtedly they would have spoken to the sisters of an expected hope of an afterlife. Their words of consolation would have been, in general, no different from what most people offer up today during a time of visitation at a funeral home—“He lived a good life, God will be fair.” Or, “It is for the best considering his illness; he has passed over to be with angels.” All men, even professed atheists, when confronted with death rely on a nebulous hope that somehow, somewhere, sometime, there is more to life than the mortal eighty-or-so years we are given. This was not enough for Martha and Mary. When they heard that Jesus had arrived they went to see him, since they knew that he alone could provide real comfort. Martha heard first that Jesus was approaching the grave and rushed out of the village to see him. Jesus spoke with her and then sent her to get her sister. We should take the account at face value—when Martha heard that the Teacher had arrived she went to see him. It is inappropriate to read anything else into her actions or that the sisters responded differently because of different personalities—e.g., one was action oriented the other contemplative. As soon as Mary was informed that Jesus had arrived (28) she also went quickly to see him. Both knew that real consolation is found only in Christ.

Remedy Request – Both Martha and Mary approached Jesus with the same complaint, “If you had been here ...” They probably had played the “if only” game together a number of times over the previous three days. There was undoubtedly disappointment in their voice. But of more importance it showed a lack of understanding. Why would the God-man have to be physically present to work healing (compare Mt 8.5-13)? However, Martha does display faith by acknowledging that Jesus could still do something about the situation through prayer to God. But, again, her understanding seems limited. She does not yet fully understand that Jesus, *as God*, performed miracles. This sets up the later communication Jesus has with the Father (Jn 11.41-42).

Resurrection Reality – Jesus’ response to Martha appears to be of limited immediate comfort. So she replies with something like the following: “Yes, I believe in the resurrection, but I miss Lazarus now!” She didn’t realize that Jesus was going to give physical life back to her brother in a few minutes. But lest we be confused by this account and think that Jesus should bring back our dead relatives as he did for Martha and Mary, we need to focus on what he says next. Our comfort isn’t to be found in a temporal resurrection. After all, Lazarus went on to die again, and in the end we all also must die (Jn 11.25; Heb 9.27). The resurrection of Lazarus is only a shadow pointing to a greater reality. For a believer, death doesn’t end physical existence since our bodies will be reunited with our souls—this is the Christian’s hope (Acts 23.6; Acts 24.15; 1 Cor 15.17-19). But even this is not what Jesus is focusing on.

Death’s Death – Our comfort is to be found in knowing Jesus personally. He is the resurrection and the life for us now! He moves the resurrection out of the distant future into the present. The ultimate victory over death is that he has overcome *spiritual* death and so raises those who are dead in sin and separated eternally from God, to new life. Eternal life is much more than just endless physical existence; it is renewed existence into eternity. This is why Jesus says that he who believes in him will never die. He isn’t speaking about physical death, but eternal death. Physical death is the portal to an eternal life with God (2 Cor 5.6, 8; Phil 1.23) and the means by which we shed our mortal body to put on an immortal one (1 Cor 15.35-49). Do you believe this?

Credible Confession – If you believe these things you will confess Jesus, in your heart and with your mouth, in the same way that Martha did:

- 1) Lord Jesus, you are the Christ (Messiah). You are the King, anointed with all glory, and worthy of all honour and praise.
- 2) Lord Jesus, you are the Son of God. You are the God-man, the second person of the Trinity, through whom the universe was created and through whom all things continue to exist.
- 3) Lord Jesus, you are the one who was to come into the world. You are the Word of God and the supreme Prophet. You are the revelation of

God to man. Everything we need to know about God is revealed in you.

Lazarus, the Sign of the Reality of Resurrection [September

11]

(Bethany, near Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 11.33-44)

Death's Grief – Contrast the noise of the professional mourners with Jesus' profound grief. They wail over death, to be paid a livelihood. He pays with his life, to weep over death. He is not moved to tears primarily because of the death of his friend Lazarus. He has already declared that Lazarus will live (Jn 11.11) and knows that Lazarus will walk out of the tomb in a few minutes. His grief is much deeper. He is moved in his spirit over the foolish blindness of men, the effect of sin, and the ugly reality of death. That Jesus wept is important for us because it shows that God, in the Son:

- 1) Is sorely troubled (deeply moved, angered) by where Satan and sin have dragged mankind. The tragedy of sin causes God to grieve (Eph 4.30).
- 2) Sympathizes with our calamity and dilemma. In contrast to pagan gods—who are apathetic, lack emotion, and often impersonal—God cares.
- 3) Has taken on true humanity. He has entered into our experiences and temptations and knows how we feel. He is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Is 53.3).
- 4) Is willing to take upon himself, as our merciful and faithful high priest, the calamity of sin and represent us before the throne of grace and to provide all the help we need (Heb 4.14-16).

Death's Gripe – What can be done about sin and death? Is death the end? Can God do anything about it? This is the implication of the question raised by some who observed Jesus weeping. In effect they conclude that if he could have prevented the death of his friend he would have; since he didn't, he couldn't. Their attitude is the same as all who question God's purposes. For example, they ask, "If God is good and all-powerful then why doesn't he stop evil?" Their conclusion is that God is

either not good or not all-powerful. They create an invalid dilemma and ignore the possibility that God has a good and glorious purpose for permitting evil—he demonstrates his infinite love for us by overcoming sin through the death of his Son (Rom 5.8).

Death's Grip – As is often the case, Jesus ignores the sceptics and moves forward to prove them wrong. He directs those present to remove the stone at the opening to the family crypt. But Martha's weak faith fails to sustain her. She doesn't believe the message that Jesus sent three days earlier; that the illness would not end in death (Jn 11.4). So she objects, with the observation that Lazarus' body will be in an advanced state of decay. Spiritual death is the same—it is moral decay, smells to high Heaven, and fails to believe God's promise that his power can free us from spiritual slavery

Death's Goodbye – Clearly the people weren't expecting a miracle because they didn't really believe that Jesus could perform them. More importantly, they didn't believe that he is the God-man. Nevertheless, at the power of his command, they removed the stone to allow Jesus to call out the physical body of Lazarus—not a spectre or ghost. Then Jesus turned Heavenward to the Father in praise. He speaks his prayer publicly to demonstrate his co-equality with the Father—"I knew that you always hear me"—and silence his critics; and to strengthen the weak faith of those standing nearby—so that they would know that the resurrection was from God and not some form of magic.

Death's God – Who is sovereign over death? We must not think that death is ultimately Satan's subject or that Satan and death are the *yang*, to the *yin* of God and life. The universe is not a cosmic duality in balance—a synthesis of good and evil. Even though Satan wields death as a temporal weapon (Heb 2.14), death is his own destiny (Rev 20.10, 14) and he does not ultimately control death. Death is our scourge and enemy (1 Cor 15.55) in Satan's hands only because God uses Satan for his eternal purposes (Job 1.12; Job 2.6). God is the sovereign over death. Death is his instrument of punishment for sin (Gen 2.17). He determines who will die, when, why, and how. Death's god is God! Jesus reinforces

this truth with a loud voice of command: “Lazarus, come out!” We note that this command was:

- *Miraculous* – John records only seven miracles of Jesus (four in Galilee and three in Judea), each with a specific purpose. This is the seventh, and final, sign that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 5.28, 29).
- *Voiced* – God is not silent, he communicates—he created the universe by speaking, recreates life through the preached word (Ezk 37.1-14; Jn 4.41; Acts 4.4), and will reunite body and spirit in the final resurrection through his voiced command (1 Thess 4.16).
- *Loud* – To attack publicly the gates of Death and Hell and to awake the sleeping dead, Jesus gave forth a triumphant shout. He will do the same when he completes the destruction of death forever (1 Thess 4.16).
- *Personal* – Jesus commanded only Lazarus to come out of the grave—his command was selective since the resurrection of Lazarus points to a spiritual truth—although all mankind will be raised on the Last Day, not all will be raised to eternal life.
- *Obedied* – Lazarus came out of the grave alive, even though his body had started to decay and was bound in restrictive grave cloths that had to be removed so that he could move on his own. God’s command over death must be obeyed—whether salvation of dead souls or raising dead bodies.

Rebels’ Reaction to a Resurrection [September 12] **(Bethany, near Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Jn 11.45-57)**

Proper Persuasion – Some who heard from Mary of the resurrection-miracle believed in Jesus. Her witness and Lazarus’ presence were credible evidence, and the people understood that Jesus’ miracles gave demonstrable proof that he had come from Heaven with a divine mission. When we read about the miracle we must also accept their witness as accurate and believe in Jesus.

Protective Pharisees – Today most people are sceptical when they read the Bible’s account of miracles because they know about the tricks

illusionists are able perform and believe that the people of Jesus' day were just ignorant dupes fooled by sleight of hand. However, even in Jesus' day, most people did not believe in him—in spite of the evidence of the miracles, even when witnessed with their own eyes. The real problem is not a lack of evidence, but a lack of faith. Men do not *want* to believe in Jesus because it will jeopardize their status. The Pharisees and their informers were in this class, and their negative reaction is the main focus of John's account. They knew that he was performing miraculous signs (47), but were concerned about protecting their:

- *Power* – If the people believed in Jesus they would stop accepting the authority of the Pharisees.
- *Position* – If Jesus gathered many followers he might attract the attention of the Roman authorities and the government might use this as an excuse to further subjugate the Jewish provinces.
- *Policies* – They believed that their wisdom and teachings, rather than adherence to the teaching of Jesus, were best for the Jewish people.

The rulers took counsel together against the Lord's anointed (Ps 2.2) to figure out why their tactics of disapproval, counter instruction, intimidation, and excommunication did not stop everyone from following Jesus. Their hatred of Jesus was disguised in the clothes of 'public safety' and 'common good'.

Prophetic Prediction – In this account, there are two examples of God's control over the events of this world. The first is Caiaphas' ironic prophecy; the second is Jesus' evasion of the Jewish leaders' murderous plot. Caiaphas suggests that since they had not been able to contain the 'damage' Jesus was causing, they should offer him as a sacrifice to Rome—a Jewish martyr would show Rome that no one man could accumulate too much power and challenge their authority and could help keep the people united against Rome. However, as John makes clear (51) what Caiaphas suggested contemptuously and cynically was overruled by God to present the truth that Christ died to:

- *Absolve* – Jesus died for his own nation and people (Is 53.8); to free them from the guilt and blame of their rebellion against God.

- *Assemble* – Salvation is not limited only to Jews. When God first gave the promise of a Messiah to Adam (Gen 3.15), his redemptive plan was to save men from all nations (Gen 17.4; Is 49.6).
- *Abrogate* – With the death of Jesus, the nation and ceremonial system that Caiaphas thought he was protecting would be replaced. Both Jewish and Gentile believers are formed into one new spiritual nation—the Church (Eph 2.11-22).

Passover Plot – This was the turning-point in the adversarial relationship between the Jewish leaders and Jesus—Jesus must die! No longer were they content to challenge him and wish him dead (Mt 12.14; Lk 19.47; Jn 5:18). From now on they actively plotted to take his life (53) and ordered the people coming to Jerusalem for the Passover to act as informers so that they might seize him (57) as if he were a criminal or outlaw. What the Sanhedrin thought to be expedient was utter foolishness since they rejected the only source of life, deceived many, and brought upon themselves eternal damnation for acting against God’s Son. However, God is always in control. What they intended as a curse, God consecrated for his eternal glory; what they planned as a bane, God transformed into the blessing of salvation for mankind. The chain that binds and controls the wicked is also their bridal that leads them in God’s directions. Leaders of the Church today need to heed this example of the Jews following the Devil’s directives and should, instead of fearing the wrath of human government, side with God’s administration.

Private Passage – 33 AD. was truly *the* year of our Lord. The events in this year, as with all years, were established by God from before the foundation of the world. No other year in history has been more important. This was the year salvation was procured for God’s elect and when the Holy Spirit was poured out in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2.28, 29; Acts 2.17). But it was also the year in which the Jews officially rejected their Messiah. While the people assembled for the Passover and underwent the outward cleansing rituals, their hearts were full of polluting hatred that would soon overflow in the words, “Crucify him.” In response to the plot to kill him and antagonism from the people, Jesus removed to a town about 25kms from Jerusalem. The reason was

not because he was afraid of death—after all, he had come to die. One reason is to demonstrate that man’s time is not God’s time, and that God has the ultimate control over the outworking of all events. Jesus would die—not before the Passover as the Jewish leaders planned; but as the Passover lamb, as God planned. But, more importantly, his departure is significant in that he would no longer move and teach publicly among the Jews (Jn 11.54; i.e., in Judea). The light of the Gospel was removed from the nation of Israel.

Final Teaching Tour

Salvation’s Gratitude [September 13] **(Samaria and Galilee, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 17.11-19)**

Pitiless People – We may be informed of the locale in which the healing of the lepers took place to reinforce the nature of their deplorable condition. Not only were they suffering from leprosy, but they were also outcasts from both the Jewish and Samaritan territories. That both Jewish and Samaritan lepers dwelt together indicates that they were welcomed in neither territory and had to subsist in a DMZ (‘dead man’s zone’)—likely in the Valley of Jezreel, which had negative connotations for Jews (Josh 17.16; Judges 6.33; Hos 1.5). From their leprosy camp, at a distance from the road, the lepers called out for mercy from the passing Jesus. We know that people in that day believed that those suffering from leprosy were inflicted as a direct punishment for some specific sin (2 Chron 26.19). We can apply their situation to our own case. All mankind suffers from spiritual leprosy and lives in the DMZ (‘desolate meaningless zone’) of this world, unless we humble ourselves and call out for mercy to Jesus as he passes by. Just as Jesus heard these lepers, he will hear us and the land of ‘No Mercy’ (Hos 2.21-23) will have mercy.

Priestly Protocol – The lepers had not yet been healed, nevertheless Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests in accordance with the process for determining if a person was cured of leprosy (Lev 14.1-32). The men obeyed, implying that Jesus spoke with such authority that

he could not be ignored and that they believed that something was going to happen to them. In this command, Jesus reinforces the requirement to obey Law—because he did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it (Mt 5.17). The ceremonial law still applies today but in a different form. We must also be declared free by a priest of spiritual leprosy, of which physical leprosy was a type. But we don't go to a human priest—we go to Jesus, the Great High Priest (Heb 4.14). We must listen to Jesus' command (Mt 11.28) and go to him.

Prompt Purification – As they were going to the priest the ten lepers were healed. No cleansing rituals were required, as in the case of Naaman (2 Ki 5.1-14); no special acts or displays of penitence were demanded; only faith and obedience to a simple command was needed, and they were healed. Thus it is with cleansing from spiritual leprosy. Jesus says, “Come to me!” If we follow his instruction we also will be purified of every polluting sin.

Pariah's Praise – Luke tells us that one of the lepers, when he saw that he had been healed, returned to thank Jesus. We don't know if he went to the priests first and completed the ceremonial ritual or if, immediately on seeing that his sores were healed, he rushed back to Jesus. I think it was the latter. He had a deeper understanding about what had happened than could be attributed to mere human knowledge. He knew that the cleansing rituals prescribed by Moses were merely a type, pointing to a greater reality. He understood, through the faith implanted by the Holy Spirit, that the same God-man who had healed him could declare him clean. The irony in this account is that the man with this understanding was not a Jew from the Covenant community, but a Samaritan. The Samaritans considered the writings of Moses to be from God, understood the Levitical Laws, and were also looking for the coming Messiah (Jn 4.25). However, they did not accept the writings of the later prophets and had deficient interpretations of Scripture (Jn 4.20-24). They were considered to be heretics by the Jews. It was the double outcast, alone, who understood what had happened to him and who Jesus was. He alone fell at the feet of Jesus in worship. This reminds us that it is often the outcast of society living in outward depravity that comes to Jesus for

salvation while sadly, at times, the children of the Covenant turn away from the only hope for mankind. Our response to being saved from sin should be the same as this cured leper. We should not go through some ritual prescribed by the Church, instead of Christ, such as ‘giving our testimony’, but rather should fall on our faces in gratitude before the author of life.

Presumptuous Pride – The other nine lepers had faith that Jesus could heal their physical infirmities, but it was not saving faith. In their pride they were willing to accept mercies from God without giving him thanks (Rom 1.21). They were from the Jewish nation that accepted the works of Jesus—feeding and healing them—but would not accept him as the Messiah and God-man, and render to him the praise he deserves (Ps 107.8). The sin of ingratitude has to be among the worst sins that we can commit since it is based on the false notions that we are autonomous and independent of God, and deserve good things in this life. We should ask Jesus for mercy but also bow in thanksgiving—we should pray, but also praise. We should be quick to join joyfully in his praise by singing Psalm 103.1-22.

Promised Pardon – The thankful man got more than he asked or hoped for. Jesus’ declaration that his faith had made him well has a deeper meaning than just being cured of the decay of leprosy. Not only did he receive physical healing, he received spiritual healing and eternal hope—the Greek here reads, literally: ‘your faith has saved you’. The other nine lepers likely lived out the rest of their earthly existence eating and drinking and making merry, and then they died to pass into a lost eternity. In contrast, the outcast of the world is seated in Glory at the feast of the Lamb. If you are destined for Heaven you will one day join his company and forever give thanks to the Lord who saves.

The Present Kingdom [September 14] **(Samaria and Galilee, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 17.20-37)**

The teaching in this passage and in a similar passage in Matthew 24.1-51 (in which Jesus, a few weeks later, expanded on the teaching) has many

interpretations. Some think Jesus is speaking of the Rapture when, according to their theory, he will take Christians from the earth and leave unbelievers behind. Others think that this passage speaks of the sudden return of Jesus to the earth to bring about the final judgement of all mankind. A third, much less common view, is that Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD—with an application to eternal judgement. This, I believe, is the correct interpretation.

Dominion Presence – The Pharisees had previously heard Jesus speak about the coming Kingdom of God and wanted to know when it would be revealed. Their hope was that the Messianic kingdom would soon appear with power and overthrow the oppression of Rome. However, Jesus informs them that the kingdom of God could not be observed or demarcated in the same way as an earthly kingdom. It was invisible, but nevertheless had already arrived—it was in their midst (not ‘within’, as in some translations, since the kingdom of God was not *in* the hearts of the unbelieving Pharisees) in the presence of Jesus as the King and of believers, such as the disciples, as its subjects. The Pharisees needed only to acknowledge him as the Messiah and they would see the kingdom. We must not be like them, looking for Jesus to establish a future kingdom. His kingdom has been established. He reigns today!

Distracting Pointers – Turning to his disciples, he expands on his theme. A time would come when the disciples would be looking for a visible display of the kingdom’s power—for example, to deliver them from the hands of Roman or Jewish oppressors (notice that the text does not speak of the *return* of Jesus but of *one* of his days). He warns them not to be distracted by all kinds of pointers (especially end-time prophecies), but to wait expectantly.

Discernable Parousia – A visible coming of the Son of Man in power would be manifest suddenly in the same way as lightening appears brightly and then vanishes. This appearance would occur only after his death and resurrection, so was in the disciples’ future—not in our future. The particular coming that is in focus is not the end of history but rather the pending destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans a generation later.

Jesus was to be rejected by that generation of unbelieving Jews and embraced by believing Gentiles—like lightening the Gospel would spread from one end of the earth to the other.

Debauched People – The Jewish people of his day were complacent in their belief that they were God’s chosen people. Like the evil people in Noah’s day, or those in Sodom, they lived as if this world was their permanent home and not as pilgrims passing through toward a better land. They were in a deep moral slumber and ignored the Prince of Peace in their midst. The ‘happy pagans’ of our day are the same—they ignore the King and his *present kingdom*, living for the moment instead of for God’s glory and eternity.

Doom Pending – For that generation, their doom was pending. Jesus gave them 40 years to repent, but their hatred of him only increased as Christianity spread among the Gentiles. When the Roman armies under Titus approached Jerusalem to lay siege to it, the Christians who were still living in the city understood what was happening and evacuated the city. In contrast, the pain and suffering for the Jews in Jerusalem was akin to the disasters of the Flood that destroyed mankind or the fire and burning sulphur that wiped out Sodom. Our own generation is under the threat of an even more dire destiny than any catastrophe that has befallen mankind (whether natural disaster or national genocide). We are wallowing in moral sleaze awaiting a holocaust in Hell fire unless we repent and acknowledge the *present kingdom* and King Jesus.

Dispatched Promptness – That this passage warns the disciples primarily about the pending destruction of Jerusalem, and not about Jesus’ final return in judgement, is evident from the fact that Jesus tells them to be prepared to flee from the city and Palestine when the Roman armies approach. If they wanted to save their lives they were not to attempt to retrieve their personal belongings or even to look back at the city as they ran from it. His instruction makes no sense in the context of his final return in judgement since on that day sinners working or sleeping on the roofs of their houses won’t think about going downstairs to pack, or those working the field won’t attempt to look back at the city

as they flee; they will be cowering in abject fear before the judge of all the earth. This initial teaching does not give the specific sign, but Jesus expands on it in Matthew 24.15-24 and warns them to flee the city when they see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel. This passage can also be applied to our own situation. We must not cling to the material decay of this world but be prepared to give it all up, flee from the City of Destruction, and run to Jesus Christ for eternal safety.

Death's Putrescence – The disciples ask where the people will be taken. Those who remained in the city would rot away during the siege and finally be wiped out by the Roman armies and then left as carrion for the vultures. In the same way, those who ignore the warnings about pending judgement will rot in Hell for eternity. Those who listened to Jesus and left the city would spread the Gospel throughout the world and then be taken into Glory.

Habitual and Humble Prayer [September 15]
(Samaria and Galilee, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 18.1-14)

Perceptive Application – We must focus on the primary point of a parable and not try to find meaning in every nuance of the story. So when the first of these two parables presents a widow and an unrighteous Judge, we are not to suppose that the Church is like a widow who, as a woman, had no standing before the law and no access to the judge and had no male who could petition the judge on her behalf. Nor are we to focus on her poverty which made it impossible for her to hire lawyers to assist her with her case or to bribe the judge. Nor are we to think of God as the judge. It would be blasphemous to suggest that God is *like* the judge in this account. The key to interpreting the first parable is to realize that the Church and Christians are in a situation that is the *opposite* of the widow—we have direct access to God (Eph 2.18; Eph 3.12; Heb 4.14-16; Heb 10.19-22) with Christ as our advocate (1 Jn 2.1; Heb 2.17-18) representing us before God's throne. Also, God is totally the *opposite* of the unjust and uncaring judge—he immediately hears the appeals of his people and responds to them. Similarly, there is no need to think that the second parable provides a lesson about the make-up of the visible

Church, with good and bad worshippers in it. What then, do these parables teach?

Persistent Appeal – Jesus first teaches us to apply persistence in our prayer:

- *Constantly* (Eph 6.18) – In every situation—not just on special occasions such as when we are confronted with danger or hardship; and about *all* things—not just about the ‘big’ decisions of life.
- *Consistently* (1 Thess 5.17) – Repeatedly, not with empty repetitions (Mt 6.7) but with similar praises and petitions to those provided in the model prayer (Mt 6.9-13) that honour God, call for the advance of his kingdom through the salvation of a friend, and ask for our daily provisions.
- *Confidently* (Ps 34.15; Prov 15.29) – Expecting that God hears our prayer and answers, without losing hope or heart.

Prayer should be for us, if we are Christians, as habitual as breathing. We should always be aware of God’s presence around us like the air and turn to him minute-by-minute with exclamations of praise, thanks-giving and appeal.

Personal Attention – God is not like the judge in the story who is bothered by the pleas of the widow. We must never think that we are bothering God when we pray. God delights in hearing his people in prayer, expressing their love for him and their dependence on him. Although it may, at times, appear that he is unhearing, this is not the case. God *always* hears and answers the true prayers of his people (Lk 18.7; Ps 10.17; Ps 86.7; Prov 15.29; Is 58.9; 1 Jn 5.14-15). However, this does not mean that he always answers in the *way* we expect or desire. His understanding and purposes are far beyond ours and he knows what is best for us (Rom 8.28). He does not even delay in giving us an answer. He begins preparing the right and best answer for us immediately. We must trust that his answer will be beyond anything we can imagine or hope. We may not *see* the answer now, but it will come.

Persecuting Affliction – These parables were delivered immediately after he taught the disciples for the first time of the coming destruction of

Jerusalem. Jesus is not suggesting, as most suppose, that when he returns to earth to close this era he will find only a few believers left. Rather, his point is that the persecutions of Christians by the Jews leading up to 70 AD were to be so severe that believers would be fainting with discouragement thinking that God had deserted them. The general application for us is that we are not to be distressed by the God-haters of our age. God has not forgotten us. He will vindicate our faith and trust in him, into eternity.

Pharisaic Arrogance – Not only is prayer to be habitual, it is to be humble. Anyone who comes to God in the confidence of his own attainments is really not praying. We are not to inform God of how good we think we are, or boast before him of the things we have done. It is delusional for us to think that we can use prayer as a means of gaining respect from men (Mt 6.5) or from God, declaring our own righteousness, or putting down others with contempt.

Penitent Attitude – Rather, when we pray we are to bow our heads before God with respect for his deity and dignity while despising our own feeble attempts to please him. Jesus reminds us that the core elements in any true prayer are: 1) a sincere admission that God alone is the true God and the one who rightly demands obedience from his creatures, 2) an honest confession that we have failed to keep his holy standards and are nothing but destitute sinners. Our standard for establishing righteousness is not our attainments but God's Word. We must not boast of our power but bow in penitence.

Paradoxical Attainments – The spiritual life is often full of paradoxes. The person who gives up his life for Christ will live, the one who puts himself last will be first, and he who humbles himself before God will be exalted. We, of course, are not to feign submission and humility thinking that we can fool God into rewarding us. God examines every cranny of our minds and knows our deepest thoughts so we cannot hide deceptively from him. But if our motives are pure and our attitude right we can trust God to deliver us from the perversions of this morally polluted realm,

bring us safely through the shadows in the valley of death, and welcome us into perpetual glorious light.

Marriage and Divorce [September 16] **(Perea, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 19.1-12; Mk 10.1-12)**

Cultural Objections – Jesus left Galilee for the final time and travelled to Judea, through Perea. On his way, he was confronted by Pharisees. They pretended to seek enlightenment on a passage in the Law (Dt 24.1-4) and guidance for deciding between the competing schools of the rabbis (e.g., Hillel taught that divorce was allowed for almost any reason, Shammai taught that it was allowed only if a wife was guilty of a sexual offence). In reality, their interest was in justifying their false views about marriage and divorce. They were creatures of their culture, in the same way that many in the Church today are infected by the world. Adultery, other sexual sins, and divorce are almost as common today in the Church as they are in society as whole.

Creation Ordinance – Jesus ignored the contentious disputes of the rabbinic schools and turned his attention to the Bible. He demonstrates that our final authority in doctrinal disputes is not to be church councils, prominent pastors, or top theologians, but God’s Word. He asks: “What did Moses *command*?” According to Jesus, the OT is still normative, not just a book of historical context for the NT. What does the OT (Gen 1.27; Gen 2.24) teach? Marriage is:

- *God Defined* – God *said* a man will leave his parents and be united to his wife. In spite of this, governments have usurped God’s right to define marriage and plagued it with all manner of evil.
- *Universal* – Marriage was instituted with Adam and Eve. It is not a Jewish convention but an ordinance that applies to all mankind, in all nations, and through all ages.
- *Cross Gender* – Marriage, as God instituted it, is to be between a man and a woman—not between two people of the same gender. A church that performs homosexual marriages is an abomination before God.

- *For Couples* – Polygamy and polyandry are ruled out from the beginning.
- *Expected* – The only thing in the new creation that was not good, was that the man was alone (Gen 2.18). Men and women are not to live their lives as singles for their careers or self indulgence, but to leave their families and live with a spouse and raise children (Gen 1.28).
- *Thicker than Blood* – The relationship between a husband and wife is nearer than that between parents and children. In-laws become a problem in marriages only if men and women forget that they are to leave their parents and to be united to their spouse.
- *A Physical Union* – Marriage is God's appointed setting for sexual intercourse. All sexual activity outside of this union is sinful.
- *Permanent* – As long as a husband and wife live, they are to remain married. A man's wife becomes part of himself ('one flesh'). This is why divorce is wrong (Mal 2.16) and 'trial marriages' are cursed.

Christian Obedience – Even when Jesus told them what God expected about marriage, the Pharisees raised the objection that Moses permitted divorce (7). Jesus dismisses this objection in two ways: 1) this provision was a concession because of their hard hearts; 2) it is not what God intended for marriage from creation. He then provides direction to his disciples on the only ground for divorce—sexual immorality. The Greek word Matthew uses is *porneia* (Jesus likely taught in Aramaic), from which we get 'pornography'. This exception clause has caused some debate. Some translate it as a synonym for adultery, whereas others limit it to pre-marital sexual activities claiming that there are no grounds for divorce, even adultery, after marriage. Some define it as 'illegitimate' marriages that could be construed as incestuous (1 Cor 5.1); some think it refers to participation in cultic sexual activities referring to Acts 15.20, 29; while others limit it to a persistent and unrepentant course of sexual unfaithfulness (not a one-time act). However we might try to limit the definition, we must accept the reality that the word includes any form of sexual activity that is not between a husband and wife. The Bible provides God's standard: marriage is permanent and the marriage bed is to remain undefiled (Prov 5.15-23; Heb 13.4).

Challenging Observance – The disciples are perplexed by this teaching. If there is no room for divorce (except if a spouse commits sexual immorality) then marriage is going to be difficult. From their perspective a husband has no threat over his wife to keep her in line. They act like petulant children and selfishly conclude that it is therefore better not to marry. Jesus responds that there are situations where not being married is an option—for those unable to marry and for those who renounce marriage to devote themselves to kingdom service (1 Cor 7.32-34)—but the normal course is for all people to marry (Gen 2.18). Note: he is not dealing with difficult situations such as a Christian woman not being able to find a marriage partner because of a shortage of men in the Church. He is focusing on *attitudes*. Marriage is hard work, and those in a marriage are to work at making it a success—not to look for an escape clause when things get tough. The Christian ideal is that there will never be divorces because husbands will love their wives and wives will respect their husbands and be subject to them (Eph 5.25-33; Col 3.19; 1 Pt 3.1). Happy marriages do not happen by chance; they result from Christian men and women, living under grace, who commit to each other their lives and relationships. They make a commitment with vows before God, to love each other, work together as mutual helpers, and sacrifice for one another. This is what God intended for marriage, from the beginning.

Jesus Loves Little Children [September 17]
(Perea, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 19.13-15; Mk 10.13-16; Lk 18.15-17)

Context – Jesus’ teaching about the true nature of marriage is followed by this account. The God-established order for man, as male and female, is marriage followed by children. A couple’s love in ‘one flesh’ is deepened and matured through the nurture of children. The Jewish mind viewed children as a blessing from God (Ps 127-128) and a normal outcome of a godly marriage. Unlike our culture, which views children as a burden and almost a curse, the Church needs to return to the God-defined view of the family, with children being seen as a reward from

God. Since three of the four gospels record this incident we need to meditate carefully on its important message for us.

Comfort – The people who brought their children (babies and toddlers) to Jesus to have them blessed were likely not acting superstitiously. The biblical precedents respecting the merit of blessings are numerous.¹⁶ Therefore the people believed in the value and power of a blessing from God mediated through a godly-man such as a rabbi to provide comfort and as a sign of God's grace. The practice of offering blessings has been carried into the NT Church.¹⁷ Our earnest desire should be to have our children receive a blessing from Jesus. When his hand of authority touches them they are truly blessed.

Censure – The disciples reacted in a surprising way by rebuking the people and trying to prevent them from bringing the children to Jesus. They knew that Jesus had affection for children (Mk 9.36-37) and that other rabbis would bless children. However, they probably thought that the parents were wasting Jesus' time and that they were doing Jesus a favour by pushing away anyone who would deflect him from his teaching ministry. Their censure of the parents was misplaced and shows, at root, a disdain for children and a pompous belief that they knew what the Lord should be doing. In our society today—one that increasingly hates children—Christians, and in particular pastors/elders and deacons, need to be careful that they are not acting as the disciples did. We can put up barriers to children by objecting to their noises during worship, segregating them into nurseries, or not taking time to engage seriously with them. If we are Christ-like, we will love children and encourage them to come to Jesus. Similarly, we can apply this in the spiritual realm and be careful how we treat new believers who are babies in Christ.

Compassion – When Jesus saw the disciples pushing away the parents with children he was indignant. It is rare that we find Jesus angry with anyone. For example, he appears to have been angry with the money changers who had taken over the Court of the Gentiles in the temple, but

¹⁶ Gen 27.1-46; Gen 48-49; Lev 9.22; Num 6.22-27; Josh 22.6

¹⁷ Lk 24.50; Acts 6.5-6; 1 Thess 5.23; Jude 24; Jude 25

this account may be one of only two (see, Mk 3.5) where we are *told* that Jesus was angry. Jesus called the children, took each one in his arms (fulfilling Isaiah 40.11) and placed his hands on them, and blessed them. While the disciples might have thought that blessing children was a waste of time, Jesus stopped his journey and ministered to each child that was presented to him before he continued on his way. It should be a great encouragement for us that Jesus cares as much for our children as he did for the children in Perea during the winter of 33 AD. We can trust that even now Jesus' hands are on our children's heads and that he is blessing them with the spiritual blessings that only he can give.

Covenant – People who claim that the infant children of believers should not be baptized are quick to point out that this passage does not mention baptism. They claim that if the disciples had practiced infant baptism they would not have turned away the parents. Instead, they use this passage to justify their practice of dedicating infants to the Lord. However, their protestations and conclusions are faulty. They miss entirely the important larger context of this passage—families under the Covenant between God and man. These children were not brought to Jesus for physical healing. They were brought to him for spiritual blessing. The parents, who were members of the Church, understood that under the Covenant their children also belonged to the visible Church and that the promises and blessing of the Covenant belonged to their children (Is 44.3; Is 54.13; Acts 2.39). Jesus intends for children to be viewed as within the Covenant community, to be presented as living sacrifices, to have the sign of the Covenant placed on them, and to receive the blessings of being part of the Covenant community. Infants of believers are to be brought to Jesus for baptism with the understanding that they are worthy and capable, because of the faith of their parents, to receive Covenantal blessings. Jesus is angry with anyone who refuses to receive infants for baptism, just as he was angry with the disciples for turning away parents seeking his blessing for their children.

Correspondence – Jesus turns the error of the disciples into a 'teaching moment'. Babies and infants have a natural helplessness, dependence on their parents, and trust in them. In this respect, their humble

circumstances and innate faith are a good illustration for how we must come to Jesus to be saved. We cannot receive salvation from God if we believe that our efforts have merit and deserve reward. To receive the kingdom of God we must come to Jesus in simple trust and with a sense of wonder at what he has done on our behalf. We must confess our inability to save ourselves, and our total dependence on his mercy and grace.

Questions from Jesus' Encounter with a Young Rich

Man [September 18]

(Perea, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 19.16-30; Mk 10.17-31; Lk 18.18-30)

What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life? – Many today would claim that they don't think about a future after death and don't believe in a conscious existence beyond this life. But in fact all people who make this claim are lying. The foolish person *claims* that there is no God (Ps 14.1) and no after-life. Everyone, without exception, knows that there is a God and that he holds us accountable for our actions. Even the most outspokenly professed atheist knows these truths in his inmost thoughts (Rom 1.19-21)—he just does everything he can to hide from the two realities. So because men really do know that there is a God and that they must obey him, they invent ways to earn eternal life. As proud creatures we believe that our eternal destinies are dependent on what we do in this life. The short history of all manmade religion is: sense God's existence, concoct means for covering guilt and appeasing God's wrath against sin, work hard at it. Yet these religions leave a gaping hole in the soul. Men know that something is missing and they always come, as did this rich young ruler, to the point where they ask what else they need to do to earn their salvation.

Why do you call me good? – Jesus first responds to the man's question by taking him to the root of his problem. The man had called Jesus "Good teacher", so Jesus probes into the meaning of 'good'. The man had a faulty perception of goodness. He held that goodness is relative ("I can be good enough for heaven.") and achievable by men. Jesus countered that goodness is measured by an ultimate standard and only

achievable by God. Jesus says that: 1) absolute perfection is demanded by God for obtaining eternal life, and 2) he (Jesus) is perfect and therefore God—accepting the epithet ‘good.’

Which Commandments? – Then Jesus confronts the man with the need for evidence of goodness. If you want to have eternal life you must display true holiness through your interactions with your fellow men. True holiness is founded on a love for God which is displayed by a love for your neighbours (Jam 1.22-25). Jesus is not suggesting that by keeping particular commands you can earn salvation. This was the mistaken notion of the young man. So he wanted to know which specific commands he needed to keep in order to gain an eternal inheritance. The message of Jesus is that there is a spectrum of laws, including the summary ‘love your neighbour as yourself’, which demonstrate the state of the heart. If any one of the commands is not kept, then the entire law has been broken and a person cannot inherit eternal life.

What Do I Still Lack? The young man understood that Jesus was not being exhaustive or complete in his illustration. This is why he enquired if there was something else that was needed. Note that Jesus does not specifically include the 10th Commandment in his enumeration. It was at this point that the man’s real problem originated—he was rich but greedily selfish. So Jesus directs him to consider his heart condition, change his priorities, and put God first in his heart. If he was merciful to the poor he would have demonstrated an inner righteousness and an unrivalled allegiance to God. Jesus is not teaching that it is wrong to be rich or that by giving all our possessions to the poor we can buy a place in Heaven. He is, rather, focusing on this person’s problem—his riches were his god. All men think they are good enough if they keep the outward requirements of the Law. Jesus decimates this view, here, and in the *Sermon on the Mount*. Man’s real problem is often not external observance of the Law, but it is always a proud sinned-stained heart.

Who then can be saved? – The Jews of Jesus’ day mistakenly equated riches with a promise of eternal blessing. In case we do the same, Jesus emphasizes the danger associated with riches. Even though being rich is

not, in itself, a moral problem it is very difficult for the rich to avoid the sins associated with the love of money. Those who are rich often do not think that they need to depend on God for anything in this life or eternity. This is why Jesus says that it is as difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as to pass a camel through the eye of a sewing needle. The disciples were amazed at this and concluded that no rich person could be saved—since all rich people seem to be consumed by a love of riches. Jesus corrects their mistake and teaches that through the grace of God even some rich people will have a proper attitude toward riches and a loving concern for their neighbours. Be careful that you do not use this teaching as an escape-clause to justify clinging to your riches.

What is our Reward? – Peter, representing the disciples, makes the opposite mistake. He assumes that since they had renounced worldly riches they were assured of a reward. But poverty is not equated with righteousness. However, Jesus did not rebuke Peter for his faulty conclusion. He knew that at heart Peter, and most of the disciples, did love him. He, rather, turns their attention away from worldly, to eternal riches. Anyone who has renounced a love of this world will be blessed with eternal rewards when Jesus comes to establish the new heavens and earth (the renewal of all things). It is unwise for us to enquire into the specifics of what these rewards will be. We should accept the reality that they will be spectacular and a just recompense for suffering deprivation for the cause of Christ in this life. Also we should not worry about how the rewards will be administered to the saints or what criteria will be used. Jesus warns, in particular, against this concern—those who are first now, will be last then. Our focus must be on obedient, faithful service.

Workers in the Vineyard [September 19]
(Perea, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 20.1-16)

In the encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus taught that we are not to be concerned about clinging to riches in this life but to look for eternal rewards in Heaven. Peter asked what would be the disciples' rewards since they had renounced worldly wealth (Mt 19.27). Jesus responded by

telling Peter that even though their rewards would be great, they were not to be concerned with how they will be allocated. He continued with the words, “Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” He then went on to illustrate his teaching with this parable of the workers in the vineyard.

Economic Guidance – Before we consider the spiritual and eternal principles taught by this parable we should note that it also provides some guidance for how we should interact with one another on an economic level. The fact that Jesus used an illustration of a landowner disposing of his income as he wished (15) indicates that God supports the right of individuals personally to own and use property. The Bible does not endorse enforced government ownership of property as is espoused by communism and socialism. Also, the landowner was able to contract with the labourers, willing to work for a fair-market wage, as he saw fit. The Bible does not endorse government mandated wage rates, such as through minimum wage settings or pay-equity scales.

Every Generation – The primary application of this parable is often thought to be to the Jews who were the first workers in God’s vineyard while those who came in later are considered to be the Gentiles. This perspective may not be valid. This parable is not addressed to the Jewish leaders, but to the disciples; and it is in response to the question Peter asked about the rewards the disciples (who were all Jewish) would receive in contrast to the rich young ruler who loved the rewards of this world’s wealth. There is nothing in this parable that indicates that it is primarily a warning to Jewish believers not to be jealous of the Gentiles who would shortly start coming into the Church in large numbers. This parable, rather, is addressed to all believers in the Church who are jealous of their work for the kingdom and feel slighted if new-comers in the Church appear to advance beyond them in recognition.

Envy’s Grudge – This parable warns against the inclination to the sin of envy which can consume any of us. Long-time members of a congregation can begrudge or be envious of (the Greek uses the idiom ‘evil eye’; compare Dt 15.9; 1 Sam 18.9) newcomers—whether new

converts or others who come in from the outside—receiving roles, offices, or recognition that they feel are theirs by right of tenure. Pastors and Elders can become jealous if a young person or new convert shows skills as a teacher or a maturity and wisdom that cause members to seek that person's advice or counsel rather than their own. We must not forget that God gives gifts to his Church without measure, and we must rejoice when he dispenses these gifts in our midst.

Eternal Grace – A key to understanding this parable is found in the right of the landowner to hire whom he willed and to pay them as he wished. This teaches that God has the infinite right to call whom he wills into his kingdom and to reward them as he wishes. While Peter's question equates works with rewards and earned rights, Jesus' response is that salvation is not based on works but on God's grace (Rom 4.1-4; Eph 2.8-10). The grace of God is not determined by our concepts of equity (12), but on his free dispensation (15). We must believe that God's grace is based on unmerited favour and not on the works that we perform for his kingdom. Rewards will be given to believers, not according to when they were converted, their seniority, their tenure, or what they did, but according to the generous grace of God. 'The last will be first and the first last', teaches that before God, there is complete equality in man; we all have equal merit—which is nothing—before God.

Endured Giving – Some in the Church will be like the workers hired first, and complain that they have served God patiently all their lives and borne the 'heat of the day' and have done the most work. They think that they should be compensated beyond those who have only toiled one, or a few, hours. We are wrong to assess our efforts for the kingdom against what we perceive that others do, or have done. Our concern should rather be to work faithfully for God's glory and not our own reward or recognition. Instead of complaining about the hardships we have endured, we really must believe that it has been our privilege to be blessed with the opportunity to put in a full day (which is a life-time) of faithful service for God.

Encouraging Guarantee – Let us not miss the fact that God gives rewards to his people. There should be great encouragement from this parable. All those whom Jesus calls into his kingdom are given a ‘minimum’ reward at the end of the day. Every believer is guaranteed the reward of an eternal life in the company of God and the angels (Rom 2.7). This reward is not the wages for the value of their work, but the gift of God. Though it appears that there will be degrees of reward in heaven, we are not to concern ourselves with the final outcome of this disposition, but to rejoice in the knowledge that there is complete and eternal happiness in store for us (Rev 21.3-4). If God graciously gives rewards to others, what concern is that to us? We should rather bow in thankful awe, and praise him for saving us from a lost eternity in Hell.

Humble Service is Kingdom Greatness [September 20]
(To Jerusalem, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 20.17-28; Mk 10.32-45; Lk 18.31-34)

Explicit Prophecy – Sin has so polluted our natures that we are slow to learn and accept truth. We see this in every domain of thought—from religion and philosophy, to science and technology, and to economics and sociology. So it should not surprise us that even though Jesus had taught his disciples multiple times (Mt 12.40; Mt 16.21; Mt 17.22-23) about his pending death in Jerusalem, they still did not understand what he was talking about (Lk 18.34). From this period of instruction we learn of the:

- *Approach* – Jesus, the true Rabbi, led them on their journey both in terms of the spatial direction they should take and their spiritual direction. He used progressive revelation, private instruction, and repetition to prepare them for the events which would occur in a few weeks.
- *All-knowing* – The explicit precision of the prophecy about what was shortly to transpire in Jerusalem is beyond the capability of any mere man and demonstrates that Jesus is the God-man.
- *Assurance* – The coming events would fulfill everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man. So Jesus emphasizes through his use of multiple emphatic future-tense verbs (‘will be’) that these

events were certain. This gave the disciples, and gives us, assurance, that God's word is absolutely reliable, without any error.

- *Affection* – In spite of knowing precisely what would happen to him, he led the way to Jerusalem. His heart was set on completing his suffering-work because, in his love, he chose to lead many people to Glory.
- *Accomplishment* – He headed to Jerusalem for the Passover as the final offering for sin. This concept confused the disciples who had different Messianic expectations. Yet his sufferings and death would procure salvation for men and be fully accomplished with the resurrection.

Evil Petition – The teaching the disciples had heard about 'the renewal of all things' (Mt 19.28) and the predicted events which were to occur in Jerusalem prompted James and John to hide behind their mother's skirt and concoct a plot to benefit from their family connection with Jesus (they were cousins through their mothers). They requested her to place an early request with Jesus that he would grant them each a seat of honour in the coming kingdom.

Empty Pride – In response, Jesus asked his cousins if they could endure the trials he was about to face—the 'cup' and 'baptism' metaphors in this case speak of God's judgment against sin (Ps 75.7-8; Is 51.17-23). They didn't understand the nature of the trials about which Jesus spoke, and probably assumed that he was speaking of a messianic battle to establish the kingdom of God. So they boasted, with an unwarranted pride, that they could endure the trials. Jesus adds the prophecy that they would indeed suffer for him. Their boast may have been empty at the time, but through the power of the Holy Spirit they were able to face their own trials for the Kingdom—James was executed at the hands of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12.1-2) and John endured persecution and exile (Rev 1.9).

Envious Petulance – The other disciples, hearing the dialogue, and that Jesus spoke of the Father granting places in Heaven, became jealous. They also had selfish ambitions about obtaining a place of honour in the

Kingdom and were probably upset that they hadn't asked first and that James and John were using their family connections to obtain the honours. For example, Peter had boasted that he and the other disciples had left everything to follow Jesus (Mt 19.27) and assumed that they would be rewarded accordingly.

Egoless Position – Jesus had recently (probably the day before) taught them about service in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 20.1-16). They appear to have been just as slow to internalize this teaching as they had the teaching about the nature of his role as the Messiah and the requirement for him to suffer in Jerusalem. So for a second time in two days, he teaches them about what constitutes true Kingdom-service. Notice that he called them together before he began this instruction. They were brothers-in-faith that were at odds with one another and they had to be brought into close fellowship again. He then set up a contrast between the kingdom he came to establish and the kingdoms of this world. Worldly kingdoms are governed by the exercise of temporal powers. The Kingdom of Heaven excludes the use of tyranny and the abuse of power (1 Tim 3.2-3; Titus 3.2), and prohibits the engagement of physical weapons for its advance and sustenance (Eph 6.10-18). Instead, the Kingdom is founded upon humble service. This service is not to be pretend or feigned in order to receive rewards but rather to be sincere—with no thought about the eventual rewards that may be distributed by God on the last day. True service for the Kingdom involves giving of our resources, talents, and time so that the name of Jesus, and not our own, will be recognized and honoured. The service we are to give is typified by that which Jesus rendered on behalf of men who do not deserve any blessings. Jesus explains, for the first time, the reason that he would die—as a ransom for many. There is no greater example of service than to give one's life as a substitute and payment for the sins of undeserving and wicked men (Rom 5.6-8). If we really want to be of service to mankind, we won't seek positions of power or prestige and we won't worry about where we will sit in Heaven. Rather, we will abandon self-honour and commit our energy and lives to serving Jesus, our Lord.

The Response of Two Healed Blind Men [September 21] **(Jericho, Winter 32-33 AD. Mt 20.29-34; Mk 10.46-52; Lk 18.35-43)**

Circumstances – There is considerable variation in the record of this miracle among the three Synoptic Gospels. This might lead some to conclude that there are errors in one or another of the accounts and, therefore, in the Bible. For example one of the accounts mentions two blind men whereas the other two mention one blind man; and Luke mentions that the healing occurred on the way to Jericho whereas the other two inform us that it occurred as they left the city. While there were two blind men who were healed, one of them, Bartimaeus, is singled out because he acted as the spokesman for the two. The location of the healing is a bit more challenging to understand. It has been suggested that initially the blind men called to Jesus as he entered the city and then again when he left. Alternatively, some say that there were two Jerichos at the time of Jesus—an old Jewish city and a new Herodian one—about a kilometre apart. The blind men confronted Jesus as he was leaving the old city and approaching the new one. A third alternative suggests that the Greek in Luke should be translated as, “when he was near to Jericho” which could mean either entering or leaving. Regardless of the explanation that is correct, we should appreciate the fact that the substance of different eye-witness accounts may be the same while the particulars may vary, and that God ensured that the original accounts written by the Bible’s authors were without error. If there are irreconcilable differences in the accounts, it is not because there are errors in the Bible, but because we do not yet have all the facts which would enable us to construct a complete picture of what actually happened. We need to believe that God has the complete scope of the events.

Cry – Without question this account speaks of the healing of two blind men along the side of the road near Jericho. However, the important message that we are to take from this miracle is not that Jesus heals physical blindness but that Jesus restores spiritual sight. There must be no doubt that Jesus can heal any person of blindness. The God who created the human eye, as the God-man, can certainly fix a

malfunctioning one. But Jesus didn't heal every blind eye in his day and we are not to expect that kind of healing today since the age of sign-miracles to validate the Messiah has ceased. We should see the symbolism in this account: Man is a spiritually blind beggar waiting for the Messiah/Christ (the Son of David) to improve his condition. The men cry out and beg Jesus to heal them. The nature of their cry instructs us as to how we should pray for salvation and spiritual insight. Our persistent plea for mercy should be directed to the God-man who alone can save us from 'blindness'.

Crowd – Many in the crowd, including possibly some of the disciples (those who led the way) tried to silence the cry of the blind men. It is a sad reality that not only in general pagan society, but even in the Church, we find many who attempt to silence those who are seeking Jesus. We need to encourage anyone seeking Jesus to shout all the louder, until God answers his prayer.

Call – God will answer everyone who earnestly seeks for him, just as Jesus heard the voice of the poor beggars and called them to come to him. Most Christians have little understanding of how great a privilege we have when Jesus calls us to himself. Those of us who have grown up in the Church often take for granted our calling. Those who are new to Christ have a better understanding and still retain the glow of their nascent joy. Our hearts should always be warmed by the call of Jesus and we should throw off our cloaks, or anything else that prevents us from running, to be with him—for example in worship with fellow believers (Ps 122.1).

Challenge – Jesus asked the men what they needed. Clearly he didn't ask them because he needed information about their situation—their blindness would have been obvious to every person walking by. The query is designed to draw them into a humble confession of dependence and an articulation of faith in him. Bartimaeus responds by calling Jesus both Lord and Rabbi. It is God's will that anyone who comes to him in prayer must acknowledge his own inabilities to meet his needs and admit that Jesus alone can meet them.

Compassion – God will respond with compassion to any humble person who trusts him to supply every need—spiritual, physical, relational, and material. Faith is a necessary means of receiving help from God, but is not the efficient cause. The efficient cause is God’s love and mercy toward his people. We should note that this miracle is a final display of Jesus’ authority before he arrives in Jerusalem to face his death. It is not a promise that God will always answer all our requests, the way we think they should be answered. We must believe that God knows exactly what is best for us—far better than we know ourselves. He knows our limits, how to test and strengthen us, and how to use us and the skills he has given us, more precisely than we do. He created us and will sustain us through every breath until he is ready to call us home.

Celebration – Bartimaeus understood the nature of Christian discipleship. He recognized his native inability, trusted in Jesus the dispenser of God’s mercy, and, when his sight was restored, followed Jesus with an infectious joy. Our response to God’s gracious mercy for saving us from Hell should have the same result. As we walk behind Jesus on the road to the eternal Jerusalem, the people we pass by should see our joy and hear our praise and should also begin to praise God.

A Small Man with a Big Heart [September 22] (Jericho, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 19.1-10)

Diminutive’s Interest – This well known story teaches about the nature of salvation from sin that Jesus offers mankind. First, it tells us about the kind of people, like Zacchaeus, that Jesus came into the world to save. He was:

- *Crooked* – There is probably deliberate irony in God’s providence that the man in this account is named Zacchaeus. While his name is derived from the word for ‘righteous’, he was far from living up to his name—since he was a crook who defrauded his neighbours by collecting more taxes than were required. Jesus showed his disciples

that even the most perversely depraved person can be brought to repentance and faith.

- *Comfortable* – Zacchaeus was wealthy and would normally be among the least concerned about his eternal destiny (Lk 18.24-25); but what is impossible with men is possible with God (Lk 18.27).
- *Curious* – We don't know how God prepared Zacchaeus' heart to want to see Jesus—he may have been a friend of Matthew who had told him about Jesus, or he had come to realize that his wealth didn't meet his deepest needs. Regardless, he wanted to see Jesus. Curiosity about Jesus is a precursor to knowing him. Anyone who is saved has a desire to know who Jesus is.
- *Child-like* – Jesus had recently taught his disciples that it required child-like faith to apprehend the Kingdom (Lk 18.17). Here we see a wealthy government official acting like a boy, running and climbing a tree, to learn more about Jesus.
- *Conscientious* – Being short and unable to see through or over the crowd, Zacchaeus did what he could to gain an opportunity to learn more about Jesus. His willingness to overcome obstacles brought him eternal benefit.

Divine Imperative – Jesus had probably never met Zacchaeus in person, but yet he called him by name and told him to come down from the tree. Jesus, through his Divine nature, knows every person in his creation and everything about them—in particular he knows those whom he will save in a personal, loving way. While Zacchaeus had hoped to see Jesus, Jesus actually went to find him. Just as God went looking for Adam and Eve after they had sinned (Gen 3.9), he takes the initiative to seek lost sinners (10) and invites himself to dine with them. It is an amazing truth that the self-existent creator of the universe delights in fellowshiping with finite creatures and deigns to share a meal with them. With Zacchaeus we should rejoice that Jesus invites us to his supper, in Communion in the local assembly and in eternity (Rev 19.9).

Divisive Iniquity – Self-righteous individuals are never happy with the way God chooses to work out the salvation of sinners (7). Many believe that their acts of kindness or generosity, or their adherence to some self-

defined rules are sufficient to earn them a place in Heaven. Others feel that those who are debauched or wicked are beyond redemption and do not deserve to be saved. These views are prevalent among both those outside and inside the Church; but they are desperately false. The reality is that none of us is righteous by nature and every one of us is guilty of breaking the entire Law (James 2.10). None of us deserves to have fellowship with Jesus and we have no right to censor God for how he saves or for whom he saves. Rather, we should fall on our knees, earnestly thanking him for saving us and beg him to save others.

Demonstrated Initiation – The first thing Zacchaeus did on encountering Jesus, and being converted, was to respond in obedience to God's revealed holy Law. Law-keeping will never earn anyone salvation, but salvation will always result in a desire to obey God's Law out of love and thankfulness (Jn 14.15). A desire to learn what God requires of us and how we may please him is the sign of true conversion. We see in Zacchaeus a change of heart that is:

- *Convicted* – He knew that he was a sinner who had broken the Law by stealing from his neighbours and he repented of his sin.
- *Compliant* – He was also conscious that the debt of sin must be paid. Although Jesus had forgiven his sins, he knew that the details of the Law must be observed and promised to repay four-fold what he had stolen (Ex 22.1). This principle, from the OT economy, is implicitly endorsed by Jesus and stands today as a guideline for retributive justice in our courts.
- *Costly* – The cost of following Jesus was expensive. He gave up half of his worldly goods in addition to repaying the debt for defrauding.
- *Corrected* – His life had been built on a love for money, but his changed heart corrected his priorities so that he was focused on eternal riches.
- *Convinced* – He stood in the presence of the God-man and solemnly swore an oath that from this point forward he would live for Christ.

Deliverer's Invocation – Jesus blessed Zacchaeus by declaring him to be a son of Abraham. He had been a descendent of Abraham physically, but now he became a spiritual heir to the promise made to Abraham (Gen

17.4-7). A man small in stature became a giant—a son of Abraham. And, consistent with the promises of the Covenant, Jesus declared that salvation came not only to an individual, but to his household. Everyone who repents of his sin and believes in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ is declared to be a child of Abraham (Rom 4.12; Gal 3.7) and becomes a source of blessing to all those around him. It is truly an amazing thing that God deemed the salvation of men to be so important that he sent his Son to seek and to save those who are lost. Thank God that he came to seek and save you!

The Gift of the Minas [September 23] **(Jericho, Winter 32-33 AD. Lk 19.11-28)**

Delayed Appearance – Prior to the end of the previous millennium many believed that Jesus was going to appear visibly around 2000 AD and set up his kingdom on earth, headquartered in Jerusalem. With similar expectation, the Jews of Jesus' day thought that God was going to throw off Rome's burden and restore the Davidic kingdom. Jesus teaches in this parable, and elsewhere, that these millennial expectations only distract from what should be our focus. While we are to expect his return and the manifestation of his eternal kingdom, we are not to read signs and set dates. We are to serve while waiting patiently for 'the man of noble birth' (a self reference to Jesus) who is the Son who went into Heaven to be appointed king, and then to return.

Directed Appointment – The Son gave to each of ten servants a mina (about three-month's wages) of silver that was to be invested in useful work until he returned. I believe that we can understand the minas to be the Gospel offered and entrusted (1 Thess 2.4; 1 Tim 1.11; 1 Tim 6.20) equally to all who hear (the 'ten' symbolizing a complete number). The minas are not individual gifts given to believers since our gifts vary; nor do they represent salvation since everyone who hears the Gospel does not use that offer wisely for Christ—some end up wasting the message of truth and hope and perish. If you have heard the truth about Jesus you have an obligation to invest that truth in productive work.

Declared Antagonism – Jesus may be alluding to an example from current history (14): when Herod died around the time of Jesus’ birth, Archelaus (Mt 2.22) went to Rome to receive approval to inherit the kingdom. The Jews sent a delegation of fifty men to Augustus Caesar asking him not to approve the appointment. Jesus may use this example to show that men don’t want to receive appointed kings and applies it to himself. Some who hear the Gospel reject Jesus in outright rebellion. They proclaim that they will not have Christ as their king. Ironically they say that they will have ‘no king but Caesar’ (Jn 19.15). They are willing to be subject to man, Satan, and sin but not to Christ.

Demanded Accounting – Some of the servants were faithful in their use of the Gospel message, without being promised rewards and expecting none. Do not think that they earned their salvation by their service. This is not what the passage teaches. Rather, the faithful servants applied the gift of the Gospel to their own lives and in obedience went to their family, friends and neighbours with the Gospel and increased its application (some ten-fold, others five-fold). We are living in the time between verses 14 and 15. The Son is absent but will return and we are to faithfully multiply the Gospel until he comes.

Delinquent Awe – One of the servants, representing a third class of mankind, was disobedient to Jesus’ command. His excuse for not applying the Gospel, either to himself or to others, was a delinquent awe. Men in this class have the wrong kind of fear of God—a fear leading to dread rather than a respect leading to obedience. They think that since God punishes sin he must be cruel and struggle with questions like “How could God claim to love men when he punishes ‘innocent’ people who haven’t heard about Jesus?” They hide behind their intellectual snobbery, calling it agnosticism, when in fact they twist the character of God into a perversion. They ignore the truth that God is loving and just and that his love is displayed in the amazing act of the death of his Son. Instead of questioning God’s justice they should receive his love.

Divine Appraisal – Jesus informs this class of men that their own words will be used to condemn them. It is true that God ‘steals’ from the work

of Satan in which he attempts to turn all men into God-haters, and produces faithful fruit by his free grace. But those who reject his truth and commands, and refuse to use the message of the Gospel for good, will see their worldly wisdom collapse under the weight of God's wrath in eternal judgement.

Disposed Award – Anyone who furthers the Kingdom of Christ by sharing, through word and action, the exciting truths of the Gospel will be given royal awards. God adopts them into his household and assigns them the privilege of ruling with Christ (2 Tim 2.12; Rev 20.4, 6). Some people think that this reign will consist of an earthly millennial kingdom with believers ruling over unbelievers. This view results in many interpretive difficulties. However, it is also not easy to understand what Jesus means when he says that his faithful servants will rule city-kingdoms in eternity. We may have to wait until the return of Jesus to fully understand (1 Cor 2.9). Regardless, we can trust and believe that Jesus will give royal appointments to his people.

Destined Avenging – Jesus deals finally with the destiny of those who refuse to be reconciled to God through him. In the Day of Vengeance it will be Jesus who will declare their punishment. Everyone who shuts his ears to the truth about Jesus; on hearing the truth, calls it a myth or lie; or who uses his name as a curse will stand before him in his anointed glory and be called to give account for rejecting him. The Jews of his generation who disbelieved ended up fully subject to Caesar, and the slaughter in Jerusalem in 70 AD was brutal. But the utter and eternal ruin that awaits all those who reject Jesus today will be worse than any holocaust in history. If you will not receive the grace of Christ you will be ruined by the wrath of Christ.

Return to Jerusalem

A Plot to Hide Resurrection Evidence [September 24]
(Bethany, Spring 33 AD. Jn 12.1, 9-11)

Seclusion Time – John tells us that Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover. It appears that his purpose in going there was to prepare for the final events in his work of procuring redemption for his people. He likely needed a short respite from the persecutions of the Jewish leaders and from the pestering of those in the crowd who were merely curious, before facing the final week of his humiliating challenges on earth. To obtain his needed respite, he went to the home of his dear friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha where he would be loved, encouraged, and strengthened. This speaks clearly about the true humanity of Jesus. In his human nature, he needed friendship as much as any other man. Just as it was not good for Adam to be alone and he needed a companion, so even the God-man needs companionship. We should remember this when we become Jesus' friends. He is not austere, cold, and distant. He loves his people and looks for them to love him in return. He wants us to commune with him—now in prayer and at his table during the Lord's Supper; and soon, forever in Glory.

Speculative Temptation – The people who came from Jerusalem to Bethany seem only to have been interested in seeing Lazarus out of curiosity. Since Lazarus was not the miracle worker, their curiosity was likely found in one, or more, of the following areas:

- 1) *Status Seekers* – Have you ever met anyone who claims he was in NYC on 2001/09/11 when the World Trade Center was destroyed by Islamic terrorists? Even if not, you can probably think of someone who speaks with pride about having been present at some other significant event. Similarly, you likely know people who 'name-drop' and claim that they have met Bill Gates, the Queen, the President, or a popular athlete or actor. Many in the crowd who came to Bethany from Jerusalem to see Jesus and Lazarus were included in this group of status seekers. They would be among the few who could claim that they had seen a man who had been dead for days and had been brought back to life.
- 2) *Spectacle Stares* – Others came to see the spectacle of a miracle worker and the result of his miracle. They were like people who gawk at serious accidents or attend freak shows. They wanted to see what a person looked like who had been dead; wound in embalming

clothes, and had begun to decay. It would appeal to their morbid appetites.

- 3) *Secrets Sleuths* – Then there would be some who, like many today, are fascinated by accounts of near-death experiences. They wanted to pry into the hidden realms of the afterlife. They may have hoped that Lazarus would speak about his experience of being dead and of what he had encountered on the other side of death.

We should come to Jesus for the right reasons—to be saved from our sins and to learn from him how to live lives that will please him—not to satisfy our lusts for secret knowledge or a perverse curiosity.

Suppressing Truth – The presence of a living Lazarus testified against the teachings of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees hated Jesus because he called them to account for their hypocrisy. So they claimed that he was demon-possessed and that he perverted the teachings of Moses. But the crowd knew that no one could really raise the dead if he were not from God. The Sadducees hated Jesus because he challenged their false teachings. In this instance, it is the priests (largely Sadducees) who took the lead in plotting to eliminate Lazarus since his resurrection demonstrated the foolishness of their rejection of the possibility of resurrection and of life continuing through death. Their plan to kill Lazarus, as well as Jesus, shows the irrationality of unbelief. If they had killed Lazarus, Jesus could have as easily raised him a second time. Later, by killing Jesus they contributed to the destruction of their own cause, because Jesus demonstrated the reality of resurrection (Lk 9.22).

The irrationality of unbelief typifies the ‘Pharisees’ and ‘Sadducees’ of our day, including: university professors teaching politically correct blather with academic hubris, politicians legislating social or economic behaviour change, environmentalists trumpeting the latest Malthusian disaster, or ‘scientists’ espousing Darwinianism with religious fervour. These priests of Western culture become angry and cover their ears if anyone dares to challenge their pontificating with truth, and gather stones to destroy their opponents (Acts 7.54-59). Unbelief and falsehood cannot

persist in a climate of true inquiry and open dialogue. It can only be perpetuated by deceit, defamation and destruction.

Status Threat – Pride was the underlying sin that caused Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit—they wanted to be like God. Pride is the underlying cause of all rebellion against God. So it was pride that led the Jewish leaders to seek to remove Jesus and Lazarus through assassination. They did not like the fact that many of the Jewish people were placing their faith in Jesus and were following his teachings. It is the same pride that drives evil men and women to drag others into their sin, and that causes Satan to seek the destruction of all mankind in Hell. However, God breaks through man's wicked inclination to be proud, humbles their hearts, and turns rebels into children of the Kingdom. Thank God that he saves!

The Triumphal Entry [September 25]

(Bethany to Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.1-9; Mk 11.1-10; Lk 19.29-40; Jn 12.12-19)

Borrowed Colt – Jesus had arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover (Jn 12.1). The next day (Jn 12.12)—a Sunday by our convention—Jesus was heading to Jerusalem and he sent two of his disciples ahead to borrow a donkey colt (accompanied by its mother) for his ride to Jerusalem. We observe in the account of this episode:

- *Predestination* – Jesus told the two disciples the precise details of what was going to happen when they arrived at the village. His knowledge of future events was only possible if he is God and if he, as God, has predestined all that will happen.
- *Proprietorship* – The disciples were to inform the owners of the colt that the Lord needed it. Jesus is master, and owner, of everything in the universe. For him to ask for the use of any of our possessions is proper because all that we have in this world is a gift from him.
- *Proclamation* – Jesus selected a colt that had never been ridden (Mk 11.2) to carry him into Jerusalem. He was proclaiming both his holiness and his humble dignity as the King of Peace.

Bold Crowning – The disciples did not at first understand the significance of this symbol of Jesus riding on a colt, but later came to see (Jn 12.16) that his actions were a fulfillment of OT prophecy and a declaration of his Kingship. They however, went along with Jesus' plans and created a makeshift saddle for him of their cloaks and placed him on the colt. To this point in his ministry Jesus had rejected attempts to declare him to be the Messianic King (e.g., Jn 6.15) because it was not the right time. Now that he was going to offer himself as a sacrifice for his people he took the initiative and declared himself to be the Messiah by riding triumphantly into Jerusalem, the royal city—the Daughter of Zion (Jer 4.31). But, he did not enter the city, on a war-horse as might a conquering king like Alexander the Great, or by chariot like a Roman general receiving tribute at his triumph. It is likely Alexander who is anticipated in Zechariah 9.1-8 as the conqueror of Syria, Tyre, and the coastlands. The prophecy of Alexander's coming is followed by the coming of the Messiah's (Zech 9.9), referred to by the Gospel writers. The Messiah would come to bring salvation to Jerusalem on a colt of a donkey. Arriving on the donkey symbolized that this King came humbly into his city, on a beast of burden, on a mission to bring peace and reconciliation.

Branches and Cloaks – Galilean pilgrims had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. Many of them had witnessed Jesus' miracles in Galilee and would want to see him again. In addition, residents of Jerusalem and the nearby villages, who knew of the resurrection of Lazarus, would be looking for him. So a great crowd lined the route to the city as he made his way there. These people cut palm branches which they spread on the road along with their cloaks. They were declaring him to be worthy of honour (Rev 5.12; Rev 7.9-10) and rejoicing at his presence (Lev 23.40), even if they all did not know that he was the Messiah or understand fully who he was.

Blessed Cries – Some people in the crowd believed that the miracles he had performed testified to the fact that he was the Messiah, and loud cries and shouts began to go up, praising him with significant

expressions and allusions from the Psalms (Ps 2.6, 7; Ps 118.25-26; Ps 132.11):

- *Hosanna* ('save now') – They used a common expression for praising royalty, asking God to save the King—like we say 'God save the Queen'.
- *Son of David, King of Israel* – They acknowledged that he was the long-promised Messianic (anointed) King—the Christ (Greek 'anointed').
- *Blessed* – They praised him as one who was worthy of direct worship.
- *He who comes in the name of the Lord* – They confessed that he was from God, bearing the name of God; and had come down from Heaven.

The people also proclaimed the truth that was previously announced by the angels at his birth (Lk 2.14)—God's purpose in sending his Son was to bring salvation and forgiveness to mankind and thereby declare peace in heaven, through reconciliation of sinners with their God and Creator.

Bitter Complaint – The Pharisees in the crowd became bitter at the reception Jesus was receiving and complained that their attempts to stop people from honouring him had had no success. Since they could not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, they asked him to stop the people from praising him. Jesus said in response that if the voices of the crowd were silenced, the inanimate stones would take up the cry of praise. If rational creatures won't accept their Lord, the inanimate objects will! Jesus, the Anointed, must be praised as the God-man who came down from Heaven for an amazing purpose—to save his people through his death and resurrection. The Messiah was being publicly presented to Israel, and God wanted this fact acknowledged and his Son honoured. In the end, all men will declare Jesus to be Lord—whether through adoration and awe or terrible trepidation (Phil 2.11). The Pharisees claimed with exaggeration that the whole world was going after Jesus (Jn 12.19). The irony is that their hyperbole has become reality. As they realized that they could not stop people from going after Jesus, so all Christ-haters, throughout history, eventually, come to realize that their

efforts to stop the spread of Christianity are futile and that the whole world has truly gone after Jesus.

Crying for the Condemned City [September 26]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.10-11, 14-17; Mk 11.11; Lk 19.41-44)

Crying Shame – Jesus was welcomed to the city of Jerusalem by a joyful crowd—some believed sincerely that he was the Messiah while others were just caught up in the excitement. But the Jewish leaders bitterly resented his presence in the city and the adulation he was receiving. It was not the positive reception that stirred an emotional response in Jesus, but the pious resentment and unbelief of many. He was moved to tears, for two reasons:

- 1) *Darkness* – The eyes of the people of Jerusalem were darkened to the truth about who he was and what his purpose was for coming to the city. At the birth of Jesus, the angels announced “peace on earth” (Lk 2.13-14) and the crowds on his entry into Jerusalem cried “peace in heaven” (Lk 19.38). Yet, even those who accepted him as the Messiah were expecting that a temporal kingdom would be established that would throw off the oppression of Rome and give them an enduring peace. The inhabitants did not understand that Jesus had come to the city to make spiritual and eternal peace between God and man through his death. Their minds were darkened and their hearts hardened against true peace—peace with God.
- 2) *Destruction* – ‘Jerusalem’ means ‘possession of peace’ or ‘foundation of peace’. However, Jesus was not entering the city to bring it temporal peace but war (Mt 10.34). The city that rejected its Messiah (“God’s coming;” Lk 19.44) would be punished for its unbelief. Jesus laid out the specifics of what was going to happen to the city in forty years (within that generation; Mt 24.34). In 70 AD, under Titus, the Romans built a siege-work against the city and razed it to the ground, slaughtering most of its inhabitants.

Jesus offers the City of Man true peace—peace with God through belief in his death and resurrection. If people today continue to live in self-imposed darkness—using Jesus as a profane exclamation or accepting him only as a good teacher or as a political activist—and ignore his

purpose for coming to earth they will perish when the siege ramps of God's destruction are erected.

City Stirred – Jesus created a stir wherever he went. As he entered the city those who were not from Galilee asked who he was. They were informed that he was the “the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” There had not been a prophet in Israel in over four hundred years so they proclaimed, probably without full understanding, that he was ‘*the prophet*’ promised by Moses (Dt 18.15). Today, wherever Jesus goes through his ambassadors—the Church—men are passionately stirred up and question who he is. The response we are to give is that Jesus is *the* Prophet of God—God’s unique spokesman who as the God-man bears the image of the divine (Heb 1.3; Col 1.15) in human form. We need to be especially insistent about this truth today. Jesus is the prophet Moses promised, not Mohammed as the adherents of Islam claim.

Curing Signs – Although only Matthew mentions, and only in passing, that the blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple courts for healing (Mt 21.14) it is an important reference since it vindicates the truth that Jesus is the Prophet. Mohammed never performed a miracle and his claims to be the prophet of God are false. Jesus performed sign miracles to demonstrate that he is God.

Children Sing – The children in the crowd shouted exuberantly in response to Jesus’ coming and his work of healing. Children were naturally attracted to him and took delight in his kindness and love. The children’s faith in Jesus could not be suppressed, but burst out in joyful songs of praise, just as Jesus’ forefather, David, had prophesied (Ps 8.2). When we sing the Psalms we join with the children in Jerusalem praising our creator and saviour (Ps 149.1-2).

Contemptuous Sin – The Jewish leaders, the ACLU (Anti-Christ Litigation Unit) of their day, were indignant that the crowd, and especially the children, were praising Jesus. They thought it unseemly and not politically correct that there should be such a public display of sincere religious affection, and for a ‘man’. In their perverted perspective

they thought it blasphemous that Jesus should be honoured as the Messianic saviour. Today the HRCs in Canada, and the ACLU in the US, pursue with the same wicked passion their one primary goal—to shut down any expression of Christianity in the public forums of our nations. The irony is explicit: these human institutions know nothing of true human rights or civil liberties. For it is in Christ alone that men have any valid human rights and legitimate civil liberties (Jn 8.32, 36; Rom 6.7; Gal 5.1).

Concluding Sweep – As evening approached, Jesus conducted a final review of the temple precincts and returned to his lodging in Bethany, before the city gates were closed for the night. This concluding visual sweep was conducted by God’s Prophet to assess the current state of religious worship. What he found was displeasing. He had previously cleansed the Temple of profane uses (Jn 2.12-17). Three years later the situation was the same, so his assessment was in preparation for a second cleansing of the Temple the next day (Mk 11.11, 15-19). Jesus found the city mostly full of materialistic pride, hatred of the Messiah, and abuses of the holy ordinances. Jerusalem stood condemned! Today God’s eye is on the NT Jerusalem, the Church. He finds some child-like faith, but he also finds it full of worldly compromise and false worship. Judgement stands over the Church and Jesus is weeping for it.

Cursing a Fruitless Tree [September 27]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.18-22; Mk 11.12-14, 19-25)

Desired Fruit – Jesus did not have many temporal resources and probably missed meals often. Why then did the Gospel writers draw attention to his hunger at this time? Not to remind us of his humanity but to declare his divinity! His physical need is a pretext for a spiritual lesson. Jesus could have covered the barren tree with rich fruit as easily as he turned water into wine and multiplied loaves of bread. But his objective was to show that our produce must be consistent with our profession. Jesus was hungry so that he could demonstrate his power and justice, through a living parable.

Deceptive Foliage – Fig trees can produce two ‘crops’ per year. The first, in the early spring, consists of small edible buds, called *olynth*. The second, full, crop follows foliation. When Jesus approached the fig tree it was mid-April so he would not have found regular figs (Mk 11.13) which would have been available only in June. But since the tree was in leaf and had not yet produced flowers, he expected to find some of the small buds. The absence of the buds indicated that the tree would not produce fruit that year. We are to understand the fruitless tree as a symbol for an unproductive Church (Jer 8.13; Hos 9.10; Mic 7.1). At the time of Jesus the Jewish leaders (scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees) claimed that they held the truth about God. Jesus condemned them for their hypocrisy—claims that were only outward pretension. They produced lots of leaves but no fruit. Many in the Church today are in a similar situation. They claim that they know and love Jesus but have no concern for following his teachings and commands (Jn 14.15). They make excuses such as “Did God really say ...?” (Gen 3.1). The fruit that Jesus is looking for is personal holiness, consistent with our profession (Gal 5.22-23). We need to ensure that our profession is proven real by our practice.

Declared Future – Jesus cursed the tree for proclaiming that it had fruit when it was barren. Other than permitting demons to possess a herd of pigs and drive them into the Sea of Galilee, this is the only instance where Jesus performs a miracle of judgement and destroys a natural object. The tree, of course, does not have moral accountability, so Jesus was making an example of a non-rational object and teaching that judgement has been given into his hands. But since it was not yet time for the execution of his wrath on men and women, he gave ample warning by this example. Jesus judged Israel for its hypocrisy, in 70 AD when Roman armies destroyed the temple and sacrificial system that they believed were eternal and in which they placed their hope. We need to heed the warning—God judges unproductive false professors in his Church in every generation. We could point our finger at leaders in the Church today who encourage evil—such as endorsing practicing homosexual for church offices or blessing their ‘marriage’ unions; or who introduce pagan worship practices—but Jesus is warning everyone

of us that we will be justly cursed and condemned if we persist in barren profession. Like the tree that withered to its very roots, we will never be able to bear fruit again. We are given an opportunity to demonstrate faith. If our faith is not real, we may never be given another chance to repent and reform our lives, and will be left as a worthless hunk of petrified wood for eternity.

Disruptive Faith – We should be surprised that the disciples were amazed that the fig tree withered so quickly since Jesus had performed many miracles in their presence. They still displayed the attitude of the world and of many in the Church that limits God’s power to a few friendly acts within their defined boundaries. Jesus shreds this view to toothpicks faster than a freighter hitting a kayak. If we have real faith in God and understand what it means for him to be Creator of the universe, we won’t be surprised at what he has done, can do, and will do. It amazes me to see professing Christians falling for the silliness of the world that claims that God could not have created, as he said he did, in six days or that he could not have stopped the world’s rotation for a number of hours (Josh 10.12-14). He is not a super-man, he is God! Jesus points to the Mount of Olives and tells them that if they really believed in this God they could ask him to throw the mountain into the sea and it would be done. Yes, Jesus is probably speaking hyperbolically, and yes, God’s answer to some of our legitimate requests of him may be: “No.” “Not yet.” or “I have even better things planned for you.” But we must not use these truths as an excuse to limit our faith in his power to work miracles. If we ask anything of God, that is consistent with his will, we must believe that he can accomplish the humanly impossible. If we lived with this kind of faith and prayed with this expectation, the mountains of wickedness and the hills of unbelief would be cast into the sea forever. This is the kind of faith that is desperately needed in the Church today—a disruptive faith that turns the world upside down!

Demanded Forgiving – Prayer is nothing but watery words if our hearts are polluted by grudges. Powerful prayer includes forgiveness as well as faith. Jesus had taught his disciples previously about the importance of having a forgiving attitude (Mt 6.12, 14-15; Mt 18.21, 22, 28-35). He

reminds them again here, before he goes to the cross to procure their forgiveness, that Divine forgiveness is linked with a believer's willingness to forgive others. It is not that we earn God's blessing by forgiving others; but our being willing to forgive others is evidence that we have been forgiven and that our hearts are right with God. Anyone forgiven by God will forgive the offences of others!

Second Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover [September 28] (Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.12-13; Mk 11.15-18; Lk 19.45-48)

Polluted Exchanges – On the Monday of Passover week, Jesus entered the Temple area and found merchants filling its outer court with animal pens and tables piled with coins and oils, wine and salt for offerings. We learn, from this encounter with the sellers of items for the sacrifices, about:

- *Hustlers* – Men will use even the ordinances and sanctuary of God to advance their personal material gain.
- *Hardness* – Sacrifice observance had become a mere formality and ritual. Pilgrims did not need to offer animals from their own flocks, leading to an impersonal application of the sacrificial system.
- *Hypocrisy* – Jewish custom dictated that the annual half-shekel temple tax required of all male Jews (Ex 30.12-16), could not be paid with Greek or Roman coins which had images of men, considered idolatrous. But the money changers exacted usurious exchange rates to defraud the pilgrims.
- *Harm* – The merchants even sold doves, the sacrificial recourse for the poor (Lev 14.22; Lk 2.24), and victimized them.
- *Hindrance* – The merchants filled the outer court with their commerce and noise leaving no room for the Gentile worshipers to approach God.

Jesus cleaned out this mess with a display of Divine authority by overturning the tables and driving the merchants out of the Temple. We must consider how the Church today displeases Jesus with the same kinds of abuses—for example: TV preachers who amass fortunes from

the pious donations of their viewers, or congregations that put their traditions ahead of evangelism.

Purposed Education – Jesus used all kinds of events as opportunities to lead people into the Kingdom, so even the misuse of the Temple provided a source for a lesson. He had taught previously that it is never sufficient just to purge out evil. If the space left after the purge isn't filled with truth, then an even greater evil will come in to replace that which was purged out (Mt 12.43-35). So Jesus not only cleanses the Temple court, but he directs people to consider the true purpose of the Temple and its courts. Until his dying breath he would present truth (Lk 23.46). He continues to provide teaching about the kingdom today, through his earthly ambassadors—preachers.

Prevented Entreaty – The particular truth he communicated in this instance is that the Temple was intended by God to be a house of prayer. When the merchants conducted their transactions in the outer court of the Temple they crowded out the Gentiles from the only part of the Temple that they were permitted to access. Also, the noise of their exchanges and the animals would make meditative prayer difficult. While the people emphasized the ritual of sacrifices, Jesus indicates that what God is really seeking from men is not the worship with outward types from the ceremonial system but the spiritual reality of a heart that seeks communion with its Creator (1 Sam 15.22; Ps 51.15-17; Prov 15.8; Is 1.11). Jesus did not present this truth in his own words but appealed directly to Scriptural authority to justify his actions and teaching. His use of Scripture was deliberate as it would disarm his critics; since they could not claim that he was presenting something new and they could not misunderstand the clear teaching of the prophets. Jesus also implies that our guide for determining what is proper in worship is to be the Bible and not the time-honoured practices of the Church. If the Church is to be reformed it must strive to remove corrupting influences from worship and restore the original elements of worship in the form that God has instituted.

Plotted Elimination – The Jewish leaders hated the man and his message. They were angry with his teaching about the proper way to use the worship ordinances and were jealous of his influence over the crowd. They plotted how they might eliminate Jesus without stirring the anger of the people who liked to listen to his teaching—four days later they would find a means. Men, in general, do not like Jesus and do not want to be reformed by him because they do not want to lose out on their perceived pleasures or power. Sadly, also many in the Church, who claim to love Jesus, do not want to follow his instructions for proper worship. They prefer to follow their vain imaginations listen to their own warped interpretations, and apply their own inventions, than worship God in spirit and truth. We need leaders in the Church who are less interested in maintaining their own prestige or popularity and are more concerned for doing what is right in worship—only what God has required.

Perfect Ending – During his first visit to Jerusalem as the Messiah, Jesus cleansed the Temple (Jn 2.13-17) and at the start of his last visit, three years later, he cleansed it again. That it was necessary to cleanse the Temple twice shows how perverse men are—they willingly return to their false practices with no concern for doing what is right. Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, after an absence, and finding the Temple and ordinances of God misused (Neh 13.4, 10), reinforces the point. Cleansing the Temple of hindrances to true worship is a fitting ending for the earthly ministry of Jesus. It teaches us that:

- *Continual Reformation* – The Church cannot be reformed only once but must be subject to continual reformation.
- *Christ's Role* – Jesus as the Messiah claims, and has, ultimate authority over the Temple worship ceremonies and all worship elements and forms.
- *Church's Response* – Jesus has delivered true ceremonial cleanliness in his person and actions. Our response must be to worship him properly.

The Time of the Gentiles [September 29]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Jn 12.20-36)

Foreigners' Request – When Jesus had cleansed the Temple for a second time he again made the point that the court being used by the moneychangers and merchants was to be a place of prayer for the Gentiles (Is 56.7). Hearing about his actions and message, may have encouraged the Greek proselytes or God-fearers (Acts 17.4) to ask Philip, who they probably knew from Galilee, for an audience with Jesus. They likely had a desire to learn from Jesus more about the Kingdom of God. Their request is significant because:

- *Statement* – The Greeks were known for being seekers after truth (Acts 17.21). Having access to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle or Zeno and Epicurus could not satisfy their craving for truth. Their coming to Jesus is a statement that worldly philosophies fail to fill the hole in man's soul.
- *Saviour* – A major theme in John's Gospel is that Jesus is the saviour of the world and not only the redeemer of Israel (Jn 1.29; Jn 3.16; Jn 4.42; Jn 6.33; Jn 8.12; Jn 10.16; Jn 11.51-52). The coming of the Greeks reinforces this truth.
- *Sign* – Gentiles came to see Jesus after his birth (Mt 2.1-12). As he approaches death, their request was a sign that the time of the Gentiles had arrived and that Jesus was going on to procure salvation for the world.

'Falling' Required – We are not told if Jesus met with the Greeks. Rather John tells us that Jesus used their request to teach his disciples. On hearing of the request, he announced that the time (hour) had come for him to complete his work of redemption through the humiliation of suffering and crucifixion and the glorification of resurrection. He used an analogy of a seed 'dying' to illustrate a paradoxical principle of Christianity: death to self is the way of life. The death of Jesus led to his resurrection glory and life for his people.

Following Rightly – As for the master, so for the servants. Anyone wishing to follow Jesus must hate his life in this world—he must stop clinging tightly to the pleasures, possessions, and power of this earthly life that will choke him into eternal death. He must give up self-centeredness and replace it with service for Jesus and his people. Hating

life in this world may also mean a willingness to die as a martyr, as did most of the disciples and many early Christians, for professing faith in Christ, proclaiming the reality of absolute truth and moral standards, and hoping in the resurrection to glory and honour.

Focused Reason – The Greeks’ request focused Jesus on the reason he came to earth. For a moment he exposed to his disciples the turmoil boiling in his human dimension of his soul. He knew that he faced persecution and abuse from the Jewish and Roman leaders, a painful death by crucifixion, and the dreaded ignominy of being made sin (2 Cor 5.21) and a curse (Gal 3.13) for us. But he did not dwell on these things and let emotions rule his life. Instead, he reaffirmed his commitment to the eternal will and glory of the Father.

Father’s Response – The Father replied to Jesus’ commitment to fulfill the divine imperative by assuring him that his perfect life and ministry had already brought glory to God; and his perfect death as a sacrifice would glorify God again. Jesus did not face the cross alone. The other members of the divine Trinity were with him as he went to the cross as the God-man.

Future Revealed – The crowd didn’t hear the words of assurance but only a sound like thunder. Jesus told them that this sign was for their benefit, since he did not need audible sounds to have the assurance that the Father was with him. The sign of a voice from Heaven was given by God to announce the start of Jesus’ ministry (Mt 3.17), to strengthen him for the second phase (Mt 17.5), and to announce the final phase of his work—the payment of the debt of sin for his people. So Jesus revealed to the crowd, the same thing he had started teaching his disciples, that it was time for him to complete the work of redemption that would include:

- *Sentencing* – The death of Jesus might seem like a victory for the wicked world, but it would really be its judgement. Everyone who rejects the Saviour of the World as the Messiah (Anointed One) will be condemned.
- *Subjugation* – Satan’s reign over men would end with the death of Jesus. By dying and rising again, Jesus would defeat Satan and the

world's false systems and consign them to the lake of eternal fire (Rev 20.10).

- *Sacrifice* – Sin and its dominion would be conquered by Jesus offering himself as a perfect sacrifice that would pay the debt of sin for his people.
- *Salvation* – Salvation procured by Jesus includes people—Jews and Gentiles—from all classes and nations, without distinction (Rev 5.9; Rev 7.9).

Flashing Radiance – The crowd understood Jesus to be speaking of his death so then figured that his claim to be the Messiah (he had used Daniel's name for the Messiah—Son of Man [7.13-14]—in 23) must be mistaken since it was their understanding that the Messiah would remain forever (Ps 72.17; Ps 110.4; Is 9.7). Jesus didn't bother to correct their confusion by teaching about the resurrection and spiritual nature of the Kingdom. Rather, he warned them that his appearance on earth among his own people was almost over. Like a brilliant flash of lightening, his ministry would end, and they would be left in eternal darkness if they did not receive him as the Messiah and light of the world (Jn 1.4, 9; Jn 8.12; Jn 12.46). His departure from them into hiding (36) was a sign that their time was short and that the time of the Gentiles was beginning.

Continuing in Unbelief [September 30] **(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Jn 12.37-50)**

Unconvincing Confirmation – People today make the pretentious claim that their beliefs are founded on scientific evidence and rational conclusions. John (quoting Isaiah) dispels this myth and shows that, on the contrary, our beliefs are based on our wills and desires. We all begin with basic presuppositions (beliefs) about reality—the existence of God, the nature of the soul in man, the origin of matter, and the source for law and moral standards—then we set out to prove our beliefs by fact or logic. It is this way for the Christian as much as for the professed atheist and for the adherent of any false religion. For example, the person who claims to believe that there is no God and that we are here as the result of random molecular events, chooses to ignore the powerful evidence for an

Intelligent Designer behind the universe. Jews and Moslems have established their own definition of god and choose to ignore the evidence that Jesus is God. We, who are true Christians, also base our approach to filtering facts from fiction on our beliefs. We begin with the premises that God is, he created, we are his unique image-bearers, and that we are accountable to him. Based on these beliefs we interpret incoming information. Thus, the conclusion of Scripture is that men will not believe in Jesus based on the evidence of his miracles, but accept miracles as evidence for his deity because they believe he is God. Our minds and wills must first be changed before we can accept truth rightly.

Unconverted Consciences – At root, the reason why men don't believe in Jesus is not a lack of evidence but an unconverted conscience. Men cannot believe because they are born in unbelief and continue to choose unbelief. In response to Adam's desire to play God, God judicially blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of all mankind. Men are caught in a horrifying spiral of death. They cannot believe, will not believe, and continue not to believe. The end appears to be only Hell. However, Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of it. There is hope! The downward slide can be arrested, the decay stopped.

Unacceptable Confession – The way to step off the spiral of death is not, however, merely to accept the fact that Jesus performed miracles. Many of the Jewish leaders believed in this way but were unwilling to allow the raw belief in facts affect their behaviour and change their attitude toward worldly power and prestige. It is not sufficient that we know that Jesus is a miracle worker, a good teacher, or even that he is the promised Messiah. There must be a deeper rooted belief than mere acceptance of these truths.

Unified Cause – Real belief in Jesus involves not mere assent but conversion and confession—turning away from sin and repenting of it—warm-hearted acceptance of all that Jesus teaches, a willing commitment to stand with him, and open profession that he is Lord (Rom 10.9). This change of heart (that the prophets declared as necessary for a restored relationship with God) comes primarily through belief in one crucial fact

about Jesus—he is God! He is not *a* god as some false religions or cults might claim; he is God in all that that it entails—the infinite, eternal, all-knowing, creator of the universe. Jesus declared this in his final days of public preaching before the Jewish crowds. Anyone who believes in Jesus believes also in the Father who sent him. There is a unified cause—the Trinity in eternity—behind all that is real, and Jesus is the perfect physical manifestation of God (Jn 1.18; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3) and is God’s light in the world. To believe in God is to believe in Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God. There cannot be two objects of faith.

Ultimate Condemnation – Continuing not to accept this truth about Jesus is the way of eternal judgement. Jesus said that he came to save, not to judge. But the rejection of the salvation he offers results in judgement. Men often complain that God is not just in judging men. They claim that God should not judge people who have not heard of Jesus, that God has not given enough evidence of his existence, of that he has been unfair in the way he has treated some people by allowing suffering and therefore should not condemn them. Jesus did not deal with these supposed excuses for unbelief. Rather, he directed his words to those who had heard and seen him. They continued in their unbelief in spite of his presence with them. Every word Jesus spoke, miracle he performed, and call to come to him is a witness against those who hear and see, and yet continue in unbelief. Our generation is no different from that of Jesus’ day. The evidence is overwhelming that Jesus is God and Saviour. Continuing in unbelief will bear only one fruit—ultimate condemnation.

Urgent Commission – Jesus again referred to the unity of the God-head in their common message and purpose. In self-imposed obedience to the Father he fulfilled his commission. He knew that what he was doing was essential and that the fulfillment of his commission was urgent. Without his dedicated service through love, there could be no salvation from sin and no one could receive eternal life. He knew and believed this, and so must we. He obeyed every command from the Father in word and deed (what to say and how to say it). We also have a command from the Father—a command that leads to eternal life—which is: to say and do.

We have to speak to the Father in confession of sin and to the world in profession of belief in Jesus as God and Saviour. To believe is to obey (Jn 3.36; Rom 10.16; Heb 11.8, 9). We find great encouragement here: Jesus knew exactly what he was doing—he was not the victim of circumstances—when he came into the world to save us.

Authority of Jesus Challenged

The Master Debater Challenges His Opponents' Unbelief

[October 1]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.23-27; Mk 11.27-33; Lk 20.1-8)

Many people like to watch political debates, hoping for a 'knockout punch' by their favourite candidate. These people should then be thrilled to watch the master debater, Jesus, take on his opponents.

Commanding – The opponents of Jesus find him teaching in the Temple, a few days before they will hand him over for crucifixion. He was walking as he was teaching, and both his walk and his talk distressed them. Jesus, in this instance, did not teach as a typical Rabbi, sitting down, but as a peripatetic (i.e., walking) philosopher who was trailed by his eager students. Also he did not speak with the tentativeness of the Rabbis who were blind leaders of the blind. Rather, he taught with his own commanding authority (Mk 1.22).

Challenge – The incensed Jewish leaders—chief priests and elders who made up the Sanhedrin—challenged Jesus to a contest of wits. They demanded to know about his:

- 1) *Credentials* – What right did Jesus have to do the various things he had done over the past few days: receive worship from the crowds as he entered the city, cleanse the Temple, curse the fig tree and the Jewish nation, claim to be equal with God the Father, and teach in the Temple?
- 2) *Commission* – Who (the governor, the council, or God) had delegated authority to him to do these things or was he acting on his own authority?

These men did not approach Jesus with open minds to discern the truth about him being the Messiah. Rather, their questions were intended to find a lack of evidence so that they could condemn and destroy him (Mk 11.18). As self-appointed guardians of Israel's religious and political culture—the thought police of their day—they were just like the academic and media elite of our day who do not like it when anyone speaks about absolutes such as God, Biblical truth, moral Law, or the uniqueness of salvation through Jesus. Of course they act arbitrarily, speak with self-appointed authority, and condemn harshly anyone who does not agree with their views.

Counter – Jesus could have declared emphatically his authority. However, he understood the desperately wicked heart of man. He knew that if he presented clearly the fact that he is God and that, in his human nature, he was the Messiah the leaders would merely laugh with scorn. The result would have been similar to what happens when a Christian politician says that he believes that God created the world about six thousand years ago. Media headlines an hour later declare, ‘Neanderthal Candidate Needs Brain Transplant!’ So Jesus used a much more effective technique to counter their duplicity—he replied with a question of his own and put the problem of solving the dilemma in their lap. At the same time as he put them on the defensive, he also answered their question! Notice the implication of his question: John the Baptist's source of authority is the same as the source of authority for Jesus. Both derived their authority from God. We also can use the same technique Jesus used for countering opponents of Biblical truth. For example, when someone claims that man is merely the product of evolution and that all his actions and character attributes are the result of random mutations of DNA, we can ask, “Then why is rape, misogyny, or patriarchalism wrong? If they are merely the result of evolutionary forces aren't they natural?” Watch him squirm!

Conundrum – The question Jesus presented to the leaders left them with a conundrum that exposed the deceptiveness of their hearts. Paul tells us that man, born in rebellion against God, is self-deceived and suppresses truth in order to maintain the veneer of his deception (Rom 1.18-22).

There are many reasons for why men continue to deny ultimate reality and truth including a desire to gain applause, fear of being ridiculed, a love of evil, and passionate hatred of God. They gag on the reflux of truth welling up from their gut and choke on the plain truth that comes into their mouths which they taste and therefore cannot deny. But before they allow truth to pass their lips they pervert it and spit out falsehood. In this instance the Jewish leaders knew the truth and where it led—John and Jesus were both messengers sent from God—but suppressed the truth and lied. Political ‘leaders’ today do the same thing. They debate the ‘merits’ of different truth-claims, consult the polls, appeal to tolerance and pluralism, act on expediency without principle, and then perjure themselves by claiming that they cannot decide for truth. Truth is unacceptable to man because he does not *want* to believe it!

Condemnation – Because of their unbelief, playing dumb, and deceit, Jesus denied the Jewish leaders the satisfaction of hearing truth declared. Jesus refused to tell them by what authority he acted because they did not deserve an answer. He would not waste his breath and cast pearls before pigs! This was their condemnation and it is the condemnation of our generation. When men do not believe in the only true God and his just demands on us, and in Jesus as the God-man and only saviour from sin, God removes the witness of truth from them and gives them over to a full measure of depravity they desire (Rom 1.24-32). All those who suppress the truth that they know innately, by not professing it and not acting according to it, are justly denied access to any further truth. This is why we are seeing the West succumb to superstition, abandoning open scientific enquiry, being overrun by false religions, and becoming engulfed by despair. We are under condemnation!

Two Sons, Two Reactions [October 2] **(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.28-32)**

Jesus challenged the unbelief of his opponents by asking them what they thought of the baptism of John (Mt 21.23-27). He then capped off his debate with them using three parables that focus on the fruit of belief,

and thereby reproved the Jewish leaders who refused to accept him as the Messiah.

Requirement – In the first parable, Jesus tells of a Father who gave the same command to both of his sons. But each reacted differently to the command. We can, without stretching the interpretation of the parable too far, apply this illustration to all mankind under the fatherhood of God as Creator. God has one command for all his children—profess your faith in God and practice your faith by living for the glory of God.

Reformation – The first son bluntly refused to obey his father, but then changed his mind and went out to work in the vineyard. All men, by nature are impudent before God and flatly ignore his commands. We find the results of their rebellion everywhere around us—it is visibly reported in the lust, greed, and theft that fill our 6:00pm news. However, God graciously reforms some of these rebels (1 Cor 6.11) and they change their minds, repent of their sins, and turn from their rebellion to walk in the path of obedience. It is an amazing thing when men and women, who initially look as if they will be the proudest residents of Hell, are turned into humble citizens of Heaven.

Religiosity – The second son politely told the father that he would go and work in the vineyard, but pursued his own pleasures instead. He represents the outwardly religious who compose all kinds of false religions and, sadly, are even found within the Church. In Jesus' day, the Scribes and Pharisees were the prime examples of those who make a religious show but have no substance. Today, adherents of false faiths participate in religious rituals such as washings, genuflexions, offerings and pilgrimages that do not have any value for bringing a person close to God. Within the perimeter of the visible Church there are many who appear to be pious but whose hearts are full of a black stinking mass of wickedness—pride, bitter envy, and hatred. Others make a pretentious show during worship services where they swing with the music and choruses but have no concept of selfless sacrifice for Christ. They are just like typical politicians who voice many promises but fail to follow

through. James indicts everyone like this with his definitive denunciation: faith without works is dead! (James 2.17)

Reception – We judge by appearances and keep long accounts. Thankfully, God knows and judges by the true state of our hearts and keeps very short accounts. An abortionist, sexual pervert, prostitute, gang member, thief, or drug dealer who picks up a Bible in a cheap room in a run-down motel and reads the words of John 3.16 or Matthew 11.28-30, and then repents of his sins and receives Jesus as saviour, will be welcomed into Heaven with great rejoicing (Ezk 18.21-23; Lk 15.10). God does not count the number of times that we attend church services, sing sacred songs, pray, or read the Bible to determine if we should be granted access to Heaven. As admission keys, these have less substance than steam rising from a swamp on a snowy day.

Righteousness – The determining factor in the balance of eternity is whether or not we have believed John's message that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This truth about who is welcomed into Heaven would have irked the Jewish leaders and it bothers many today in the Church. For some reason we don't want to believe the truth—it is easier to convince a heathen than a hypocrite that what Jesus teaches in the *Sermon on the Mount* has less to do with our outward actions than with the motives for our actions. Simply, if our hearts aren't pure our actions never can be! It is not doctrine that saves, but belief followed by action. It is not having religion that saves, but knowing Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Repentance – Jesus told the Jewish leaders that even though they had seen the fruit of John's ministry—sinners repenting and turning to righteousness—they would not believe his message. And because they *wouldn't* believe it, they *couldn't* believe Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. The same problem persists today. Men everywhere see the fruit of the Gospel and rather than falling on their knees in awe before the only Wise God, who turns mud into gems; they continue to proudly resist the proclamation of the most important truth men can ever know—Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. History proves beyond doubt that

Christianity is true. Dismiss the claims of those who point to the Crusades or Inquisition, and say that Christianity is evil and divisive. The Crusades and the inquisition may have been undertaken in the name of Christ but they were not *of* Christ—they were not Christian. And, besides, far more wickedness has been perpetrated throughout history in the name of Allah, Communism, Eugenics, or Fascism than has ever been committed by those who *claim* to be Christians. Rather, point to the true fruit of Christians living out their lives for God: preachers facing persecution from authorities, missionary doctors performing eye surgery in field hospitals, or volunteers providing soup and sandwiches to streetwalkers at midnight. Point to the changed hearts and lives of many throughout history, who were at one time swindlers, cheats, pornographers, slave traders, terrorists, war-mongers, or murderers. The evidence is clear, Jesus came to save sinners!

Unthankful Tenant Farmers [October 3]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 21.33-46; Mk 12.1-12; Lk 20.9-19)

Requirement – Jesus continued to denounce the fruit of a spirit of unbelief through a second parable (of three). In this parable he uses a well-prepared vineyard as a symbol for the Church—the OT Church (Israel), but also the universal Church as it has appeared throughout history. His Jewish audience would have understand the application of the vineyard since the prophets had used this analogy (Is 5.1-7; Ps 80.8-16) to show that God provides necessary support for his people so that they can be fruitful in their service. Just as the landowner expected the vineyard to produce fruit and the tenant-farmers to pay him a portion of the crop, so it is reasonable that God expects his Church to produce fruit payable to him. The portion that we owe to God in tribute ranges from a tithe on our income and one day in seven set aside for worship, to holy lives that reflect the indwelling of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-24).

Rebellion – However, the reality is that people don't want to pay tribute to God. This is a problem not only in the world where they say "Who is God that I owe him anything?" but it also a disease infecting many who claim to be God's people. Within the Church today people say (if not

explicitly, then implicitly), “Who is God that he demands I give up NFL football on Sunday afternoons? After all I went to church in the morning?” or “You must be kidding! God doesn’t want me to miss dinner out, so he can’t really expect me to give a tenth of my minuscule salary.” or “What do you mean that I can’t bring *my* new song composition into worship? Surely God wants me to use *my* talents in worship!” or “God wants me to be happy, so I am going to marry whom I chose, even if he/she isn’t a believer!” And so it goes, in every area that God speaks about the tribute he demands, Christians find excuses for why their way is the right way and ‘shoot’ the messengers of God. Today, we may not stone the prophets, as the Jews did, because we don’t like their message, but church politics can be very vicious—those who declare God’s requirements can be destroyed with the stones of misquotes and slander.

Rejection – The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was the Messiah and God’s Son, just as the tenants in the parable knew that the final messenger was the landowner’s heir. Hatred of God’s messengers escalates to rejection of his Son—which is ultimately a rejection of God himself. You say, “But not in the Church!” Yes, in the Church! The Church today is as infected with rejection of Christ and God’s requirements as it was in Jesus’ day. Leaders deny the Trinity, virgin conception, and deity of Jesus; proclaim falsehoods such as ‘open theism’ as truth; ordain and ‘marry’ active homosexuals; and introduce innovations in worship ranging from Passion plays to joint services with Moslems or Wiccans. Leaders in the Church have swallowed Satan’s powerful drug and believe that man can be God, and try to usurp God’s sovereignty over his Kingdom by expelling his Word.

Retribution – God condemns no one who is not already condemned by his own conscience (Rom 1.19). Men know that judgement is deserved and required for sin. This is so obvious that the people hearing the parable knew what the punishment should be for the tenants who did not pay their dues to the landowner and killed his messengers. Men know that justice must be done. They know that God must punish sin,

rebellion, and rejection of his Son. Yet, they still don't want it to happen and cry out, "May this never be!"

Reversal – God surprises the rebels by turning the rejection of his Son on its head. Jesus illustrates this with his quotation from Scripture (Ps 118.22-23). While men reject Jesus as a useless stone, God crowns creation with his Son and laughs (Ps 2.1-12) at all the conspiring leaders of this world (in civil governments or the Church). He takes the one they rejected and anoints him King of kings (1 Tim 6.15; Rev 19.16). God overrules rebellion in amazing ways and shows that all human attempts to block his purposes will come to nothing.

Removal – Jesus continued speaking to the Jews and told them that the Kingdom of God would be taken from them. As a nation they had rejected their Messiah, so the Gospel would be presented to the "peoples" (nations). This appears to be a formal announcement of the removal of the Jewish nation as God's special people and the reception of Gentiles into the Kingdom—as Gentiles, not as circumcised converts into the Jewish nation. It also has a broader application. A church (congregation or denomination) will be handed over for punishment if it leaves behind its adherence to Biblical truth, and its place will be given to others who will arise in its place. God will always have his Church in every age, but no congregation or denomination will survive when it departs from the principles on which it was founded. Jesus says that it is necessary for us to 'fall on the stone', which means being humbled by Christ and his Word, or we will be crushed by him.

Reaction – The leaders of the Church in Jesus' day were offended by the parable and its application. They knew that Jesus spoke about them. So they were prepared to kill him, to silence his message; but feared a riot. Leaders in civil and church roles do not like being told that their policies or beliefs are wrong. So they take action to silence their opponents. Let us pray that each one of us, and our leaders, will be willing instead to listen to the Word of God, repent of a spirit of rebellion, and pay to the King a proper tribute.

Invitation to the Son's Wedding Banquet [October 4] **(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 22.1-14)**

This parable, the third of three in a row which Jesus uses to teach about the fruit of unbelief, clearly speaks to the Jewish leaders who refused to accept him as the Messiah. But it also has lessons for professing members of the Covenant community and the world at large.

Prepared Repast – Jesus is undoubtedly referring to the wedding feast which he, as the bridegroom, is preparing for his bride, the Church. We find in both the OT and NT the imagery of a great eschatological feast prepared for the people of God (Is 25.6; Rev 19.7). This feast, at a well provisioned table (4), is ready today for all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Personal Reminder – People invited to a feast in the Middle East knew that when it was ready, messengers would be sent to call them to the meal (Est 6.14). Jesus uses this as an analogy to remind the Jews that they had been invited into the Kingdom of Heaven in a way no other nation or people had been. God had called the Jewish nation out of paganism and had provided it with many blessings (Rom 3.1-2). Their Messiah had now come, the hour for the wedding banquet had arrived, and they were invited to come to the feast that had been prepared. Today, this same invitation goes out to all who are under the sign of the Covenant through baptism. They have heard the Gospel through the regular preaching of the Word, know that the wedding banquet of Jesus is ready, and are personally invited to attend.

Perverse Rejection – The Covenant invitees however perversely chose to reject their invitation. This, of course, does not mean that every last person in Israel rejected the Messiah. It is rather an indictment on the nation, not of sincere individual believers. The Jews consistently ignored the proclamations of the Prophets, perverted worship of God with idolatrous practices, courted relations with the pagan world, and let their personal welfare take precedence over the work of God. Then, when the Messiah came they wanted nothing to do with him and sent him to

crucifixion. The modern Church has behaved in somewhat the same way. Lawful business activities (6) take precedence over the things of the Kingdom—for example carrying out commerce on the Lord’s Day. And, the members of the Church are drifting into all kinds of false beliefs and evil practices in worship and behaviour that ought not to exist among the people of God. When called to take the requirements of the Bible seriously, rather than repenting they ‘kill’ the prophets.

Punished Rebels – In the parable, the king in anger sent an army to punish the rebels who had rejected the invitation to his son’s wedding banquet. In history, God did the same thing to the nation of Israel. In 70 AD, the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it through one of the most gruesome retributions ever dispensed on a rebellious people. The punishment of the Church does not end there, however. God continues to cut off congregations or denominations which ignore his instructions, pollute his holy ordinances of worship, and deny Jesus his honour as the God-man and the King of kings.

Public Reception – The Jews, as a people, were rejected and the call to fill Heaven and Christ’s banquet table went out to the Gentile nations (Acts 9.15; Acts 13.46; Acts 18.6). This call continues today. Every congregation or denomination that is cut out of the Church because of unbelief is replaced by an even larger body of new converts who rejoice at being invited to Christ’s wedding feast. This new assembly is a mixed multitude (Rev 7.9) that includes those who were ‘good’ and bad (9)—those who lived outwardly moral lives *or* were debauched and wanton. The call of Jesus to come to his wedding banquet is not conditional on who we are or on what we have done in the past. It is a sincere and open invitation: ‘The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.’ (Rev 22.17)

Proper Robes – However, there is a condition for attendance at the wedding banquet. All the attendees must be robed in garments suitable for a wedding feast. In ancient times, the robes worn by the guests were fine and ornate. When those invited to a wedding could not afford their own fancy clothes, the host of the wedding would lend them suitable

attire. It is implied in the parable that the required fine garments required to attend the wedding were supplied by the king since those invited to the banquet came directly from the streets (10) and would not have had an opportunity to return home to get their own garments. So it is with the eternal banquet, God supplies the wedding garments (Is 61.10; Rev 3.18). All we have to do is put them on, in faith.

Pronounced Ruin – One of the guests was found without a proper wedding garment. He had no excuse for his neglect and was silenced, as will be all hypocrites in the Church who presume that their own works can save them, pretend to be part of the Kingdom, or misuse Gospel ordinances. The King will consign all such phonies to weeping, and gnashing of teeth; which Jesus uses to describe the eternal misery of Hell and the on-going resentment that the rebels will have against their deserved ruin. Jesus ends the parable with a solemn warning, “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” This statement seems to imply that there are more hypocrites in the Church than we might suppose. We must heed the warning, repent, and put on Salvation’s robes.

An Emperor Question – Should We Pay Taxes? [October 5]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 22.15-22; Mk 12.13-17; Lk 20.20-26)

Set Trap – Jesus delivered three parables addressing unbelief by the Jewish leaders, who refused to accept him as the Messiah. He ended these parables with a warning about the ruin that follows unbelief. But the Jewish leaders chose to ignore the warning and instead plotted to catch him by means of a misspoken word or a contradiction. Their approach is no different from that followed by all political operatives who seek opportunities to discredit their opponents. To achieve their goal, they assembled a coalition of contraries—Pharisees who hated Roman rule, Herodians who encouraged submission—and sent junior disciples as spies to set the trap. In this, they fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 2.2 by taking counsel to oppose the LORD’s anointed.

Sure Traits – The spies attempted to flatter Jesus to undermine his diligence and watchfulness. However, unintentionally and ironically, their flattery declared truths about Jesus:

- *Integrity* – He speaks the truth in total honesty.
- *Impartiality* – He is not swayed by looking at the faces of men.
- *Instructiveness* – He teaches the true and right ways of God

Even when men attempt to abuse and defame Jesus, they are constrained by God's overriding providence to declare his glory!

Sly Test – After attempting to flatter him, they dropped their carefully crafted question: “Is it right for us to pay taxes to fill the Emperor’s treasury?” Thinking that they were really smart, they hoped to put Jesus in an impossible situation—if he answered that it was okay to pay tribute to the Romans, they could condemn him for speaking against the law (Dt 17.14-15), discredit him as God’s messenger, and incite against him the people who hated a century of subjugation to Rome. However, if he said that it was wrong to pay taxes to Ceasar they could charge Jesus with insurrection and bring the power of Rome against him. They thought they had Jesus caught between a religious and a political conundrum. However, as is common among sinners rebelling against God, they displayed an ignorance of logic by presenting an invalid dilemma—i.e., stating a case as if there are only *two* possible alternatives, both of which are equally problematic. Atheists, following Hume, do this by asking “Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent.” They ignore a third, logically and theologically consistent, alternative: God is able to prevent evil, permits it for morally good and sufficient reasons, and is destroying it through his Son.

Sprung Trap – Jesus easily saw through their duplicity. His opponents were hypocrites; first because they grudgingly paid Roman taxes while grumbling under their breath about injustice. Second, because they had framed their question, not to learn truth from him, but to trap him. So he sprung their trap by responding with a rhetorical question that exposed their evil intent.

Silver's Teaching – Jesus then asked to have a denarius brought to him, which he used as a visual aid to reinforce his teaching. The coin bore, on one side, either the image of Tiberius Caesar (14-37 AD) or Augustus Caesar (19 BC-14 AD), if the Tiberian coins were not yet widely circulating in Judea. In either case, the common coins carried a religious image on the reverse side. One had Caesar enthroned as a god with the title *Maxim Pontif*, or Chief Priest, of the Roman religion. Others had priestly implements indicating the Emperor's assumption of religious duties, or Tyche (the Roman goddess of good luck). The images originated in the cult of emperor worship and were a claim to divinity, which was particularly repulsive to Jews. Yet the Jews used these coins to pay the Temple tax as well as to pay their Roman taxes. Jesus showed them that they had accepted Caesar's authority by using his silver

Simple Truth – He probably turned the coin in his hand as he spoke: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” His teaching is clear and simple. Mankind has a duty to obey the civil magistrates and to worship God correctly. The Romans were wrong because they worshiped false gods and made their emperors into gods. However, the Jews were doubly wrong because they rejected a government appointed by God (Dan 2.21) and also had succumbed to false worship and rejected the promised Messiah. We are not to understand from Jesus' instruction that there are two authorities—the king *and* God. Rather, there is one ultimate authority, God; and both the government and religious observances are ruled by him. In the first case, in obedience to God, men are to respect civil government, not to rebel against it, pay the required taxes, honour the rules instituted by it (if not requiring direct disobedience to God's Law), and cherish the benefits that (any) government brings over anarchy (Dan 2.37-38; Rom 13.1-7; 1 Peter 2.13-17; 1 Tim 2.1-3). In the second case, all men (not just Christians!) are to cease from worshiping idols and participating in false religious observances. Instead they are to render to God the proper worship (e.g., prayer and praise) and tribute (e.g., the tithe) that is due to him.

Silenced Tempters – Jesus’ inquisitors were amazed at his wisdom, which is greater than Solomon’s. No invalid dilemma could stump him. Instead of trapping him, they were humbled in silence and left with no prize. God will silence all who oppose him with their supposed wisdom (Rom 3.19).

An Eschatological Question – Is there a Resurrection?

[October 6]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 22.23-33; Mk 12.18-27; Lk 20.27-40)

Sadducees – Jesus had successfully met the challenge of the Pharisees and Herodians—answering their political question about paying taxes—when along came the Sadducees to place their trap. The Sadducees—the deists or religious liberals of their day—did not believe in the created spiritual realm (angels or spirits of men), life after physical death and the resurrection, or Heaven and Hell (Acts 23.8). They held that only the five books of Moses were authoritative and from the days of their origin, in the second century BC, had challenged the Pharisees to prove the truth of the resurrection from the Pentateuch. With the Pharisees failure, they figured they had Jesus stumped. Biblical truth has always been challenged by superstitious hypocrites on one side and ignorant materialists on the other. One group misuses truth and the other despises it, but both deny God’s authority.

Substitutes – The Sadducees concocted a hypothetical account based on the levirate law (Dt 25.5-10) where a man was supposed to take his brother’s widow and provide an heir for him. Their objective was to make the prospect of the resurrection appear ridiculous based on six substitute husbands.

Scriptures – The resurrection was not an unknown doctrine in the OT. Job spoke of it with certainty (Job 19.26), Elijah demonstrated the possibility (1 Ki 17.21), Ezekiel prophesied about it (Ezk 37.1-14), and Daniel promised it (Dan 12.2). But the Sadducees believed that their strictly literal interpretation of the Torah was faultless and that they could not be provided with evidence of the resurrection from Moses.

Jesus told them bluntly that they were ignorant of the Scriptures and that Moses did speak about life after physical death (which implied the reality of judgement, resurrection, and Heaven and Hell). He used the account of Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush to prove their unbelief—rejecting man's spiritual essence—to be wrong.

Supernatural – Jesus also accused the Sadducees of not understanding the power of God—they did not believe in the supernatural, whether a created realm beyond the merely physical or in God's power to act in uniting and re-uniting the spiritual and physical. Jesus quoted from Exodus 3.6 and pointed out that God did not say, "I was" or "I have been," but "I am" the God of the patriarchs. Contrary to the Sadducees self-deceived belief (Mk 12.27)—that the patriarchs who had died, no longer existed—God's word to Moses demonstrates that the patriarchs are alive even though they are, from our time-based perspective, only in the spirit realm, and will ultimately share in the resurrection of the righteous. In this confrontation with the Sadducees we should note that Jesus does not argue for the existence of the created non-material realm (angels, spirits, Heaven) or the resurrection as philosophical possibilities. Rather he simply quotes from Scripture. We must never doubt that God's word can stand on its own without our attempts to vindicate truth.

Sexless – Jesus also deals with the *Pharisees'* mistaken view of the nature of Heaven. They held a view similar to that prevalent in most Middle Eastern religions, and continuing in Islam today, that in Heaven *men* would enjoy endless time in a palatial garden and be served by beautiful women. Jesus informs them that, although mankind will have *physical* bodies, they will be of a different (spiritual) essence (1 Cor 15.42-49). Also, in their new immortal bodies people will be genderless, like the angels. Marriage and sexual relations will be unnecessary in Heaven for two reasons:

- 1) In Heaven there will be no deaths (Lk 20.36; Rev 21.4) and no births as every person who will dwell there will have been saved from this sin-stained realm. So there will be no need for procreation to add to Heaven's full number.

- 2) The physical intimacy associated with becoming one flesh (Gen 2.24) in marriage will also no longer be required in Heaven. This intimacy was necessary for the initial constitution of man, as created by God, so that he would not be alone (Gen 2.18) and so that he would fulfill his mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth (Gen 1.28). In Heaven we will be perfectly one in Christ and have intimate fellowship with other believers that will exceed any physical closeness that we can experience today.

The primary failure of the Sadducees and Pharisees (and of all religious sceptics today), was to understand how significantly different will be the form and nature of the order that God will establish in the New Heavens and Earth. Although we will maintain our identities and (sinless) personalities, and will recognize our relatives and friends, Heaven will not be an extension of how things operate today in this space-time realm. It will be an entirely new order of physical reality.

Silenced – Only rarely does Jesus and the Bible open a window into Heaven. His purpose in doing so at this time was so that he could silence the foolish beliefs of another group of antagonists. He affirms in his teachings what the Sadducees denied—the existence of angels, the reality of the spiritual dimension in man, life after physical death, and our hope in the resurrection and eternity in Heaven. The crowds were astonished at his teaching, partly because it opened up new truths but also because of how he had silenced the sceptics with a short quotation from the Law of Moses! Again, we learn that God will silence all who oppose him with their supposed wisdom.

An Ethical Question – What is the Heaviest Command?

[October 7]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 22.34-40; Mk 12.28-34)

Challenge – Will men ever give up challenging God to defend himself and his cause? Without faith in Christ, never! Job's challengers, philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Hume and Kant, and modern professed atheists like Hitchens and Dawkins, continually raise the same tired questions about cause and effect, origins, purpose, the soul, and evil

and good. They refuse to accept the wise answers of Scripture and of God's ambassadors. So it was that the Pharisees, seeing the Sadducees silenced, tried again to test Jesus.

Command – Their next attempt to trap him involved their interpretation of the Law. They had enumerated over 600 individual commands and had divided them into positive and negative and 'light' and 'heavy' commands—the 'heavy' commands were more important in their casuistry. During the Middle Ages the Church perpetuated this distinction with 'venial' and 'mortal' sins. Jesus had previously spoken against such distinctions (Mt 5.19-20) and James would later remind us that it is an invalid distinction (James 2.10). In spite of this, do you ask what is the most 'heavy' or 'first' command? Is it to keep the Sabbath, stay sexually pure, repent and believe, or pay your taxes?

Commitment – As we have seen, Jesus can't be trapped by foolish questions. He digs deep into spiritual meaning, theology, and human psychology and presents unexpected answers to every man's apparent dilemma. In this case he answers not by pointing to a particular specific command but rather to two great statements in Moses that summarize the entire Law. The first he draws¹⁸ from the Covenant Treaty (Dt 6.4-9)—the words that pious Jews recited daily and wrote on scraps of parchment that they placed in little boxes and tied on their foreheads and attached to their doorframes. Our first duty is to love God with a commitment that encompasses every aspect of our human existence—heart (emotions), soul (volition), mind (thoughts), and strength (body). The greatest command is not a particular moral, ceremonial, or case law; but is rather the attitude of our hearts toward *all* the Law. If we truly love God in a personal, comprehensive, and wholehearted way, we will not try to dissect God's Law to find guidance for keeping one law over another; but rather will want to obey our Lord in all that he demands, worship our King with the tribute he desires, and honour our Creator with the praise he deserves.

¹⁸ The Hebrew text from which Mark 12.30 is taken, does not have 'mind'; the OT Greek translation (Septuagint) does not have 'strength'; Jesus included both terms, to emphasize the comprehensiveness of the command.

Care – The second greatest commandment is also a command of love—to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev 19.18). As we are to love God so we are to love all those who have been made in his image. We cannot say that we love God if we hate or mistreat our neighbours (1 Jn 3.10-18; 1 Jn 4.7-21). The love we have for mankind is to *include* a love for our self, and the love we have for others is to be *equal* to the love we have for our self. Self-love can be corrupted into selfish pride, but that is not love! True self-love desires to see our self loved by the Father, saved by the Son, and guided by the holiness of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit. If we truly love the dignity of the image of God in us and understand that all we have is a great gift from God, we will cherish his image-bearers and care for their temporal and eternal welfare.

Crux – Jesus says that all of the Law (and Prophets—i.e., all of Scripture) hangs on these two commands. It does so in at least the following ways:

- *Abstract* – These two commands summarize the entire Decalogue (Ten Commandments). The first command—love for God—is an abstract of the first four of the Ten Commandments; the second command—love for mankind—is an abstract of the final six of the Ten Commandments.
- *Amplification* – All the laws in the Old and New Testaments develop and amplify these two summary commands. Every law in the Bible is based on one or both of these two commands.
- *Affections* – All obedience to God’s Law begins with our affections. There can be no true religion, correct worship, or proper adherence to the Law without love. False religions enforce law through fear and coercion. Christianity alone, engenders obedience through love.
- *Absolute* – The Law of Love is absolute; all of the other commands in the Bible are based on love. Love is both the efficient (Rom 13.10) and final (1 Tim 1.5) cause of all obedience. Love never fails.
- *Application* – The Law of Love can be applied in a special way. As Jesus was presenting this truth to the scribe, he was surrounded by many who hated him without cause and plotted his death. Jesus

implies by these two commands that we are required to love him—the first as God, and the second as our fellow man.

Commendation – The lawyer praises Jesus for his teaching and repeats what he has learned. Jesus sees that he has understood the essence of the Law of Love and, in turn, commends him. In a marked contrast to the attitude of the other Pharisees, his spiritual understanding and open heart to what Jesus taught, led him to reject his personal prejudices and the position of his peers. Jesus says that this brought him close to the kingdom of God. We do not know if he went the next step and believed that Jesus was the Messiah and repented of his sins. But his response caused the other Pharisees to stop questioning Jesus. They did not want to risk losing anyone to Jesus' teaching.

An Essential Question – Who is the Messiah? [October 8] (Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 22.41-46; Mk 12.35-37; Lk 20.41-44)

Assembly – The Pharisees and Sadducees had asked Jesus three questions to trap him in a contradiction. They had asked about the relationship between religion and government, this life and the next, and our obligations to God and man. Jesus dealt with these questions with the authority of the Divine teacher, not as a mere human interpreter, and silenced their foolish attempts to catch him in a dilemma. While they were all still assembled in the Temple courts he in turn asked them about a more fundamental relationship—the relationship between God and the Messiah.

Asking – His first question is very simple and yet more profound than any other question that we can ask—more important than the questions his opponents asked him and even more important than, “Who am I?” “How did I get here?” and “Why am I here?” There is no more important question to ask than, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” Most people try desperately to avoid this question. When Christianity or Christ comes up in discussions with unbelievers they usually try to change the subject and dismiss the topic with a cliché such as, “That’s fine for you; but I don’t need a religious crutch.” Others

claim that Jesus is merely a myth concocted by a few demented fishermen on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and have no interest in considering any evidence to the contrary. Once we get past the outright avoidance of the subject of the Christ, we are left with only three options—he was either a fanatic or a fake, or he is truly the Son of God. If we do not ask this question *and* answer it correctly we condemn ourselves to an eternity separated from God (Jn 3.16-21; Jn 8.24; 1 Jn 2.18-23).

Answer – The assembled teachers knew how to answer the question in a simplistic way. They had studied the Scriptures and knew what was well known—the Messiah (Christ) was to be a descendant of David (Ps 89.35-36; Is 9.7; Is 11.1). The Gospel writers (Matthew and Luke) demonstrate that Jesus was in fact descended from David—probably through both his adoptive father, Joseph, and his natural mother, Mary. But their answer provides only part of the truth because the Messiah is both God and man. Their answer addressed only the aspect of his human nature and ignored his Divine nature.

Authority – Jesus was not out to trap his inquisitors but to educate them and, if possible, lead them to receive the truth about him in faith. He first grounds his argument on Scriptural authority. He quotes from Psalm 110.1 which every person in his audience would have believed to be part of God’s word. In his preamble, before quoting from the Psalm, he indicates that the Psalm has both a human and a Divine author—‘David speaking by the Holy Spirit’. He also accepts David as declaring truth with the voice of a Prophet (2 Sam 23.1-2). Jesus gives us an important example. We must never be ashamed of basing our arguments on Scripture—whether speaking about creation, Christ, or God’s Law. We should not attempt to start from some ‘neutral’ position and try to work toward a defensible position of truth. Rather we should begin with the simple fact that God has communicated truth in his word and we are to accept it wholeheartedly and use it faithfully and boldly. Also we should note that his quotation comes from the Psalms. Many in the Church today dismiss the singing of the Psalms by claiming that they don’t speak about Jesus. Yet the Psalms are quoted more in the NT than any other

book, and are used most often to defend the Crown rights of Jesus Christ. There is nothing more powerful than the Psalms to present Jesus as God's ordained King of kings and Lord of lords. Certainly no mere human composition can compare!

Axiom – The verse of the Psalm that Jesus quotes refers to the Messiah in Heaven in his exaltation (Heb 8.1; Phil 2.9; Eph 1.20). This verse presents an axiomatic conclusion that the Messiah is David's Lord and God. Since this is a fact supported by Scripture, how is it possible that the Messiah could also be called the son of David? It would seem to be impossible for the father to speak of his son as his master and his successor as his predecessor. Also, if the Messiah were just a natural son of David, how could David ascribe deity to him? The religious teachers in the audience did not attempt to answer the question, and Jesus did not expand on his question with an answer. Leaving them with the rhetorical question was a powerful didactic device that proved the conclusion from the premise. The obvious implication, understood by all, is that the Messiah is both God and man—as God he is David's Lord; as man he is David's son (Rom 1.3; Rom 9.4-5; Acts 2.32-36; Acts 13.22-23).

Approval – The religious leaders dared not answer because they knew that what Jesus said about the Messiah was true and that it applied to him as the Messiah. They stuffed wool in their ears, refused to entertain the concept, suppressed the truth, and rejected the Messiah they claimed to believe in and expected. The common people heard his teaching with delight. In particular, they liked to see their pompous teachers baffled. But their approval was only temporary. They would, within a few days, turn on him and cry out repeatedly "Crucify him!" They had heard truth but were no more willing to make it a transforming and controlling factor in their lives than their leaders were. The ultimate question we all must ask is, "What do *I* think of the Christ? We must not just delight in his teaching but receive him as Lord and Saviour. It is a matter of life or death!

Beware of False Religious Leaders [October 9]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 23.1-12; Mk 12.38-40; Lk 20.45-47)

Positioned Hearing – After the religious leaders had tried to trap Jesus in a contradiction so that they could undermine his authority, he asked them a question about the identity of the Messiah to expose their unbelief. Their failure to answer his question served as the basis for a public denunciation of the false religious leaders and a warning to his disciples (in the hearing of the crowd) to beware of them. In this instance he was pointedly warning them that the pharisaical religion of the Jewish leaders was dangerous. However, his warning is also applicable to all religious hypocrites. The Jewish leaders did not accept Jesus as the Messiah so they are in the same class as all religious leaders who reject Jesus as Lord and saviour—whether liberals in the Church or the purveyors of the cults and all non-Christian religions.

Principled Habits – Lest he be misunderstood as condemning the proper observance of the law, Jesus indicates that when religious leaders teach something that is consistent with the Bible, or judges adjudicate in a way that is consistent with Biblical Law, then they should be listened to. His reference to ‘Moses’ seat’ reminds us that the specific laws and justice-principles of the OT remain normative for men today. They provide examples and principles for how to apply the summary law in the Ten Commandments and thus how we are to obey God. In contrast, when men speak with their own authority, they trespass on territory that belongs only to God.

Practiced Hypocrisy – The Pharisees were charged with handing down laws that bound the people, while they found ways to avoid keeping the laws. In the Church, there will always be hypocrites who condemn certain behaviours in others, while secretly practicing them—the sad exposure of leaders who have been caught in sexual sins is an example. An equivalent hypocrisy today is found among the adherents of the latest manifestation of pantheistic enviro-religion who lobby for carbon-footprint taxes but live in fancy houses that consume many times the average amount of energy, or outspoken proponents of government-funded social programs who have been caught cheating on their taxes. Jesus said he would lighten men’s burdens (Mt 11.28-30), but every

legalistic religion only increases them. We must be careful that we don't drive people from Christ by creating rules that others must follow.

Paraded Hype – For the Pharisees, religion was a pretentious parade. They had no true heart for God—and certainly no desire to love his Son. All false religions are nothing more than the observance of outward rituals that are performed to impress others and receive praise for apparent 'holiness'. For the Pharisees this display included wearing boxes containing a scrap of paper with a few words from the Law while plotting the destruction of Christ. For Moslem Taliban it is the thrice-daily ritual of praying on a mat and forcing their wives to wear head-to-toe *burqas*, while planning the annihilation of Christians. In the Church the same spirit can be seen among those who want to parade their talents with a secret hope of gaining recognition and renown.

Proper Honour – Jesus condemns the use of titles intended to honour men in the Church. For example, the word *rabbi*, derived from the Hebrew and Aramaic words for 'great', came to mean a master-teacher. It is plainly wrong, according to what Jesus teaches here, for members of Christ's Church to bow before popes and archbishops and to call their religious or spiritual leaders 'father'. It is probably also wrong for men in the Church to take to themselves the title 'Reverend' which means reverent or worthy of worship. Jesus does not approve of our looking to men as religious authorities. Our only authority is to be God himself—as he has revealed his will through the Bible. This prohibition on the use of titles of spiritual honour in the Church (or any religion) does not mean that there are no lines of authority in the Church. Jesus, through his Apostles, put in place elders to govern his Church and to teach. While elders are to be respected (1 Thess 5.12, 13; 1 Tim 5.17; Heb 13.17) they are not to usurp the authority that belongs only to Jesus. Elders are not to lord it over the people of Christ. Jesus wants all people in the Church to respect the spiritual equality that exists among the children of God—we are brothers and sisters together, under his lordship.

Pleasing Humility – Mr. Collins in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* is the epitome of a false humility that is sickening to observe among those

who claim to be spiritual guides. True greatness in the Church is not found among those who elevate themselves or pretend to be humble, but only among those who delight in serving their brothers and sisters for Christ (Jn 3.30; Jn 13.12-17). Jesus often reminded his disciples that they were not to strive for honour but to be truly humble and self-denying. We need to heed this often-repeated instruction and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ with unfeigned love.

Prepared Hell – All religious hypocrites will receive a greater judgement—greater even than those who deny God and raise their fists in rebellion against him. God hates dissemblers who pretend to a form of holiness or godliness and yet have hearts filled with selfish and evil intentions. With this warning of a prepared Hell, Jesus next launches into his most explicit denunciation of the hypocrisy among religious leaders—in the form of the seven woes. We will consider these in our next meditation.

Woe for Religious Hypocrites [October 10] **(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 23.13-36)**

In our ‘politically correct’ age it is considered legitimate for an ‘atheist’ to write screeds against Christianity and blaspheme God; as Dawkins does in *The God Delusion*, where he calls the God he doesn't believe in a “pernicious delusion” and says he is “a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” In contrast, when a Christian suggests that there is only one true religion he is called intolerant. Jesus must therefore be intolerant since he closes his final debate with the Pharisees by declaring *all* religions that do not believe in him as Creator-Lord to be false.

Shutting Heaven (13) – All religions are *not* essentially the same, as most people claim; they do not all lead to God and Heaven. Any religious leader who does not teach that Jesus is the only true prophet, true way to God, and saviour from sin and eternal death, shuts himself and his followers out of Heaven.

Spawning Hell (15) – All religions proselytize and use many techniques to induce others to convert including sending out their agents and adherents in pairs; distributing literature; establishing (physical or electronic) reading rooms; providing counselling, shelter and temporal aid; advertizing; or compelling conversion with a threat of eternal punishment or death. Jesus notes that the cost of conversion is high. But if the conversion isn't to Christ, it is to Hell.

Splitting 'Hairs' (16-22) – All religions also include requirements that their disciples must meet. Leaders of false religions require duties to be performed by their members to gain admittance, works to advance in levels of enlightenment, or tasks to access inner sanctums. Like the Pharisees, they pile on layers of complexity, and nuances of interpretation to their ever-increasing suite of rules. They also find means for rationalizing inconsistent behaviour—they cannot even keep their own rules perfectly, let alone God's holy Law. Only Christianity admits that mankind is hopelessly unable to perform any work that has merit before God. Only Christianity provides a solution to man's inability—in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ accepted on faith.

Sightless Helpers (23-24) – Even when men do, and teach, what God requires in his law (such as giving to God the tribute of tithe that is his right), they do it for the wrong reasons. They think that the observance of laws will save them and miss entirely the true requirement of God—a heart brought to life by the Holy Spirit, through faith, that is filled with a growing desire to love God and man by serving humbly, forgiving mercifully, and giving gratefully. Sadly, some born-again Christians distort their faith and believe that the retention of salvation is dependent on *their* ability to obey the Law. They forget that they were not brought to spiritual life through the observance of law and that their continuing to live in God is by grace—from first to last.

Soiled Hearts (25-26) – Rituals created by men abound in all false religions (and in most branches of Christianity)—from bowing prostrate and throwing ashes, to lighting candles and genuflection, to repetitive

chanting and cleansing rites, to fasting and pilgrimages. The Pharisees refused to do anything that would make them ceremonially unclean—such as eating with a Gentile. God requires of those who are in Christ only a few *symbolic* practices such as baptism. What he desires, instead, is pure hearts that hunger for holiness.

Satanic Holes (27) – Ritualism in religion extends beyond ceremonial practices. It often includes wearing distinctive clothing. For example, the Pharisees wore garments that made them stand out (Mt 23.5). All other false religions tend in the same direction with turbans and *yarmulkes*, *burqas* and *hijabs*, and *dhotis*, *sadaras* and *chunnis*. Jesus says that this outward ‘beauty’ covers the satanic hole of the human heart that is full of death’s decay—pride, hatred, lust, and all other forms of rebellion against God. The evidence of true godliness is character not affected appearance.

Serpentine Haters (28-35) – The Pharisees (whom Jesus labelled as serpents and vipers) and their forefathers destroyed the prophets from God, while claiming to venerate their memory. But they are not unique. The adherents of every man-made religion are content to show Christian artefacts (e.g., from the Byzantium era or colonial New England) in their museums, but hate God’s messengers and those who live faithfully for Christ. The Romans persecuted Christians for refusing to bow to the Emperor. The Zoroastrian Persians persecuted Christians, who they claimed sided with Rome after Constantine. Moslems persecuted Christians throughout the Middle East, and continue to do so today. Hindus persecute Christians in Orissa, Buddhists persecute Karen Christians in Myanmar, and academic proponents of Darwinism expel believers in Intelligent Design from their universities.

Sworn Harm (36) – So Jesus’ sentence of woe on the Pharisees can be applied to all religious hypocrites. They cannot escape the sentence of Hell and will receive eternal punishment to avenge the innocent blood of God’s people that they have shed in their murderous hatred against God. This punishment came to the Pharisees in 70 AD at the destruction of

Jerusalem, and awaits all who continue to reject the truth that Jesus is the God-man and the anointed Christ.

A Lament for Jerusalem [October 11]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 23.37-39)

Dirge – A few days before Jesus concluded his denunciation of the Pharisees he had entered the city to great praise. But, knowing the real condition of the people's hearts, he had paused to weep over Jerusalem's pending demise. Now, at the conclusion of his declaration of woes on the city's leaders, he voices a dirge of lamentation as a memorial for the city that is going to be destroyed within a generation. His lament over the city is partly out of anger because of the sin of the Jewish people (particularly their leaders) who killed the messengers sent from God, and would kill Jesus. But there is a deeper grief displayed here, that is based on love. Jesus, in his human nature, was a Jew who loved the City of David and his own people, whom God had called out in ancient times to be a holy nation, separate from the pagan nations around them. When I was writing this meditation I thought of a similar, current, situation. The US had recently elected a president who was leading the nation deeper into the sin of rejecting God's message and persecuting his messengers. While we may condemn the sins of a US president (or of our Prime Minister), it is not appropriate for us to desire that any leader should fail or mess up. As Christians, we should be praying for our leaders (as Paul instructs us)—that God would give them wisdom and lead them to do what is right (Rom 13.3-5).

Desire – God the father loved the world so much that he gave his only Son (Jn 3.16). Jesus loved his own people and he loves all the people of the world so much that he agreed with the Father to die on mankind's behalf to satisfy the demands of God for justice (Rom 3.25, 26). In this lament he states his desire to see Jerusalem and, by logical extension, all men saved and to come under his protective care. God does not desire that any man, woman or child should perish (1 Tim 2.4; 2 Pt 3.9) and his heart is grieved when men, created in his image, wallow in sin, refuse to receive Jesus' love, die in un-repentant sin, and are thrown into the

Devil's dungeon. Also, his patience with mankind is beyond any wonder we can conjure up or imagine. In contrast, we can barely put up with the slightest of provocations—a friend keeps us waiting 10 minutes and we fret, a debt of a few dollars is not paid and we hold a grudge. But God puts up with every form of rebellion, blasphemy, and hatred; and yet continues to love and call his creatures into his kingdom.

Disobedience – We must not ask the impertinent question, “Why doesn’t God just save everyone if he desires that all mankind be saved?” His plan of salvation is based upon his sovereign purposes worked out *through* the will of his rational and volitional creatures. He calls to all, but only some respond. It is our individual responsibility to respond to his call, to receive it, and to come into his presence with repentant joy. Jesus is not dealing here with God’s electing sovereignty, but rather with man’s responsibility to wilfully respond. He is dealing, not with the ultimate responsibility that is God’s in his providence, but with the proximate responsibility that is ours in believing. God cannot be blamed for the fact that all men are not saved. He cannot be accused of making ‘puppets’, some of whom he takes into glory, and others whom he consigns to destruction. Rather, as Jesus sates here, and elsewhere (Jn 1.11; Jn 5.40), the problem is with man’s will. God does not force anyone to believe and he does not force anyone to reject Jesus. Never hide behind God’s sovereignty as an excuse for refusing to believe in Jesus and to receive the eternal salvation he provides. God calls us; and he desires that we repent and believe. Wilful rebellion is man’s fault and it deserves judicial censure.

Desolation – The immediate judicial response in this instance is the sentence of destruction on the city of Jerusalem for rejecting the Messiah and sending him to crucifixion. The desolation of which Jesus speaks here would come upon the city 40 years later when the Roman armies, under the command of Titus, besieged Jerusalem and razed the temple and the city. A broader application is the removal of God’s favour from the nation of Israel and the advancement of his cause among a spiritual Israel which consists of all those who believe in Jesus as Lord—Jew or Gentile. The most comprehensive application is to the destruction of the

City of Man which consists of all man's feeble attempts to imitate God and build a city to their own liking, and in their own image to make a name for themselves. In the end, the City of Man becomes the City of Desolation.

Declaration – Jesus then makes his final public declaration. It is not a word of desolation but a warning of direction. His final warning to the people of Jerusalem is to receive him as the Lord's Anointed. He is not promising here, as many mistakenly suppose, that there will be a restoration of the nation of Israel with the Messiah ruling from a re-built temple where the Dome of the Rock now stands. He is declaring a universal truth to Jew and Gentile that from that point on, no one would see Jesus who does not acknowledge him and call him the Blessed One who came from Heaven. To *see Jesus* means that we see him for who he is—not as men think he is or wish to shape his image. To *see Jesus* means that we believe in him as the God-man, the second person of the infinite and eternal Trinity, and the Creator. To *see Jesus* means that we believe by faith in his substitutionary sacrifice. To *see Jesus* means that we call him blessed and worship him as the only one who is worthy of worship, and before whom all men must bow now and into eternity (Phil 2.9-11; Rev 4.11; Rev 5.12).

Giving All [October 12]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mk 12.41-44; Lk 21.1-4)

Most people reading this account misread it and jump to a wrong conclusion. They think that Jesus teaches that it is not the *portion* of our abundance that we give that is important to God, but the *proportion*—it is not the absolute amount, but the relative amount, compared with our wealth and income, that is praised by Jesus. It may be that we all have been influenced by a prevalent view, not found in the Bible—arising from the socialism that afflicts our generation—that causes us to believe that we and our government must bring about a levelling in society and that the rich must pay a greater proportion of their income as taxes. It is inconsistent for Christians to accept the reality that God endows people with different gifts such as intelligence, beauty, and physical abilities,

and saves some from mankind and not others; but to believe that God made a mistake giving some people more wealth or income than others and that it is our *duty* to remove the distinctions. The belief that the rich should pay a larger proportion of their income as taxes or should be required to support welfare payments to the poor, arises mostly from envy.

We should note that in the OT economy God instituted various forms of tribute and giving. There were *fixed* taxes, such as specific sacrifices for sin and the annual temple tax which was to be the same amount (half a shekel, or two-drachma; Ex 30.13; Mt 17.24) for every male, regardless of his wealth or income. In the case of some sacrifices God did make allowance for individual circumstances—permitting the very poor to substitute a less expensive animal (Lev 5.7). Also the Israelites were specifically instructed to give a *flat* tax of one tenth (i.e., a tithe) of all the general increase of their possessions (Lev 27.30). In addition, provisions for the poor were to be made by leaving un-harvested corner portions of fields (again a *fixed* portion), allowing the poor to pick up dropped grain heads or fruit from trees that ripened after the first pass made by the farmer, and through the provision of interest-free loans and jubilees to cancel debts. However, there appears to be only one class of giving in the Bible that is not regulated by a fixed amount. That is a free-will offering (Ex 35.29; Lev 22.21; Acts 5.4). Since the offerings in this instance are *free-will*, the amount was at the discretion of the giver.

Some people also misinterpret this passage by pointing to the widow's two small copper coins and suggest that this is a normative example for how we are to live the Christian life with regard to how much of our material possessions we are to keep. These guilt manipulators claim that if we have more than two changes of clothing and anything more than baked potatoes for dinner, while others in the world are starving, we are not living as Christ did and taught. There are problems with their false view, including:

- 1) They hold a perverse view concluding that Jesus teaches that the woman was right to starve herself to give support to others.

- 2) They reject the continuing Biblical obligation for Christians to tithe on their income (1 Cor 16.2-3) and replace it with a human requirement.
- 3) They claim that God no longer specifies that a tithe is to be given, which leaves open the specific amount to be given to man's discretion; they have replaced the freedom that comes from knowing what God requires with chaos and doubt—how can we ever be sure we have given enough?
- 4) They create a form of works-righteousness, by which we can try to earn merit with God by being more sacrificial in our giving.

To interpret this passage correctly we need to understand the historical and temporal context. Administrators of the Temple had set up a number of chests in the outer courts where people could deposit free-will offerings (gifts) which would be used by a public charity fund, administered by the Temple wardens. Giving donations to poverty relief was not mandated by law but was voluntary. This was not like modern governments that use their taxation and policing powers to play modern-day Robin Hoods—stealing from the rich to give to the poor. We need to read the accounts of Mark and Luke carefully to understand what the real contrast is that Jesus defines.

Jesus saw the rich donating large sums of money. Their action was probably visible to everyone since it was in a public place, and the rich made a big production out of giving to charity (Mt 6.1-4). The problem was that they gave their gifts grudgingly and to receive plaudits from men. Jesus rejected their gifts because their hearts were wrong, not because they hadn't given a large enough proportion of their wealth as free-will offerings (Acts 5.4). In contrast the widow gave all that she had left over from her working wage for the day, probably after she had eaten her final meal (it was evening as Jesus was heading out of the city). We should also note that Jesus says that she “out of her poverty has put in everything.” We can be sure that the woman did not make a show of giving her gift, nor went around telling people how little money she had. The fact that we know that she gave *all* that she had, is only because Jesus knew her heart. Her attitude displayed clearly that she had an

implicit trust in God, that he would supply tomorrow's needs; and she had a love that overflowed in joyful and generous service for others (2 Cor 9.6-12).

God measures our charity by the state of our hearts, not by the size of the heap we give. He wants our hearts, lives, and material possessions to be like the woman's—consecrated 100% to his service.

Teaching on the Mount of Olives

Structure of an 'End-time' Prophecy [October 13]

(From Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.1-4; Mk 13.1-5; Lk 21.5-8)

Dedication – Enter 'wailing wall' as a query into Google and you will see the remnants of what the disciples describe as 'massive stones'. Some of these stones are almost as tall as a man and longer than twice a man's height. The Temple that Herod had restored, on top of the superstructure laid by Solomon and the remnants of the second Temple built after the return from the Babylonian Captivity, was magnificent. However, the beautiful buildings of which the disciples speak are no longer in existence. They were destroyed by the Roman armies in 70 AD. About 600 years later, on the site of the Temple, Moslems built the Islamic shrine, the Dome of the Rock, and on the Temple courtyard they built the *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This historical context helps us to understand and interpret what Jesus teaches his disciples on the Tuesday evening before the Thursday Passover and his crucifixion on Friday. The disciples were so impressed by the buildings dedicated as gifts to God that they believed they would stand for all time—until the end of time when the Messiah would establish his eternal kingdom (Zech 14.1) or possibly wrap up history. In their minds the existence of the Temple and time were co-terminus, and their demise would be convergent.

Destruction – Jesus was not impressed by the physical stones that made up a building that was only a pointer to the eternal temple and timeless stones. He knew that within a generation of his death they would no

longer exist. While looking at the temporal stones of the Temple, the disciples looked right past the eternal Temple (Jn 2.19) walking with them and the eternal Rock cut out without hands (Dan 2.34). He told them plainly that a time would come when the Temple would be destroyed. At this, they would have been incredulous and would question him about it once they reached their destination where they would spend the night—the garden on the Mount of Olives. Their ideas and incredulity are much like that of many people today who have built imaginary schemes about the Temple and the times and events associated with the return of Christ, and who cannot imagine that their interpretations of Scripture are looking at the wrong temple. Jesus smashes their images as he does the disciples' when he says that not one stone will be left on another. At this point we will observe that the bulk of Matthew 24.1-51, and the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, deals with the destruction of the physical Temple in 70 AD and only peripherally with end-time matters. Those who put this passage into a (mostly) future context and look for another temple to be built where the Dome of the Rock is today, misunderstand Jesus' teachings here, ignore his position as the final and true Temple and the fulfillment of the Old Covenant symbols, and are mistaken when they conclude that the signs given by Jesus are referring to his return to earth at the end of time.

Distinction – When we align the three Gospel accounts, we note that the disciples ask a number of questions of Jesus. In their minds these questions all related to a single event in space-time—the end of history and time, the destruction or replacement of all physical reality, including the Temple, and the establishment of an eternal Messianic kingdom. Although, we should note that Jewish eschatology was not an elaborately worked out scheme as it is for some today, with signs, markers, events, and significant anti-Christ. Jesus, however does not, in his later answers, equate the questions. The questions which they ask can be detailed as follows:

- When will these things happen? That is, when will the stones be cast down from one another?
- What will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled or take place?

- What will be the sign of your coming?
- What will be the sign of the end of the age?"

The disciples do not make the fine distinction in their questions laid out here. However, as we will see, Jesus will separate the topic of the imminent destruction of the Temple, its associated signs, and the end of the exclusively Jewish age from the topic of the distant end of time and his final return.

Deception – Jesus warns them to “Watch out that no one deceives you,” before he begins to address their questions. It is clear that he is also warning us that we need to be careful not to be deceived by false prophets and the many flawed interpretations we find throughout Church-history (and today) of what he says in response to the disciples’ questions. In contrast, we can provide an outline of the discourse as follows (using the verses in Matthew 24.1-51):

- 1) *Definite Description* of pending local events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and immediately following events (4-34).
 - General turmoil and tribulations which were not to be viewed as signs pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem, and are not to be used by us to predict the time or hour of the second coming of Christ (4-14).
 - The specific sign—the abominable Roman armies surrounding the city—that would warn that the desolation of Jerusalem was soon to be and that Christians should flee from the city (15-28).
 - The non-physical coming of Christ in judgment on Jerusalem to bring to an end the era of the OT Jewish Church and to inaugurate the new era of the Gospel age of the Gentiles and the NT Church (29-34).
- 2) *Indefinite Indication* of the second coming of Christ, and the imperative for us to be always watchful and waiting (35-51).

Beginning of Birth Pains [October 14]

(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.4-14; Mk 13.5-13; Lk 21.8-19)

Temple – The disciples had asked Jesus questions about the destruction of the Temple and about the end of the world. In their minds they equated the two events, for they believed that the Temple would last throughout the entire Messianic period. In principle, their concept was right, but their application wrong. The true temple of God is Christ and his Church—with Christ as the corner stone and all believers the living bricks making up the edifice. This living Temple will endure for the entire Messianic age—eternity! However, at this point in their understanding, they still believed that the physical Temple was the enduring symbol of God’s presence with his people on earth.

Tricksters – Jesus warned them to beware of being deceived. False prophets would arise claiming to be the Messiah. Shortly after the resurrection of Jesus heretics such as Gnostics, Judaizers, and practitioners of mystery cults began to deceive believers (e.g., Acts 8.9-10; 1 Jn 2.18; 2 Jn 7; Jude 4; Rev 2.2, 14). Although this warning was specifically for 1st-century Christians, it also has application today. We need to watch out for false prophets who deceive many with their end-time ‘prophecies’ that are not based on a proper understanding of Scripture. False prophets who proclaimed the ‘end is near’ were to be ignored by Christians leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. They also are to be ignored today. No one can predict when Jesus will return!

Turmoil – Many assume that Jesus is giving signs here about the close of the NT age. In fact he is teaching the opposite! He tells the disciples that natural phenomena and national calamities are *not* predictors of either the destruction of the Temple or the end of time. Jesus’ point is that these events will always occur and we should not see them as predictive signs. The earthquake in Phrygi in 61 AD, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 63 AD, famines during the time of Claudius and Nero, wars in Alexandria and Selucia, and the comet that appeared over Jerusalem, were not to be viewed as predictors of the destruction of the city. We also are not to read particular meaning into economic turmoil, wars, nuclear armament, or natural disasters as predictors of the end of the world; rather they are only the ongoing process of decay that harasses

Christians since the resurrection of Christ. We are, however, to view these events as *general* signs that the world is destined for destruction.

Tribulations – Jesus warns the disciples that the beginning of the NT Church will be evidenced by birth pains that will include direct, severe, persecution of believers. Before the destruction of Jerusalem Jewish converts would be flogged in the Synagogues they were once members of, and Jews like Paul, before his conversion, would persecute them. Jews might be tolerated by the Romans but Christians would be hated. Christians made their profession before Emperors—the classic example is during the persecutions under Nero up to 68 AD. Christians were not to use these tribulations as markers to determine when the city would be destroyed. In fact Nero's evil persecutions ended before Titus besieged the city. The persecution of Christians by Romans continued throughout the centuries after Christ until the time of Constantine, during the period of the Inquisition and the Killing Times (1660-1688), and under communism in Russia. They continue today throughout Islamic and Hindu countries. Persecution of Christians is not a direct sign pointing to either the destruction of Jerusalem or the end of the world.

Trials – Jesus encourages his people, the disciples in particular, and all believers, by teaching that he will not abandon us during our trials. Rather he will give us the Holy Spirit to be with us during our most difficult challenges. We, in the West, may wonder if we could face the types of persecution we see our brethren facing today. Would we wilt in the face of confiscation or destruction of property? Would we deny our Lord at the prospect of a prison sentence or a severe beating? Would we abandon the faith to protect our life? Those who are his true disciples will be given wisdom to defend their belief in Jesus as Lord and the strength to endure to the end—even to face death.

Time – There will be pretenders in the Church in every age who, in the face of severe trials, will turn away from the faith and deny the Lord whom they claimed as their master. They will even betray their own family members. At that time there were many who wilted under the heat of persecution. True believers were not, however, to view this as a direct

predictor of when the destruction of Jerusalem would occur. Similarly, we are not to view apostasy as an end-time predictor. A proper reading of history shows that there have been many periods in which some have abandoned the truth—we can see the results in North Africa or Asia Minor where there were once strong churches and now Islam is ascendant. We can also see it in Europe, out of which arose the Reformation, that has fallen under the thrall of secular humanism and will soon be consumed by Islam, if God does not lift his hand of judgement.

Testimony – Jesus told them that no believer would perish in the destruction of the city—because he was going to give them a specific sign that would enable them to flee at the right time. It appears, from the historical records, that most Christians fled; but Jews remained in Jerusalem when Titus’ armies besieged and destroyed it. God’s plan was to scatter Christians from the city to proclaim the Gospel—then the city and Temple would be levelled.

The Abomination of Desolation [October 15]

(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.15-28; Mk 13.14-23; Lk 21.20-24)

Abominable Armies – The expression ‘abomination of desolation’ is explained by most interpreters as one of: an ensign of the Roman armies that was brought into the Temple; some form of pagan sacrifice in the Temple, such as the slaughter of a pig; or setting up of an idol in the, then existing, Temple by the Romans or in a yet to be re-built temple by some future evil ruler or false religious leader. These explanations miss the mark entirely:

- The sign was given to the disciples so that they could escape the city before it was too late. By the time the pagan armies had reached the Temple, the city was destroyed and its inhabitants slaughtered.
- The historic prophetic context informs us that the abomination referred to by Jesus was predicted by Daniel to cause *desolation* (Dan 9.27; Dan 12.11). A Roman ensign or a pig sacrifice in the

Temple may desecrate the Temple's most holy place, but would not cause desolation.

- When we compare Luke's account with that of Matthew and Mark, we see that the meaning of the term 'abomination of desolation' is explained, by Jesus, to be armies surrounding Jerusalem.

Jesus provided his disciples with an explicit sign of the pending destruction of Jerusalem—a local event that occurred about 2,000 years ago—so that they would know when to leave the city. When the Roman armies began to surround Jerusalem in 70 AD, apparently most Christians heeded the warning sign Jesus had given and fled from the city before the Roman siege-works were set up. Josephus, who acted as a mediator for the Romans with the Jews in the city, witnessed the siege and aftermath when negotiations failed, and in his *Wars of the Jews* claims that more than one million people were killed during the siege, of which the majority were Jewish.

Abrupt Abandonment – We are not to interpret this passage, as many do, as a warning for some future generation. When Christ returns, there won't be any use in believers fleeing to the mountains around Jerusalem. Believers (alive or dead) will immediately be taken up to meet the returning Lord (1 Thess 4.17). However, we can apply the warning in a spiritual sense. True believers in Jesus must be willing to follow Jesus and leave behind the love of this world that drags us down. Just as Christians in Jerusalem in 70 AD were not to cling to their worldly possessions but to flee from the coming destruction, so we must be willing to go forward wherever Jesus leads us and not cling to our material possessions, family, or friends (Lk 9.57-62).

Awful Anger – Jesus predicted that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the most grievous punishment ever dispensed on a people. Josephus reported the devastation: "It was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind." Some might argue that the holocaust in Germany

and Poland during WW II or the Islamic destruction of Christians in North Africa or Armenia, or the slaughter of Christian dissidents in Communist Russia were more grievous than the destruction of the Jews in the city of Jerusalem. However, we should take God's perspective on this seriously. Jesus says that the greatness of the distress associated with the events in 70 AD would be unequalled from the beginning when God created the world and will never be equalled again. The fact that he says that they will be unequalled in the future indicates that we are not to look for a particular excruciating tribulation in the future as a sign of Jesus' imminent return. We should however, take warning that after time comes to an end there is a much greater punishment for the sins of rebellion against God and rejection of his son—eternal Hell fire.

Active Aid – Jesus is clear that the destruction of Jerusalem would be limited in extent, and that for the sake of his elect he would protect his people—the true Israel. The destruction of the province of Judea was limited to the recalcitrant cities of Jerusalem and Masada. Josephus reported that many (likely the Christians who heeded Jesus' warning) fled to areas around the Mediterranean, but the Jews who rejected Jesus suffered greatly. Titus, the Roman General, is reported to have refused to accept a wreath of victory, as there is “no merit in vanquishing people forsaken by their own God”.

Advance Advice – Jesus warns his disciples not to look for any sign of his coming in destruction on Jerusalem, other than that of the Roman armies that would be like vultures hovering over a carcass. Many pretenders would claim to know what was going to happen to Jerusalem. They would even perform signs and miracles to convince their hearers. Yet they would be useless at predicting the coming of Christ in judgement on the city. In the same way, we are warned by Jesus not to follow the ravings of ‘prophets’ today who read deep eschatological significance into events such as the election of a president, the creation of a registration system, the assembly of an army, or the acquisition of armaments. They are false prophets who will deceive even the elect if that were possible. Stand firm on one simple truth—Jesus is going to return. However his return will be without warning, sudden, and

generally unexpected—there will be no special signs or evidences to indicate when he will return (Mt 24.36-44; Mt 25.1-13; 1 Thess 5.1-3; 2 Pt 3.10).

Signs of the Coming Kingdom [October 16]

(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.29-35; Mk 13.24-31; Lk 21.25-33)

Significant Statement – This section causes much confusion. Interpreters, even if they believe that the earlier portions of the *Olivet Discourse* refer to the pending destruction of Jerusalem, generally believe that at this point Jesus changes direction and begins pointing to the signs of the end of the world and his second coming. However, contrary to what these interpreters claim, this section also deals with events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. It is in the *following* verses that he changes his focus to deal with the end of time.

The key for determining what these events refer to is found in Jesus' words, recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, at the end of this section, "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Whatever Jesus has been speaking of up to this point, and also *through* this section, must be interpreted in the context of that statement. Therefore, we are to understand the signs prophesied in this section of Jesus' instruction as predicting events which the Jewish converts to Christ, living in Jerusalem in 33 AD, would see unfold within their lifetime.

Some attempt to get around this explicit statement of Jesus by claiming that we are to understand the word 'generation' in some other way (e.g., as 'race', 'people', or 'age') than by its obvious meaning—within the average lifetime of those present. The Greek word used for 'generation' by the three Gospel writers is used in nine places earlier in Matthew¹⁹. In every instance it refers to a contemporary people or a period of roughly

¹⁹ Mt 1.17; Mt 11.16; Mt 12.39, 41, 42, 45; Mt 16.4; Mt 17.17; Mt 23.34.

30-40 years. How then are we to understand and apply the signs given in this section?

Setting Sun – Apparently there will be a rare series of lunar eclipses in 2014-2015—with one even falling on Passover. This has led some, sadly deluded, Messianic Jews and end-time prognosticators to claim that we are to expect the return of Christ in 2015. They have taken Jesus' references here to the sun and moon being darkened, as direct predictors of his coming, either to wrap-up time or to inaugurate a millennial kingdom. Their confusion arises because they do not understand how to interpret apocalyptic language. Jesus is not speaking of literal events that will occur in our solar system or galaxy, any more than Peter in Acts 2.19-20, used the Prophet Joel's words to refer to physical phenomena. The signs spoken of in this section of Jesus' teaching refer to the end of the Jewish age. We can see how Jesus uses this visual imagery when we compare his words with OT apocalyptic prophecies, such as those that apply to the destruction of Babylon (Is 13.10) and the enemies of Israel (Is 34.4, 5; Ezk 32.7). He is saying, in effect, that the star of Jerusalem is going to be blotted out, the sun of their witness to the nations will be blackened, and the moon of their moral example will be covered. By the events spoken of earlier—the destruction of the city and Temple—it would appear that the nations of the earth will be left without a significant witness to God's truth.

Son's Sign – At that time, during the coming days he is speaking of, there would be a sign of the Son of Man's coming in judgement. Jesus does not say that he would personally return at that time to the earth, rather he says that they would see a *sign* of his coming in the heavens. The sign of his reign in Heaven and his rule over the earth, which that generation would see, was to be his coming in judgement to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD (compare Is 19.1; Ps 97.2, 3; Dan 7.13, 14), symbolizing the passing of the old era of God's redemptive plan for mankind.

Salvation's Sunrise – The setting sun of the Jewish age and Jewish Church is a sad day for the earth. But it is not the end! Jesus speaks here

of the beginning of a new age—the NT Gospel age—in which the peoples of the earth would be brought into the Kingdom of God. With the passing of the Jewish age, the Church would no longer be confined to a national group (the Jews) or to a locale (Israel) with a single focal point for worship (the Temple). Rather, the Church would be drawn from the four winds (Lk 13.29), from peoples of every nation, and men would worship in a new form no longer centred on the Temple (Jn 4.21-24).

Summer Season – Jesus then encourages his disciples with a parable. They are not to think of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as the end of God’s redemptive work nor the end of the Messianic kingdom, but rather as a beginning! He uses the budding of a tree (a fig tree in particular, in two of the Gospel accounts) to provide them with a message of hope. The buds and leaves are a precursor to the coming summer when fruit can be harvested. The symbolic events in the heavens and the temporal events in the actual destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple do not portend an end of all things, but only the end of one age. The Jewish age is like a winter compared with the summer of the Gentile age in which millions upon millions—a vast multitude that no man can number from every tribe and people and language (Rev 7.9)—will be brought into the kingdom. We are now in that glorious summer season of God’s working out his great plan to save his people. Jesus is bringing into his Kingdom more and more people throughout the world. He is building his Church, in accord with his certain promise (Mt 24.35)!

The Unknown Day and Hour [October 17]

(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.36-44; Mk 13.32-33; Lk 21.34-38)

Secure Secret – Jesus continued to answer his disciples’ questions about the future, while spending the night with them in a garden. In the first part of his instruction, he dealt with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He now turns to the second major topic that they had asked about, the sign of the end of the age—*that* day. However, in contrast to the specific sign—the abominable Roman armies surrounding the city—

he had given to warn them when the city and Temple would be destroyed, he indicates that the day and hour of the end of the age is not known by anyone except the Father. Not even Jesus, in his human nature, knew the day or hour, so it is utter foolishness to think that anyone can predict the day and hour when Jesus will come again to wrap up history, open the graves, execute eternal judgement, and renovate the created order (Mt 11.22; Jn 5.28, 29; 2 Thess 1.10). This should warn us to avoid the teachings of any false prophet who claims to have figured out when the end of the universe will be.

Seduced Scoffers – Peter tells us that in the last days scoffers will come who will ask, Where is the promise of Jesus’ coming? Jesus informs us of how these scoffers will live out their ridicule of God’s truth—like brute beasts focusing on physical pleasures, with no concern for their eternal souls. Just as the Flood came unexpectedly upon the world that laughed at Noah’s massive construction project, and just as death comes suddenly to some young people who think that they are invincible while road-racing with their peers at insane speeds, so the end of time will strike all mankind like a cobra springing from the rocks (1 Thess 5.2). We should not be concerned that God doesn’t give his saints a warning of this pending event. They will not have to flee from the city to the safety of the hills—as they did in 70 AD. Their temporal-physical lives will not need to be protected and preserved from the wrath of Titus’ legions or from the hatred of some future tyrant. The lives of God’s people will be changed instantly with their assumption of eternal, glorious bodies, and their reception into the welcoming arms of the triumphant Lord. No warning sign is needed for God’s people. Also, God does not give sinful mankind any warning sign of when this wonderful happening will transpire. Men, wallowing in their carnal pleasures, have no interest in what God is planning; they would rather live out their hopeless existence in defiance. They have both their innate knowledge of God and his righteous demands, and the witness of the world-wide Church to warn them of the coming reality. So a specific sign would go unheeded as much as the truth they already have.

Sudden Separation – Jesus says that on the last day there will be a sudden separation of mankind. There are many who believe that this will happen at a rapture at the *beginning* of a millennium when Christians will be taken from the earth and unbelievers will be left on the earth. Some who believe this have stickers on the bumpers of their cars stating, “In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned.” or “After the rapture, give this car to my mother-in-law.” These people are sadly mistaken. Jesus is not speaking of the beginning of a millennial reign on earth. He is speaking of the *end* of his invisible reign over the kingdoms of mankind. He is speaking of the day on which mankind will be separated into two classes—those who will be taken away for consignment to Hell (Mt 13.40) like those swept away in the Flood (Mt 24.39), and those who will be left behind to be with the Lord (Is 4.3). He is speaking of the end of time—the beginning of eternity. He then interjects a warning to his people to keep watch and to be alert. With this injunction he reinforces the fact that the day or the hour when this will happen has been revealed to no one, so that his people will be constantly on guard, waiting expectantly for his return—which could be in the next few seconds, tonight, or at any time in the future. This should engender keen anticipation, keep us from becoming complacent and indifferent, and prevent us from living like the pagans around us.

Secular Snare – Jesus warns his disciples, and us, to take his word seriously. Whereas the previous instruction dealt with local events around Jerusalem, the sudden coming of the end of time will impact “all those who live on the face of the whole earth”. Therefore, this part of his teaching applies directly to us; so we must not run wild while thinking that his return is far off. In this warning, we can discern another reason for why mankind is given no advance information by which to forecast the return of Jesus. If we knew for certain that Christ was going to come on a particular date in the future, then there would be a compelling tendency among men, including Christians, to put off serious attention to the state of their souls and how they will stand before God on the Day of Judgement. We can be sure that there is not still a future period of one thousand years that will pass before the last day. Rather the last day will close in on us unexpectedly like a trap catching an unwary prey.

Therefore we must take every effort and precaution to be ready for it today—by repentance of our sins, trust in Jesus, and faithful obedience.

Secret Spoiler – Jesus adds a series of memorable parables to reinforce the fact that his return to earth and the consummation of all things will occur at a most unexpected time and we are to be prepared at all times for his return. In the first parable he uses the example of a thief who breaks into a house when the owner is distracted. We are not to be caught unaware like the careless householder, but rather to be spiritually awake and watchful for the imminent return of the Lord who will, on *that* day, judge the living and the dead.

Sleepless Servants [October 18]

(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 24.45-51; Mk 13.34-37)

Assigned Tasks – What is your purpose in life? What do you live for, and why? We could answer these questions from an abstract, philosophical level or from a practical, personal level. The ‘man in the street’ lives for pleasure and the weekend or for prestige and power. At the beginning, God gave man the task of serving as stewards over the rest of physical creation (Gen 1.26). Since all mankind was expected to be part of God’s household—not rebels against him—man’s ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God. What about us? Do we live for God’s glory? Jesus applies this creation ordinance to the particular tasks assigned to those who are part of his Church. Each of us is assigned tasks for the preservation and advance of the Kingdom while we await his return. There is no such thing, in God’s household, as ‘Christian’ work and secular work. Everything we do, whether wiping a baby’s bottom or teaching about the life of Jesus, is to be for God’s glory and the building of the Church. Let’s make sure we put everything in life into that context!

Approved Teachers – Jesus does, however, have a particular word for those who would be approved teachers in his Church and warns them that they must be faithful and wise when feeding those under their care. James (James 3.1), the half-brother of Jesus, also warns teachers in the

Church that they will be under great censure if they fail to live up to their obligation to provide good spiritual food. This warning must be heeded by everyone who preaches or teaches. There will be great consternation on the Day of Judgement for many of these teachers who have polluted the message of the Gospel with their silly and blasphemous notions. We could enumerate a great many false teachings spouting from the verbal orifices of false-teachers who have compromised the truth of Scripture, making it subject to the opinions of the pontificators in the academies of men, or to the ‘politically correct’ thinking of the pop-culture. However, we will list only a few of the teachings of faithless servants in the Church today: claiming that God did not create the universe in six actual days about six-thousand years ago or that he used evolution to bring about the emergence of man; pretending that there are not God-ordained differences between men and women and that it is okay for men to marry men; teaching that God is not the Lord of life and that it is proper to snuff the unborn in the womb; or suggesting that God is pleased with the adulteration of worship by the vain inventions of men. I could go on with the catalogue of perversity that is filling God’s Church from seminary, to pulpit, to pew; but it would just discourage us. Instead, let us be warned by the parable. Jesus has spoken!

Assistant’s Treachery – It is not just teachers to whom Jesus addresses this parable; he includes all servants in his Church. He warns us all not to take his apparent delay in returning to earth as a reprieve from watchfulness. While waiting we are not to become engrossed with the world, drinking the wine of pleasure, eating the food of prosperity, and partying with those who delight in doing evil. Living *in* the world, must not become an excuse for living *for* the world. Our hearts must be focused on three primary things: 1) Jesus, who reigns from Heaven, 2) Jesus, who is coming soon, 3) Jesus, who mandates the way of our walk here below and left us an example to follow (1 Cor 11.1).

Abscessed Teeth – Jesus warns his disciples that anyone in the Church who fails to serve faithfully and expectantly will be handed over for punishment in Hell. If you think that Hell is reserved only for greedy egomaniacs, genocidal tyrants, or sexual perverts then you haven’t been

reading the same Bible I have. Jesus is clear: being a member of a congregation and attending services religiously will not save you from the coming wrath if your heart is not right with, and before, God. The Master of the Church is coming at an unexpected time and anyone who he finds in his Church who has been unfaithful will be sentenced as a hypocrite to the same eternal punishment that is prepared for Satan, his horde of demons, and crowds of demented men. Jesus uses a scary summary of the consequences of punishment in Hell—weeping and gnashing of teeth. Since the Bible states clearly that there will be a general resurrection of all men, this punishment will include eternal physical pain. Thankfully I have never had an abscessed tooth, but I hear that the pain is severe enough to make anyone cry. If you have felt such pain, then you have a small hint of what Jesus means when he speaks of the punishment that will be meted out on any in the Church who are unfaithful, and their resultant gnashing of teeth.

Awake, Therefore – If you claim to be part of Jesus’ Kingdom, then you must not sleep but, rather, stay awake until he returns. Obviously this is not a reference to physical sleep! Jesus means that you are not to fall into spiritual slumber, because it may be a sign that you are spiritually dead! If you forget to pray, take no delight in being with the assembled saints, find it boring to read a Bible chapter each day, enjoy the titillation of temptation, or delight in a ‘new’ perspective on this or that Biblical teaching, then you are in danger of sliding into a deep snooze, and may already be comatose, if not dead. Like the guard posted at a military base, who must be careful to protect those inside, you must stay awake to ensure that no enemy can take your soul hostage. We need to stop trying to calculate when Jesus might come to bring this age to an end, or worrying about when our personal time will be up. From the moment of our birth we are on the way to our appointment with death. Each of us faces unassailable certainties: death, the return of Christ, the end of time, and the Day of Judgement. Therefore, stay awake and watch!

The Necessity of Saving Faith [October 19]
(Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 25.1-13)

The various interpretations that people have given to this parable over the centuries provides a good reminder of why we are to focus on the primary message of any parable and not to attempt to impute meaning to each element of the story. For example, some people find meaning in the trimming of the lamps by the virgins, claiming that this implied that they had been baptized or that they were ready to give account for their works. Others see significance in the fact that there were *ten* virgins—noting that a Synagogue could be formed only when there were at least ten males in a locale—and claim that Jesus is speaking symbolically of congregations. Some interpreters claim that all the virgins represent true believers—five of whom are foolish but not immoral—but then they have to explain the fact that the five ‘believers’ are rejected. Some claim that the oil is a symbol for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and get tied up explaining how the foolish-five had *some* oil but ran out of it. In contrast, others suggest that the oil and the light from it represent the Word of God that the Church is to hold forth to the world. Some note that all the virgins were asleep when the bridegroom came and say that this represents the state of the Church at the end of this age, when there will be little passion or enthusiasm for spiritual matters. Still others note that the bridegroom was “a long time in coming” and use this as a basis for commenting on the apparently faulty eschatology of the early Church. The explanations of the different aspects of this parable are endless. When we read too much into each element we can be led into dangerous directions. Let us, instead, note the key lessons that we should learn from this parable.

Featured Wedding – Jesus uses a ceremony common to all societies as an illustration to show the importance of being ready for his return to earth. The local wedding customs of his day are not much different from our own day. Brides are still accompanied by their maids. Since Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to bridesmaids we can conclude that they represent the Church—the bride of Christ (Rev 21.2, 9)—and that Jesus is the bridegroom (Ps 45.1-17). The Church is called to join Jesus at his great wedding feast (Rev 19.7, 9). It is our great hope that Jesus will return (Acts 1.11; 1 Thess 4.16) to this world to claim his bride and take her to be with him forever.

Firm Witness – However, Jesus speaks in this parable of a sad reality in the Church in this age. The Church is made up of two classes of people, those with true faith and those without. There has always been this mixture in the Covenant community, and even among those who have the Covenant sign placed upon them—the brothers, Jacob and Esau, being the archetypical example. Outward profession of religion, even of the Christian religion, is evident throughout the world, with there being many who are passionate and even fanatical about their religion's practices and rituals. While five of the virgins in this parable make a pretence of belonging to Christ, they are not truly and personally converted. They claim to be looking for his coming, but at his return their hearts are found to be empty of a living faith—there is no real love of Christ in them and no humble trust in him; only pride in self-worth and self-work. At their death, or on the return of Christ, these false professors find that their dependence on association with true believers is not a sufficient warrant for the door of Heaven to be opened to them.

Fully Watchful – The specific aspect of local custom that Jesus uses is that the bridegroom in his day would go to the bride's home in the evening for the wedding. It is clear that Jesus intends us to understand this to be a reference to his second coming at the end of time, when he will gather together all those who are truly part of his Church and present them to the Father as his bride (1 Cor 15.23, 24). Every person on earth is to be ready for that momentous event. However, since most men reject it as foolishness, it is not to them that Jesus speaks in this instance. Rather, he is speaking to those in the Church who *claim* to believe in his imminent return. This claim must be expressed and realized through action. The action that is necessary is not to stand on a hill top waiting for his descent on the clouds. Nor is it necessarily to practice a series of daily spiritual exercises such as prayer and reading the Bible—although these may be evidence of true faith, they can be practiced as mere rituals and feigned as much as a verbal profession. The most important aspect of being watchful is to ensure that your *heart* is right before God—this can only be realized through humbly admitting to God that you are not God, but his creature; confessing that you have treated his laws with disdain

and that you cannot make amends for your breaches of his Law; and appealing to Jesus' substitutionary atonement on the cross to cover and erase the guilt and penalty of your sins. If you do not do these things, Jesus will say to you "I do not know you."

Faith and Works – The parables of Jesus do not stand in isolation. Each one does not present all aspects of what he wished his disciples and us to know. His teaching is a unified whole with many dimensions presented throughout his three years' of public ministry. This parable and the next one (Mt 25.14-30), are the last recorded parables that he spoke and they should be read and considered together. This parable speaks of the necessity of true faith and the next of the necessity of the works that flow from that faith. Without faith, and the works evidencing that faith, there is no true salvation (James 2.17).

Our Talents and the Fruit of a Living Faith [October 20] (Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 25.14-30)

In the last two recorded parables that Jesus delivered during his earthly life he deals with the two dimensions of salvation—the necessity of true faith, in the previous parable (Mt 25.1-13); and the necessity of the works that flow from that faith, as taught by this parable. In this parable he makes three key points: everyone in the Church is given gifts; these gifts must be used for the work of his kingdom; and rewards are dispensed in accord with the fruit of a living faith, and punishment in accord with lack of fruit from a false faith.

Distributed Abilities – The US *Declaration of Independence* states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ..." This document is largely a humanistic declaration of mankind's supposed native rights. In reality, all men are *not* created equal. They are equal before God in that they all bear the image of their Creator (Gen 1.26, 27) and are all sinners in rebellion against God, in need of salvation (Rom 3.23). But men are not all created equal in other respects—God endows males and females differently, contrary to popular feminist

thinking today; and God gives varying physical, material, and intellectual gifts to each person, contrary to the thinking of the socialistic equalizers of the modern era (Rom 12.6). This parable attests to the diversity of gifts that are distributed by God to mankind in general, and specifically to his servants, who represent the members of the Church on earth. Each is given different allocations of talents. The word *talent* comes from the Greek and is equal to about 34Kgms of silver. The word has come into English, largely because of this parable, with a broader meaning—the various gifts and abilities that God distributes to us (1 Cor 12.1-31).

Disciplined Application – Since this parable is a *Kingdom Parable*, teaching truth about the Kingdom of God, and was spoken specifically to the disciples (among whom was Judas—an unbeliever), we are to infer that its application is to *professing* believers in the Church. Therefore, it is not a parable that speaks exclusively to true believers since those who have sincere faith in Jesus Christ cannot be consigned to Hell (30). As gifts are distributed by Jesus to the people who make up his Church on earth, he expects them to use their abilities, talents, and resources for the advance of his cause, while we wait for his return to earth to reclaim what is his own (1 Pt 4.10). Those who profess faith in Jesus are expected to provide evidence of that faith by their works. As shown by the order of the two parables, faith is followed by works and true faith must bear fruit as good works. While each person is given gifts of different degrees and types, each is expected to use those gifts fully for Christ. The parable speaks of the two servants who had true faith and went out and earned double with what each was given. The important point is for us not to dwell on the amount of resources we have or have not been given by God, but to be determined to use them fully for his glory and be able to report to Jesus, “I have made ... double.”

Divine Approbation – On hearing of the faithful work of his servants, the Master said “Well done, good and faithful servant!” On the Day of Judgment Jesus will say the same thing to everyone who has diligently applied himself to using the resource at his disposal for the salvation of lost and perishing mankind. Jesus will then invite his faithful servants

into his glorious presence to join him at a great wedding feast and to share in his happiness forever.

Delinquent Abdication – In contrast, one of the servants buried his talent in the ground and did not make it earn double as had the other two. The lesson is clear—he did not put his talent to work for the Kingdom. His profession of faith wasn't sincere and so there was no evidence of faith. We then find this servant making excuses for why he did not earn anything with his talent:

- 1) *He acted with temerity* – He accused the master of being a hard man, making profits where he had no rights. Men, even in the Church, make the same accusations today against God. They claim that he has no rights in saving election or providential governance of his creatures. They claim that he has no right to impose his laws on free men. And, they claim that they know better than God how to deal with the problems in this world caused by sin.
- 2) *He admitted his timidity* – Ironically, while he knew that his master would demand his rights, the servant ignored that and cowered in fear. Men today are like this servant. They know that false religions are a sham and that God requires men to profess faith in Christ alone, and to obey his Law. Yet, knowing these things, they hide the truth of them (Rom 1.18) and claim ignorance as their cover for not standing for Jesus alone.

Declared Accounting – Jesus, like the master in the parable, challenges all false servants. He does not condone their feigned concern for preserving the resources he gives them—this behaviour is that of a proud, covetous idolater. Instead, he condemns their wilful laziness for not using their talents for him. Men, throughout history, have claimed that they know what God wants from us and have invented all manner of schemes they think will please him; or they have nursed a false humility and played the agnostic. Jesus' response to them on the Day of Judgement will be “throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The very punishment they claimed to fear is what they will receive in the end.

Judgement Between the Sheep and Goats [October 21] (Mount of Olives, Spring 33 AD. Mt 25.31-46)

Coming – The disciples asked Jesus when the Temple would be destroyed and what would be the sign of his coming and of the end of the age (Mt 24.3). Jesus answered their questions with a series of revelations and parables on the Mount of Olives, where they rested for the night. He ended his instruction with this teaching about the final judgement (Rev 20.11-15) at the end of time (not at an intermediate appearance as Dispensational Premillennialists claim). While there is a figurative element (the sheep and goats), this teaching is clear and explicit. The coming of Jesus will be:

- *Guaranteed* – His return to earth is guaranteed (Acts 1.11), contrary to what scoffers may speculate and spout (2 Pt 3.3-4).
- *Glorious* – It will reveal him as the anointed King, accompanied by his retinue from Heaven (1 Thess 4.16).
- *Godly* – He will act in his role as judge of the world (Acts 17.31).

Classes – On the Day of Judgement all mankind, from all nations and all generations, will be assembled before Jesus, who is Lord over all. His laws and commands apply to all men in all nations, through all time. Men will not, on that Day, be able to claim that they didn't know about his laws or that they tried to find access to God through some other route or religion—Buddha, Krishna, Confucius, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, etc. are all false prophets! All men will stand before *Jesus* and be held accountable to him alone. Jesus will then divide mankind into two separate classes—not one or three. All people will not eventually go to Heaven as many suggest, nor is there an intermediate classification for those destined to a supposed purgatory.

Call – To the class of men on his right—those declared righteous—Jesus will give an invitation to enter Heaven with:

- *Privilege* – Jesus declares them as blessed by the Father. Anyone whom God blesses is greatly privileged. He may be cursed by the world, but will be welcomed with joy by the Divine Trinity and thousands of angels.

- *Patrimony* – Each will receive an estate, a kingdom, inherited from their Father. By the act of God, believers are adopted into God's household, declared to be sons, and made joint heirs with Jesus (Rom 8.17).
- *Preparation* – Through election, God has foreknown and fore-loved all those whom Christ would save. Both the Father and the Son have been preparing a place for them from the foundation of the world (Jn 14.3).

Charity – Jesus tells the righteous that the reason they are admitted into the presence of God is because of their works of charity and mercy. We must not misunderstand Jesus' teaching. He is not saying that it was their good works that saved them. If it was their works that earned merit before God, then his sacrifice on the cross two days later would be a waste of his commitment to save his people. Human works cannot save! They are always tainted with a pride and imperfections and cannot make recompense for sin. Rather the good work that Christians do is the *evidence* that they belong to the Kingdom.

Confirmation – The righteous were surprised at the reason given to them for their admittance into Glory. They were not aware that they had performed any particular works of charity and mercy for Jesus. Also, true members of his family are always disappointed by their 'good' works—we know that they are not up to the perfect standard set by Jesus, and we know that we could always do more, and better. Jesus, however, confirms that it is the love they have shown for the rest of those assembled at his right hand—his brothers who make up the Church—that he has in view. There is a gentle rebuke even in this commendation; we should be doing more for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, in our congregation, and throughout the nations of the world.

Condemnation – Jesus will then turn to those on his left, who are destined for destruction, and tell them to depart from him. The reason that they are dismissed is that they did not perform any works of charity or mercy toward those on his right. While the primary emphasis is on their sin of omission (they *didn't do*), there is an implication that their

failure to do good was accompanied by hatred toward Jesus and his brothers. Anyone who does not love Jesus and his people hates them. The people at the left hand of Jesus on the Day of Judgement, did not just ignore Christians, they actively despised, scorned, and persecuted them. Men who flagrantly break God's Law will be justly, eternally, condemned for their sins. Yet it is their contempt, censure, and cursing of Jesus' brothers that will be the focus of their condemnation. Jesus loves dearly those he died for. Any insult against them is counted as an indirect insult against him, and their failure to extend mercy to those in the Church is a show of contempt for God. Since those on the left loved to curse Christians, Jesus in turn will curse them by sending them to the eternal abode of their evil master—the Devil—and his henchmen—the fallen angels.

Conclusion – There are many, even in the Church, who despise the truth that God will punish the wicked—they claim that a loving God couldn't do such a thing. So Jesus pre-empt's their foolish notions by concluding his Olivet Discourse with the explicit statement that the punishment of the wicked will be eternal. Since there is a promise of eternal life for the righteous, it is incumbent on us to be among those who show love for Jesus and his people.

Plotting Betrayal and Planning Burial

The Passover Plot [October 22]

(Mount of Olives and Palace of the High Priest, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.1-5; Mk 14.1-2; Lk 22.1-2)

Hugh Schonfield proposed in his book, *The Passover Plot* (1965; made into a movie in 1976), that Jesus had a deliberate agenda to capitalize on the messianic expectations of the Jews and plotted privately with a few select co-conspirators to manipulate events so he would be declared the Messiah. Schonfield's silly conclusions deny God's providential plan guiding the revelation of the true Messiah and the overthrow of the real Passover plot carried out by the Jewish leaders.

Passover Prophecy – God’s plan was that on the Wednesday before the crucifixion Jesus would conclude his teaching about the:

- End of the Jewish ceremonial system, shown by the destruction of the Temple;
- Revelation of the eternal Kingdom, with servants who live out their faith in obedience; and
- Timing for his return to earth to judge between the righteous and wicked.

The next afternoon the Passover lambs would be slaughtered, and then eaten after sundown. Jesus as the true Passover Lamb (Jn 1.29, 36) would take a lamb and eat it with his disciples, and then replace it with the accompanying bread and wine that would symbolically represent his own body and blood. He would then go to the cross on the Friday, as the Feast of Unleavened Bread began (Ex 12.15-20)—which not only commemorated the exodus from Egypt but also symbolized the purging out of sin by the sinless Jesus, the only sacrifice that could ever pay the debt of our sins. Knowing God’s eternal plan, Jesus prophesied that he would be handed over to the Jewish leaders for crucifixion *during* the Passover so he could be crucified on the day of *the* exodus from sin. It would have been impossible for a mere man to have predicted or to have manipulated such an outcome (as Schonfield suggests), especially since the Jewish leaders were planning on taking Jesus after the festival period had ended—probably after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that was celebrated for a week after the Passover. While his enemies were plotting to slay him, Jesus was preparing to sacrifice himself.

Passover Plot – That same Wednesday evening Jesus’ enemies assembled to hatch their plot to arrest and kill him. This plot was:

- *Priestly Prompted* – It is incredible to think that the priests, who were supposed to represent God and his holiness and offer sacrifices of atonement for the people, were the leaders of the plot to assassinate Jesus. They called together the evil assembly that included elders of God’s Covenant people and the teachers of his Holy Law. What a travesty, God’s Church had determined to destroy the Son of God!

- *Politically Provoked* – Some people suggest that Jesus' teachings are not political. To the contrary, they are very political. This is the reason that the Jewish religious establishment (and later, Roman civil leaders) were so keen on wiping out Jesus and his followers. Christianity is antagonistic to all human political regimes for it requires all kings to be subject to King Jesus and requires that the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven place their allegiance in God and not on a 'benevolent' secular state.
- *Palace Positioned* – The participants in the Passover plot assembled in the palace of the high priest. The fact that the high priest had a palace, or luxurious abode, informs us of the real reason for the plot. Men love power and prestige and will do anything to procure and protect them—even slaughtering the innocent.

Providence's Plan – The proximate reason for why the Jewish leaders did not plan to arrest Jesus during the Passover festival was that they were afraid of the people. However, the ultimate reason was God's control of all events. The Jewish leaders were not really concerned about purging out sin or living a holy life, as symbolized by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or that the observance of the rites of the festival be kept sacred. Their concern was merely pragmatic. Many pilgrims had come to Jerusalem for one of the two high points in the Jewish liturgical calendar—the other being in the seventh month (in the fall) to observe the Day of Atonement and Feast of Booths. The Jewish leaders were concerned that the large crowds could be stirred to riot—one of the reasons that the civil rulers, King Herod and Pontius Pilate the Roman governor, were also present in Jerusalem instead of residing in Tiberius or Caesarea. The Jewish leaders were likely concerned that the less 'civilized' Galileans, could easily be provoked into a riot if their popular celebrity, Jesus, was arrested. They were planning on arresting him once the crowds had begun to disperse. However, God had a different plan—that a 'friend' would betray Jesus (Ps 41.9) and precipitate his arrest. Jesus had to go to the cross in two days to fulfill all righteousness, not when the Jewish leaders decided. Man's plotting is not God's planning. Man's rage is not God's reason.

Peace's Path – The thinking and behaviour of the Jewish leaders reminds us that all religions are not the same, or equal. All religions do not engender good moral behaviour. All religions do not lead to peace. All religions do not seek for the glory of God. Only Christianity can create disciples who do good, that grace may abound, and who strive for peace with God and peace from God. Only Christianity is true because, in God's plan, Jesus inaugurated a new year—a new era—by saving his people out of sin and leading them into righteousness and peace.

Mary Anoints Jesus [October 23]
(Bethany, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.6-13; Mk 14.3-9; Jn 12.2-8)

Praise Party – During the week before his crucifixion Jesus had spent some of his evenings and nights in Bethany (Jn 12.1). On the Wednesday evening before the Thursday Passover meal he was invited to attend a dinner there in his honour—at Simon the Leper's home. Other named participants at this banquet include the siblings: Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The Simon in whose home the banquet was held would likely not have had leprosy at the time of the banquet or he would not have been permitted, by Jewish law, to be within the town precincts or in his home. So it is likely that he had been healed by Jesus but still went by the name of 'Simon the Leper'. We also know the account of how Jesus called Lazarus from the grave and raised him from the dead. So the assembly at this banquet included those who ardently loved Jesus and who had first-hand encounters with his miraculous works. They came together to praise and worship Jesus as the Anointed One—the Messiah, or Christ. We, as part of the Church, are also among those who love Jesus and have seen his miraculous power exhibited in the healing of our broken spirits and raising us to eternal life when we were dead in our sin. Therefore, when we come together as an assembly to worship Jesus, and especially for the Lord's Supper, we should be overflowing in our praise and honour of him. Our minds should be filled with joy as we reflect on what he has done and on the promise of being with him soon, at the great wedding supper in Heaven (Rev 19.9).

Poured Perfume – At this party, Martha was engaged in serving food, as

she had done previously (Lk 10.40). Although the family had wealth and status and undoubtedly had servants, she probably believed that serving food to Jesus was the best way that she could honour him. Mary, being the more effusive of the sisters (Lk 10.39), selected a dramatic way of honouring and showing her love for Jesus. She took an alabaster jar of about half a litre of nard (aromatic oil from a rare plant root, native to the Himalayas) and broke off the neck and anointed Jesus' head and feet with the oil, while he was reclining on a dining couch. The jar and the ointment were expensive—300 *denarii*, more than a year's wages—and show the degree of Mary's devotion to Jesus. However, there is another aspect that we should not miss. While it may have been customary to anoint special dinner guests with fragrant oils (Ps 23.5; Lk 7.46), Mary went beyond the obvious and wiped the oil from Jesus' feet with her hair! A woman's hair is her glory (1 Cor 11.15), so Mary demonstrated that she was surrendering her honour to Jesus in her faith in him, and devotion to him. John, as an eye-witness to these events, tells us that the fragrance filled the whole house. In the same way, the fragrance of our faith in Jesus, and our devotion to him, should fill the whole world.

Pretentious Pretext – Some of the disciples—led by Judas Iscariot—voiced a complaint about the apparent waste of the ointment. Their pretentious pretext was that the value of the ointment could have been realized through its sale, and the money used for the care of poor. John tells us that Judas didn't care about the poor, but as the disciples' treasurer he was able to pilfer funds for his private use. A person's view about money is often indicative of his character (1 Tim 6.10; Heb 13.5). Those who feel that they don't have enough are prone to worry, complaints, and greed. Those who think of money as providing answers to all that ails mankind are often given over to parsimony and false hope. Those who use money as purely a means to satisfy their physical urges and passions are usually profligate and licentious. Judas was a lover of money and immediately after his rebuke of Mary he went out to find the Jewish leaders who were meeting in the city at the same time, to betray Jesus for a handful of coins. While Mary gave in faith, Judas grasped in lust; while he demonized her for destruction (translated 'waste') he was destined to destruction (Jn 17.12); while Mary gave more than a worker's

annual living, Judas sold himself for a slave's price (Ex 21.32; Mt 26.15). Those who understand that money is given to us by God to provide for our needs and to be used for his glory will appreciate what Mary did for her Lord.

Permanent Poor – Jesus rebukes the disciples' false interest in the poor by reminding them of something most politicians seem to forget—we can never eradicate poverty. Poverty is the result of sin, and as long as there is sin in the world there will be poor among us. This does not give us an excuse for not caring for the deserving poor—widows and orphans and victims of events beyond their immediate control. However, it does teach us to have a balanced perspective on the use of the resources that God gives us. Giving from our wealth and income to Jesus, for his glory, must come first in our priorities.

Preached Preparation – Do you become uncomfortable when people are demonstrative in their love for Jesus? Mary's actions were misunderstood when she sat at Jesus' feet (Lk 10.39), rushed out to meet him (Jn 11.31), and anointed him. When anyone gives Jesus first place in his life he will be misunderstood and ridiculed by the world and by those who merely profess to believe in Jesus. Jesus told the disciples to leave her alone and not to bother her. What she had done, without necessarily realizing it, was a preparatory anointing for his burial and a beautiful thing. We must be prepared to receive the lesson of Mary's example as a rebuke to our coldness toward Jesus and a recommendation to contribute to the advance of his cause and kingdom.

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus [October 24]

(Bethany and Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.14-16; Mk 14.10-11; Lk 22.3-6)

Causation – Mary loved Jesus and offered expensive perfume to prepare him for death; Judas hated Jesus and when he left Mary's presence in anger he betrayed Jesus to death. The juxtaposition of these events, from one room, on the same evening, presents the ongoing struggle in the world between God and Satan, Heaven and Hell, the Spirit and the flesh,

and good and evil. This particular contrast raises a key question, “Why did Judas do it?” We are told that “Satan entered Judas”—that is, he tempted him. At the same time Judas “went to the chief priests”—that is, he acted with personal volition and will. Then, elsewhere (Acts 2.23), we are told that Jesus was “handed over ... by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge”—that is the actions of Judas were predestined. We could analyze this situation using Aristotle’s modes of causation (material, formal, efficient, and final), but would miss the point that all three causes—the Divine, Satanic, and human—often converge in the actions of men, but in no way removes man’s responsibility for his actions (Jn 13.27; Mk 14.21). The specific motivation that led Judas to act, could have been any or all of: 1) jealousy, since he was not from Galilee he may have felt that Jesus favoured the other disciples; 2) disillusionment, believing that Jesus was a failure since he didn’t plan to establish a political kingdom; 3) greed, since he was a thief (Jn 12.4-6) and had a lust for money; or 4) pride, thinking that he could obtain recognition from the Jewish rulers. Sadly these are the kinds of motivations that drive all of sinful human behaviour.

Corruptness – The “Why?” question leads naturally to another, “How could Judas, or anyone, do something so bad?” The Jewish chief priests and officers didn’t approach Judas; he went to them. They probably believed that Jesus’ close disciples could not be corrupted since they had been with him for so long and had not left with the fickle crowds. Judas’ coming to them was a welcomed surprise. We, who understand Biblical truth, know that the heart of man is desperately wicked—innately, by the presence of sin from conception. Unless a person is converted and cleansed by the Holy Spirit and restrained by his grace, the black sludge of sin that gurgles away in his soul can vomit out at any moment. History teaches this over and over again—elected leaders who refuse to step down, and become dictators; crowds that reach a tipping point and pillage and rape; functionaries who conduct experiments on the disabled and claim it was at the direction of their bosses; transit riders who, unprovoked, turn on persons nearby and slice off their heads; or wealthy men who set up ponzi schemes to bilk the unsuspecting. While most people would claim man’s innate goodness, we know better—sudden

outbreaks of extreme evil are not rare, but are to be expected. Judas was an intimate associate of Jesus who turned out to be his vile enemy. So it is in the Church today. There are always some who claim to love Jesus and say that only the Bible is their standard for doctrine and life. Yet, they are hidden subversives who desire to overthrow his Church by introducing unauthorized worship, unholy alliances, and blasphemous teachings. We must be vigilant, not only watching out for the con artists, but also that our hearts don't deceive us (1 Cor 10.12).

Contract – Judas didn't have a specific plan in mind for how to betray Jesus, nor did he go to the Jewish leaders with a particular payment request. Rather, he plotted with them about how he might undertake the betrayal and asked them what they were willing to give him in exchange. He didn't make his devilish compact because he lacked money but because he loved money. He treated the Son of God as a commodity to be bartered. So it continues today. Many in the Church love this present world (2 Tim 4.10) and will sell Jesus, the Kingdom, truth, and their eternal souls for a pocket full of silver coins.

Coins – So the Jewish leaders counted out for him the thirty silver coins that they had agreed to in their deal. Somali pirates will try to extort millions of dollars from ship owners and the Taliban will seek large sums to release their kidnap victims. But Judas betrayed the Lord of the Universe for a pittance. We noted previously that Judas sold himself for a slave's redemption price (Ex 21.32; Mt 26.15)—thirty silver coins, worth about a month's wages. It is a fundamental truth that it does not take large meals to feed a dragon-sin, just regular morsels. The pervert gets his relief from a Web-page, the glutton needs only a bag of chips, the miser just another dollar, and the proud man one more accolade. The Devil suits the temptation to the person tempted.

Consent – We read that Judas consented to the arrangement. He wilfully kept his vow to do evil. He was like Herod who agreed to execute John the Baptist to keep his vow to Salome, Herodias' daughter (Mk 6.26). It is an extreme irony of sinful human nature that evil men are willing to keep their vows to perform the perverse, but good men have difficulty

keeping their obligation to obedience. We must perform only the proper vow, give consent only to the chaste vow, and void the vile vow.

Chance – Judas, having determined to do evil, looked for any opportunity to carry out his vicious plot. Like the prospective adulterer conniving to get a woman alone, or the thief casing a target for an opportune absence of the owner, so Judas watched for a chance to betray Jesus when there was no crowd to protest an arrest (Mk 14.2). Evil prefers to do its deeds in secret and darkness rather than be held accountable before the glaring light of Truth.

Last Passover

Preparation for the Passover Meal [October 25]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.17-19; Mk 14.12-17; Lk 22.7-13)

Passover – Jesus had a family—mother, brothers, sisters are mentioned in the Bible as being alive around this time—and they may have even been in Jerusalem for this Passover and its associated feasts. Nevertheless, for this Passover meal, he chose that he would eat the family meal with his disciples (Mt 12.50). By his action he was not teaching that family is to be despised or neglected. Rather, the symbolism is too obvious to dismiss. He was pointing to the reality that this meal would serve as the foundation for the sacramental ordinance of the Lord's Supper that brings into fellowship all of his spiritual brothers and sisters and commemorates his sacrifice as the Lamb of God. The next day he would procure eternal redemption for his people on the exact day that God redeemed his people from the slavery of Egypt through the exodus.

Pair – Jesus sent two of his disciples, Peter and John, to prepare the Passover meal. We must be careful not to impose a direct didactic purpose on every aspect of historical narrative in the Bible. However, it seems valid to conclude that Jesus was sensitive to the fact that most tasks are easier to accomplish when a person has a partner to work with him. Just as it was not good for the original man to be alone, and God

provided him a helpmeet, so the principle that two people working together can accomplish more than the two working independently (Eccl 4.9). We won't examine this principle in detail, but it likely speaks to the situation in the Church where individuals in ministry act as 'lone rangers' and why God established a plurality of elders.

Prescience – Jesus told Peter and John in advance exactly what would happen as they went into the city to prepare for the meal. Some interpret this exactness as being simply the enactment of pre-arranged events by Jesus who was concerned about being undisturbed while in the city. For example, they say he had previously booked the room without the disciples' knowledge and had established a secret sign—the man carrying the water jar. They base this interpretation on the unusual sight of a *man* carrying the water jar, since this was considered to be a woman's task, and on Jesus instructing them to ask, "Where is *my* guest room?" (Mk 14.14). It is incredible to think that Jesus could have made the arrangements personally without the knowledge of his disciples who were with him constantly. It is far more credulous to accept the fact that God had pre-ordained these events and that Jesus—as the God-man—was able to reveal the details of the Divine plan.

Providence – When the disciples went into the city they "found things just as Jesus had told them". Jesus was teaching his disciples that God's prescience is based on his providence. God does not *look* into the future to see how people will behave as contingent, autonomous agents. Rather, God *knows* precisely what will happen because he has planned the actions of every entity in all of creation, including the actions of rational and responsible men. There is not a logical contradiction between God's providence and mankind's responsibility—there is only an antinomy that results from our finite minds being unable to grasp the possibility of the two coexisting.

Possession – The inhabitants of Jerusalem would have had rooms available for rent by the pilgrims coming to the city from the surrounding regions and towns to celebrate the Passover. However, by this point (the morning before the evening Passover meal) it would normally have been

impossible to find a vacant space suitably large to accommodate Jesus and his many disciples—more than twelve, since at least Matthias and Barsabbas would also have been present (Acts 1.21-23). Not only was there a miracle in Jesus foretelling events exactly, but also in the provision of the space on such short notice. We don't know why the space was available; it may have been that there was a last-minute cancellation by some rich pilgrim who had previously reserved the large, furnished room for his family and servants. Extra-Biblical tradition states that the room used for this Passover meal belonged to the family of John Mark, and would later become the meeting place of the first converts in Jerusalem (Acts 1.13-15; Acts 12.12). It may be that the disciples encountered either John Mark or his father carrying the water jar. God worked events so that the family's initial disappointment at losing the income from the rent of their space was overcome by their joy at having the Messiah come to their home. The authority with which Jesus directed his disciples to acquire the space indicates that Jesus, as Lord of the universe, owns not only the cattle on a thousand hills but all of our possessions. He can expect the material blessings he has provided to us to be used for his purposes. The readiness of the temporal owners of the space to accommodate Jesus and his disciples indicates that Jesus was known to them, that God had already prepared their hearts to receive him, and that they viewed their possessions as ultimately his.

Preparation – Once the disciples found the space, they prepared the meal. This would have involved buying a slaughtered lamb and roasting it; buying the unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, dried fruit, spices, and vinegar; and preparing the meal for the arrival of Jesus and his disciples. We can imagine Peter and John, later in life, reflecting on these activities before a celebration of the Lord's Supper with their congregations, and applying this to Jesus' three years of preparatory work before going to the cross as our Passover Lamb and the preparation of our hearts before we come to the Lord's Table.

Washing the Disciples' Feet (Part 1) [October 26]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 13.1-10)

Demonstrated Love – We are all familiar with the idea that *love* is a feeling or passion. We talk about ‘falling in love’ or ‘being in love’. However, we are much less engaged with the concept of love being *caring in action*. For example, we don’t say, ‘doing love’. In contrast to us, doing love was the essence of the life of Jesus. Because of his love for God and because Jesus *is* love (1 Jn 4.8), his entire ministry over the preceding three years had been focused on displaying love. From Galilee to Jerusalem his love had been poured out on selfish, self-righteous, sinners from mankind in general and on his disciples (“his own”) in particular. On the evening before his crucifixion, knowing that he would be leaving the world the next day, he again showed his disciples the extent of his love for them. He demonstrated his love for them, first, by rising from the supper table to wash their feet, then by encouraging them with his final words of teaching and prayer for them (John 13.12-17.26), and finally by going to the cross for their eternal salvation.

Divine Lord – Jesus carried out his actions in perfect harmony with the Divine plan, and arose from the table as the Passover meal was being served, to put his living parable into action. The timing was perfect because:

- *Conviction* – Satan had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus. Washing even Judas’ feet would demonstrate that God loved us while we were still sinners (Rom 5.8) and would compound Judas’ guilt for rejecting the Lord.
- *Completion* – All authority had been given to Jesus and it was necessary for him to complete his work on earth and return to the Father.
- *Covenant* – Jesus was about to inaugurate the new covenant in his blood that was the ultimate demonstration of the love of God for mankind.
- *Condescension* – He knew that he was called to a servant’s role until his earthly work was completed and he was glorified (Phil 2.6-11).
- *Contention* – The disciples were still striving for worldly honours and a contention would arise during supper. Jesus washed their feet when the food was on the table, rather than *before* the meal as was

customary. This noteworthy action would fix in their minds the nature of true greatness.

Disciple Laundering – True greatness is measured by service in love, not by being served in luxury; by the number of people we have benefitted not by the number we have bossed (Mt 20.26). Jesus is therefore the greatest since he helped more people during his three years of ministry than any doctor, school teacher, counsellor, advisor, or pastor has ever helped in a lifetime of service; and in his death he provided the most important help we can ever receive—salvation from sin. To demonstrate again the reality of his love for mankind (especially for his disciples) he performed a task normally assigned to slaves (1 Sam 25.41). He stripped to his under-garments and began washing the disciples' feet. There are two primary reasons for this action:

- 1) To prove that his condescension was a voluntary act of humility and
- 2) To provide an example for his disciples.

We will consider the second reason in our next meditation. Now, however, we will note two key implications of his voluntary act of humility.

- *Challenge* – The apparently odd flow of the account from verse 3 to 4 appears to include a non-sequitur between his thoughts that all things were given into his hands and he was about to return to the father, and his servile action. The connection is probably that Jesus had to resist temptation throughout his entire life; and especially at this point, when he knew that the end of his humiliation and his coming exaltation were so near. By deliberately rising to wash his disciples' feet he challenged the temptation he was facing and resisted it.
- *Conviction* – Jesus knew that he was the anointed sovereign over creation and that his enthronement would occur within days—at his resurrection. This conviction empowered him to accept the temporary abasement and to face death the next day. He knew that these voluntary acts of loving service were the necessary requirements to purchase life for his people.

Denied Labour – Peter watched Jesus washing the feet of the other disciples and determined that he could not allow his Lord and teacher to be humbled at his feet. Peter may have acted somewhat rashly (as he appears to have often done) but his reaction was based on a true desire to see Jesus honoured. Peter, however, needed to learn that not only is it necessary to be humble before Jesus, but also to be obedient to him. Jesus is both Saviour and Lord!

Declared Legitimacy – Jesus counters Peter’s disapproval with a strong rebuttal that indicates the necessity of receiving the foot-washing if Peter is to have any part with him. Peter insightfully realizes that the foot-washing was a symbol for spiritual cleansing from sin that Christ alone could provide, and ask for an entire body-wash. Jesus indicates that the symbol is exactly that, a symbol—the reality is spiritual. Anyone who has had a spiritual bath through repentance of sin and belief in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross is like a guest invited to a royal dinner who has bathed and only needs his feet washed to remove the dust of the road. We need daily spiritual foot-washing through confession of sins to re-apply Christ’s death to us (1 Jn 1.7-9; 1 Jn 2.1-2), so as to remove the grime of sin that we pick-up as we walk through this world. Jesus wants our walk to be humble and holy until he comes to take us home.

Washing the Disciples’ Feet (Part 2) [October 27] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 13.10-20)**

We noted in our previous meditation that there are two primary reasons why Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. First, was to prove that his condescension was a voluntary act of humility; second, to provide an example for his disciples. Today we will consider the second of these reasons.

Definitive Lesson – After he had finished washing their feet he asked them, rhetorically, if they understood the reason he, as their Teacher and Lord, had done it for them. He then explained that the reason was to provide them with an example of how they should act toward one another. We see in this living parable a ratification of his command, “Do

as I have done!”, and learn of:

- *Selflessness* – Jesus is the Creator and Lord of the universe. He is the Holy One who is worshiped by angels and men. Yet, he washed the feet of all his disciples, including Peter, who would deny him, and Judas, who would betray him. We must grasp the profound depth of this example. We have trouble being kind and gracious to those who love us or to those we consider equals or superiors, but the humility that Jesus expects from us is to kneel before our enemies and those who hate us. A lack of true humility is the primary cause of every feud and failure in life. As Peter says, recalling this event, “clothe yourselves with humility” (1 Pt 5.5).
- *Service* – Jesus tells the disciples (15) that he gave an *example* that they, and we, should follow. Some readers of this account have misunderstood Jesus and have set up a religious rite they observe during the ceremonies leading up to Easter. Jesus is speaking metaphorically; not necessarily of taking a bowl of water and towel, but of being of sacrificial service to all our fellow disciples in the Church. Jesus speaks of service not sacrament.
- *Submission* – Foot-washing is service, but it is more. It is submission to Jesus as Lord and to one another. Not only are we not greater than our master who sent us (16), we are not greater than others in the Church. Jesus had corrected the disciples in the past for their misdirected aspirations to kingdom greatness—for example to sit on his right hand or left hand. He anticipated another dispute that would arise among them later that evening (Lk 22.24-30). His example is a rebuke to our pride, selfish attitudes, and competition; and an appeal for mutual submission.
- *Strength* – As we noted previously Jesus undertook to wash the disciples’ feet as a means of strengthening his resistance to the temptation of self-exaltation. In the same way, when we humbly serve in the Church—whether it is sweeping up after the children’s snack, replacing light bulbs, or typing the congregational newsletter—we learn to be humble, serving Christ and not self. There are usually some in a congregation who hold, or aspire to, the ‘exalted’ roles of teaching and preaching—they *also* need to learn

through foot-washing to resist the temptation to pride, just as Jesus their Lord did.

- **Satisfaction** – Our holy service should be offered up joyfully and freely in love for Jesus; not motivated by a wish for a reward. However, our Lord is not unobservant or niggardly. There are many places in the Bible where he promises blessings for obedient service. Here (17) also, Jesus reminds us that as we do good we will be blessed. We could enumerate many blessings that result from faithful service however, in the context of this statement, the primary blessing seems to be the satisfaction of knowing that we are being useful to God and following Jesus' example.

Disclosed Light – While encouraging the disciples to follow his example of selfless service, Jesus mentioned twice that a member (Judas, who was as yet unidentified) of their group was unconverted. First he said that not all of his disciples were spiritually clean (10) for Judas was set on a plan to betray him (11). Then he excluded Judas from among those chosen for salvation because he claimed to be a friend, but was really an enemy (18). These statements seem to be out of context with the example he gave them by washing their feet. However, we need to consider their connection and important message:

- **Mixture** – Since there was a betrayer among the disciples who had heard Jesus teach for three years and had eaten, prayed, and travelled with him, we should expect that there will be wolves among us dressed in sheep's clothing. The true nature of their hearts will be indiscernible, except to God, so we are not to get tied in knots trying to figure out who are among the elect, but rather to serve all in the Church with indiscriminate love.
- **Messiah** – To encourage them Jesus predicted that one from their midst would betray him (19). Events related to his role as the Messiah were unfolding as planned by God and according to Scripture (quoting Psalm 41.9 in 18); including his humiliation by washing the feet of a 'friend' who betrayed him, and through rejection by his own nation who sent him to be crucified by Roman hands.

- *Mission* – Jesus showed his disciples that loving service, even to those who are our, and God's, enemies is not a waste of time. It is what the Messiah was called to do and so we also are called obediently to do the same. We as his messengers have a mission to bring Jesus to the love-starved, morally destitute world which plods along without hope. We are called to humbleness and holiness, and the resultant happiness (17). Many in the world will watch our service and life and see our blessedness and come to Jesus through our example (20). The closer we follow the example of Jesus, the more we will draw men unto him.

Identification of the Betrayer [October 28]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.20-25; Mk 14.18-21; Lk 22.21-23; Jn 13.21-30)

Chronology – There is disagreement about the sequence of events during the Passover meal. Matthew and Mark place the identification of Judas as the betrayer before the institution of the Lord's Supper, whereas Luke records his identification after the passing of the communion cup. Serious debates have arisen because of this difference; each order has implications for the role of the communion ordinance and qualifications for participants. We cannot rehearse the various arguments for the different positions here. Rather we will follow the order of Matthew and Mark, which are based on the eye-witness accounts of Matthew and Peter. For a thorough defence of this position refer to Jonathan Edwards' *Qualifications for Communion* (Objection VII) and George Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (chap. 8). Gillespie demonstrates that Luke gives a retrospective review of an event that happened during the evening and is not recording events in absolute chronological order.

Concern – Jesus returned to the supper table after washing the disciples' feet and telling them that one of them would betray him. He was troubled by this revelation. His concern about the betrayer affected his human nature. As God, he knew that it was necessary for the betrayer to act to fulfill the Scriptures and to complete the Divine plan. But as man, his spirit was afflicted because of: his concern that the disciples not become

discouraged, the evil associated with his betrayal at the hand of one who claimed to be a friend, the pending suffering it would bring about, and the coming eternal destruction of Judas.

Communication – It was necessary for Jesus to warn the disciples again of the coming betrayal, so he testified with a solemn formula that it was one of their own number who was present that evening in the upper room. We see in this both an unveiling of his Divinity which knows all things and a further display of his love as he gave the disciples a warning to help them understand events that would transpire the next day. It also provided an opportunity for the betrayer to realize that his heart was visible to Christ and to repent.

Consternation – The disciples were incredulous. They could not believe that any of them would betray their Lord. They had no idea it would be Judas, and even wondered about the state of their own hearts, asking: “It is not I, is it?” They were reclining on couches, with John on one side of Jesus and Judas on the other side, or nearby. Peter was further away and signalled quietly to John to ask Jesus who the betrayer was. John leaned back and whispered a request that Jesus identify him. The fact that the disciples did not know that there was a betrayer among them, and questioned their own hearts, provides warnings for us: 1) It is possible for unbelievers to be in the Church, even in respected offices, and their hypocrisy be indiscernible to others. 2) We need constantly to examine our hearts to be sure that we would not betray Jesus. 3) We should not trust anyone with our salvation, even our own selves, except Christ alone.

Charge – Jesus did not announce aloud who the betrayer was. Rather he gave John information privately. John implies this in his Gospel, where he records that none of the other disciples knew why Judas left the room. Beside the twelve at the table (Mt 26.20) there were others present at the meal, such as Justus and Matthias (Acts 1.21-23). So Jesus tells John that it would be one of the chosen inner-circle. It is almost impossible to believe that it could be one of the twelve eating from the same serving dish as Jesus. So Jesus also gives John a sign to identify him. As the host,

he used a gesture of honour to reveal the traitor—he handed him a piece of lamb dipped in bitter herbs and wrapped in bread. Judas, feeling the all-seeing eye of the God-man on him, asked, rhetorically, if he was the betrayer and called Jesus Rabbi rather than Lord as the other disciples had. Jesus could leave the question unanswered, so charged Judas with one the most evil of all evils in the history of mankind.

Consequences – As Judas received the sign of the charge against him—the piece of bread—Satan entered him. It may be that the protective care of Jesus was lifted from Judas and he was left to be swallowed up by Hell’s lord. Jesus told Judas that in spite of (actually, *because of*) the betrayal he would go on and fulfill all prophecies—about his crucifixion (e.g., Ps 22.1-31; Is 53.1-12)—and complete his assigned task of saving his people from Hell. But for Judas and all those who, like him, reject Jesus as Lord it would be far better if they had never been born. Having God’s general grace removed, and being left for Satan to possess is the worst thing that could befall any man.

Command – Jesus then commanded Judas to do his dirty deed quickly. The other disciples did not realize that Judas was going out to betray Jesus and assumed that he left to buy supplies for the feast that followed the Passover. Ultimately, what Judas did was predestined by God (Ps 41.9; Zech 11.12, 13; Acts 2.23). However, Judas was not a pawn in a cosmic battle between good and evil. He was a responsible human who acted according to his own wilful desires (Mk 14.10-11) and made moral decisions. In so doing, he fulfilled God’s plan and revelation. Judas left the light of Christ (Jn 8.12; Jn 12.35, 46) and the Gospel, departed into the night, and the darkness of Hell swallowed him up. Never hide behind God’s acts of predestination! We are all as accountable as Judas to acknowledge Christ as Lord and not to betray him.

Dissension Among the Disciples [October 29] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Lk 22.24-30)**

Have you had the experience of telling a toddler not to do something—climb on a chair, touch a hot pot, open a cupboard—and then have him

look you in the eye and go ahead and do the very thing you told him not to? Jesus must have felt, on his last evening with the disciples, that he was dealing with two-year olds. He had given them an acted parable of humility by washing their feet and a lesson on humble service and mutual submission as he explained why he had washed their feet. Then, he had warned them that one of their own company would betray him—they had thought it could be any one of them. But they seem not to have paid attention to what he showed them or had told them, for when he gave Judas the piece of bread as a sign to John of who the betrayer was, the other disciples appear to have considered this a special honour bestowed on Judas and they began to argue about whom among them would be considered the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The irony is that what Jesus intended as a rebuke was understood as a reward.

Pagan Sovereigns – When the administration of rule by those who have positions of power is not tempered by a fear of God, Biblical wisdom, and true humility, the only possible direction for their government is toward autocracy and tyranny. Lord Acton understood this when he said in a letter in 1887, to Bishop Mandell Creighton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.” The founding fathers of the US, knowing of this danger, tried to put in place a form of federalism that would balance power between the states’ and national governments, and between the branches of government. Yet, even in this case, they were not able to restrain the tendency of men in positions of power to lord it over other men. Thus, we see in the US an increasing concentration of power and a usurpation of responsibilities by the Federal Government. While, adding powers to themselves, the President, Congress, and the Courts all claim that their objective is to support the powerless and supply the poor. Jesus shows that the modern situation is no different from what was happening in the ancient world. One of the Ptolemies (VIII) who ruled the southern portion of the Roman Empire from Egypt, until about 150 years before the time of Christ’s three-year ministry, had taken as his surname *Euergetes*—Benefactor—the word Jesus uses (25). His reign was filled with vice, murder, cruelty, and tyranny. He was hated by his subjects from Egypt to Judea and into southern Asia Minor. Ironically, another

name that history has given him is Physcon, which means “potbelly” or “bladder” because he was obese. His subjects suffered under his lordship while he accumulated wealth and power. Jesus warns his disciples that to seek positions of worldly power would make them no different from the pagan Ptolemaic or Herodian dynasties.

Proper Service – The disciples of Christ are not to seek after, or to display, the power and pomp of the world. The Church is a different kind of kingdom that is structured around service, not sensuality. Like their King, who had stripped to his undergarments and washed their feet, the disciples were to serve one another; not to lord it over one another. Doing service is more honourable than being served. To do good, is to be great. We all need to heed this instruction. It is not just the Roman Catholic hierarchy with their robes, and rings that need to listen. Even the humblest servant in the Kingdom must accept the reality that there is only one King, one Prince, and one Lord. There are no dukes, earls or barons in Christ’s Kingdom, only servant priest-kings.

Praised Sharers – Jesus does not leave the disciples with a word of rebuke, but adds a note of encouragement. First, he praised them for sharing in his work of ministry. They had not abandoned him as had Judas or the crowds that had turned away when his teaching became difficult to accept and they didn’t get what they were looking for—an earthly kingdom and miracles (Jn 6.66-71). Although the disciples had stumbled, and would stumble over the next thirty-six hours, the foundation of their being able to stand with Jesus in his trials was their belief that he was the Messiah. All of us who believe in Jesus can show our love for him by standing with him through his Church—his, and our, brothers and sisters. When any of us face trials and persecutions from the Christ-hating world we are to stand with one another for Christ.

Prescribed Seats – Second, he encouraged them by conferring on them all equally—none above the others—two different kinds of seats of high honour in his Kingdom:

- 1) *Seats at his table* – He invited them to eat and drink at the eternal feast that he is preparing in Heaven (Rev 19.7, 9). Immediately after

inviting them to join him at that feast, he took bread and wine and instituted the New Covenant Supper (Lord's Supper) to which all believers are invited. This Supper looks back to his saving work on the cross and forward to the heavenly feast to which all believers are also invited.

- 2) *Seats of judgement* – These seats have both a temporal and an eternal dimension. Elders, who are rulers in the Church and general successors of the Apostles, judge the spiritual twelve-tribes of Israel today, for example as they officiate at the Lord's Supper. The other dimension is more inclusive, as all members of the Church—the assembly of priest-kings—are given the responsibility to judge the world (1 Cor 6.2)

What a great honour it is to be a *servant* in Christ's Kingdom!

Institution of the New Covenant Supper [October 30] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.26-29; Mk 14.22-25; Lk 22.14-20; 1 Cor 11.23-26)

The New Covenant Supper was instituted after Jesus and the disciples had eaten the Passover lamb, an OT pointer to Jesus and his sacrificial death (Gen 22.8; Jn 1.29; 1 Cor 5.7), while they were drinking one of the traditional four cups of wine. It may have been a cup associated with redemption from Egypt (Ex 6.6-7) that Jesus lifted and consecrated for the New Covenant Supper. This explicit connection with the Passover shows that the *form* of the old ceremonial order has been replaced with a new order, by the head of the Church. It is inappropriate for Christians (including Messianic Jews) to continue observing the *Seder*; it has been replaced by the Lord's Supper. In this Supper we find various elements of enduring significance:

Body – Jesus had taught that he is the bread of life (Jn 6.35). It was bread, rather than a piece of roast lamb, that Jesus chose to spiritually symbolize his body in the new order. While the lamb had symbolized redemptive sacrifice and death, which would end forever the next day, the bread symbolized life and sustenance that would be provided by the Saviour. Jesus took the bread:

- *Blessed* – Through a prayer of thanksgiving (a *eucharist*), he set it apart for a holy purpose to *represent* his body. When he said, “this is my body” he used a metaphor—as shown by the pronoun (*this*) having a different gender than the noun (*body*) in the Greek, and the choice of verb (*is*) which differs from ‘becomes’—in the same way as “*All the world’s a stage*” does not mean that the world becomes a physical stage.
- *Broken* – He broke the bread symbolizing the physical abuse (Is 53.5) that he would undergo the next day as he completed the assigned work of redeeming his people from sin.
- *Believers* – He gave the bread to his disciples and commanded them to eat it; indicating that Jesus is to be received by all believers, who are spiritually to feed on him (Jn 6.57-58).

Blood – In the OT ceremonial system the real blood of sacrificed animals pointed to the real blood of Christ that would be shed on the cross. From this evening in the upper room, and onward, his blood would be remembered by the ‘blood’ of grapes (Gen 49.10-11); again as a metaphor, since Jews clearly would never have drunk real blood (Gen 9.4; Lev 3.17; Lev 7.26-27; Lev 17.10-14).

- *Blessed* – He took the cup, likely the third cup, at hand for the Passover, and through a prayer of thanksgiving set it apart for sacramental use.
- *Brotherhood* – He directed *all* of his disciples to drink from the single cup, teaching that no believer is above another—reinforcing his example of humility in washing their feet and his condemnation of their wanting to have positions of prominence in the Kingdom. We participate in the *Lord’s* supper, not a ceremony instituted by a denomination, emphasizing the unity of the universal Church and our obligation to strive for peace (Eph 4.3). Jesus will soon pray for this unity to be visible (Jn 17.20-23).
- *Bond* – In lifting the cup he re-instituted the covenant between God and man, in its new form—the *New Covenant*, promised of old (Jer 31.31-34). His covenant bond and promise is that his shed blood on the Cross would replace the ultimately useless animal sacrifices,

cover effectively the sins of his believing people, and procure eternal blessing for them.

Broadcast – Jesus established this sacrament as a participatory memorial by which we regularly remember his death on the cross on our behalf. But it is more; it is a perpetual proclamation to the world of his saving work. As the Church faithfully observes this sacrament, it demonstrates the reality that Jesus provides a way of salvation from sin, that God has a people that he has called out from the ways of sin, and that these people are different from the rest of the sinful world. This is one reason that the Lord's Supper belongs to the Church, only to the Church, and only to believers within the Church.

Blessings – The institution and observance of the New Covenant Supper points to two key blessings that flow from the reality that is symbolized:

- *Provision* – The Passover commemorated the deliverance of the people of God from slavery in Egypt. The Lord's Supper commemorates a more significant deliverance—the deliverance of God's people from slavery to sin and Satan. It points to the love of God in providing his Son to pay the debt of sin through his blood, and the means whereby he can forgive the sins of many—a great multitude from every nation, that no one can number (Rev 7.9)—and reconcile them to himself.
- *Prospect* – Jesus told the disciples that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine again, until he would drink it with them in his Father's kingdom. Some think that he did not drink the traditional fourth cup of the Passover meal—the *Hallel*, or blessing—as a sign that the plan of redemption was not yet complete and that there is still a prospect of great blessing for God's people. We find in his statement a promise that there is more to come. While for him it was his death the next day and his resurrection into Glory two days later; so it is for us physical death, the prospect of resurrection to eternal life, and perpetual communion with Jesus at his banquet (Rev 19.7, 9). Observance of the Lord's Supper reminds us that when the Lord left the earth, it was farewell and not goodbye. He is coming again to bring us home to the happiness of Heaven.

Teaching in the Upper Room

Prediction of the Departure [October 31] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 13.31-38)

Throughout the three-years of Jesus' ministry, the disciples were confused about the purpose of his coming into the world and the nature of the Kingdom of God. So after instituting the New Covenant Supper, Jesus began his final course of instruction to leave them with teaching and guidance; that would become much clearer to them within a few hours. He began by telling them of his imminent departure and how they were to behave during his absence.

Glory – The time had finally arrived for the Son of God to end his period of humiliation at the hands of wicked men and to return to the glory of Heaven, the praise of the assembled multitude, and eternal communion with the Father and Holy Spirit. Yet, while Jesus as God deserves the honour and praise of all creation (Rev 4.11), he did not think selfishly along the lines that we might think—"I have paid my dues, it is my turn to be recognized!" The primary consideration Jesus had was that the Triune God be glorified through:

- *Redemption* – John begins this instructional section by noting that Judas had left the presence of Jesus and the disciples. From the perspective of Satan it appeared that wicked men had gained a victory—the Holy One of God was betrayed to his enemies. But from the Divine perspective the beginning of the end of Satan's domination over men had arrived. On the cross Jesus would reverse the evils that had plagued man and nature since Satan connived with Adam in the Garden to play at being God. God was not humbled or defeated by the death of Jesus but rather glorified as Jesus fulfilled all righteousness and paid the debt of sin (Rom 3.21-26). God's plans were not thwarted by the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus but rather his providential plans to redeem a people were precisely fulfilled.
- *Representation* – Jesus used the title 'Son of Man' to focus attention on the fact that he is the Messiah. He is the anointed one promised

from the very beginning (Gen 3.15) as the means of solving the problem of sin. God is amazingly glorified by working out a means whereby mankind, with an infinite debt of sin, can be reconciled to the holy God—through the work of a mediator, the God-man Jesus who represents both God’s righteous holiness and justice and his loving mercy.

- *Resurrection* – God was glorified in the crucifixion of Jesus but the work of redemption would not be complete until the death that sin introduced into the universe had been conquered. Payment and removal of sin is not sufficient if there is no renovation of the created order; salvation from sin is not enough if there is no salvation through resurrection. Jesus indicates that the Son would be glorified at once. It is likely that he was speaking of the resurrection that would follow shortly after the crucifixion and would declare to the world that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Goal – In a somewhat cryptic manner Jesus tells them that his departure would remove him to a place where they would not be able to see him or to follow him. Jesus could mean by this his sufferings under the weight of Hell. No mere human could have endured the onslaught of Hell’s fury and the infinite pain that Jesus endured on being forsaken by the Father in his death. Jesus then tells Peter (36) that he will follow later. This may be a hint that Peter will follow Jesus into persecution and crucifixion—as later history appears to indicate—and suffer to a degree what his Lord suffered. It seems, however, more likely that Jesus is looking beyond the crucifixion to the final goal—which is residence in the glory of Heaven after the resurrection. With tender concern he assures the disciples that while he may leave the space-time realm, and so not be found with the eye of the body, they would follow him later—he expands on this as he continues his discourse (Jn 14.18-19).

Governance – Just prior to the institution of the New Covenant Supper, the disciples had debated about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus had told them not to think like the pagans who want to dominate others but instead to have the attitude of humble servants before one another. He now tells them what is to be the primary distinguishing

characteristic of the New Covenant Community. In the OT the Israelite community was to be different from those around it—its uniqueness was to be based on a belief in the true God and a respect for his laws, which would result in ethical and social transformation that would be a witness to the nations. The Church, as the new Israel, is to be unique in the same way. The heart of Christianity is to love God and to love our neighbours—this is a summary of the Law (Mt 22.37-40). In this respect the command to love is not new (Lev 19.18). What makes it new, however, is that it is based now on the example of the sacrificial love of Jesus. If we truly love God we will show our love for him through our love for Christ's brothers and sisters. This is not optional, it is Christ's command; it is to be our governing principle until Christ returns.

Grace – Peter does not understand that Jesus is telling them that he is leaving the world, and wants to follow him as he has followed him from Galilee. Peter then claims that he will continue to follow even through death, if required. Jesus, probably with an ironic smile since he knew in advance that Peter would deny him, asks Peter if he would really lay down his life for him; for it is not Peter who will lay down his life (at least not at that time) for Jesus but the converse—Jesus was going to go out the next day to voluntarily give up his life to save *Peter*! This is sacrificial grace! This is servant love!

Prediction of the Denial [November 1]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.31-35; Mk 14.27-31; Lk 22.31-38; Jn 13.38)

There is disagreement about whether the incident recorded in this account occurred in the upper room or on the way to the Mount of Olives. Some have tried to reconcile the accounts by suggesting that Jesus predicted Peter's denial twice. We cannot review the evidence supporting the various views today, so will follow John's placement after the Passover meal. From a synthesis of the Gospel accounts we learn of the following:

Fear – Fear is a strong motivator of the survival instinct in people. So we

must not be hard on the disciples when we hear Jesus informing them that they would fall away (the Greek uses a word from which we get *scandalized*) when he was ‘struck’—arrested, tried, and crucified. They did not yet have an understanding of how salvation was to be procured and of the necessity of the crucifixion. From their perspective, the events over the next eighteen hours were a blow to the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. They felt deserted and defeated. Also, we must not judge them, since we have more understanding of the meaning of these events and of what Jesus has done for us, and yet we are often just as quick to desert our Lord by being ashamed of our Christian profession or by behaviour that is essentially a denial of his lordship. We need to learn from this example of the disciples to be prepared for trials that may come upon us and trust that after his resurrection he went ahead, before us, to Glory. We may be scandalized by him and afraid of men, but he will not forsake us. We may fall, but he will pick us up.

Folly – Peter’s reaction to the prediction of his denial is voiced three times: “I will not fall away,” “I am ready to go with you to prison or death,” “Even if I die, I will not disown you.” Peter is not more boastful or proud than anyone of us. He is just as deluded about his own heart as all men are. Self-deception is the great leveller of us all. We all believe that we are much less sinful than we really are; that we are more lovable, smarter, or skilled than others; and that we have wills of iron to resist the strongest temptation. It is utter folly for any one of us to take an oath, as Peter did, and say ‘never’. It is best for us to see his situation as equivalent to our own and ask God to keep us from temptation (Mt 6.13). May our claim of fidelity never be false!

Faith – Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter for his misplaced self-assurance. Rather, he informs him that the source of his delusion is Hell and that the resources Peter has available to counter Satan’s powers are the faith given to him by the Holy Spirit and the mediating prayer of Jesus. Satan’s demons may challenge our faith also through trials, but God will overrule and separate the wheat from the chaff. True faith can never fail because it is a gift from God (Eph 2.9) and not engendered by our own power. True faith can never fail because the prayers of Jesus uphold us.

Forecast – In spite of this assurance we still all sin. Jesus predicted that Peter would commit the grievous sin of denying him—not once but three times. The three-fold denial of the Lord, while it is what actually happened (as we know from later accounts), is symbolical of completeness. Peter’s defection from Jesus was as bad a sin as any that can be imagined. He always vividly recalled this prediction. Only he reports a specific detail—the crowing of the rooster *twice*—through Mark. This detail shows how much his denial affected him personally. This should serve as both a warning and an encouragement for us. Even the apparently most stalwart of Christians can fall into serious sin. However, no sin—no matter how serious it may seem to us—can be worse than the sin that Peter committed that night. Any Christian who truly repents of his sin, as did Peter, will be restored to fellowship with Jesus.

Furnishings – Jesus then asked the disciples if they had ever lacked anything during their service with him, and he told them to equip themselves with certain items—a purse, bag, and sword. The disciples replied that they had two swords. What Jesus meant by asking them to buy swords (particularly since his Kingdom does not advance by force; Mt 26.52) and his response “that is enough” causes much debate. What he intended to communicate to the disciples seems to be that no matter what the circumstances, they were to be prepared and to trust him that he would provide what was needed at the time. This is a key lesson that we need to learn. We must depend on God to provide what we need, when we need it—essentially, our ‘daily bread’. Many Christians live with the expectation that God will provide for them into eternity but do not have strong enough faith to believe that he can provide what we need, spiritually and materially, in this space-time realm.

Fulfillment – Jesus predicted the specific time when Peter would deny him—at night, when it was normal for people to be sleeping—to reinforce the fact that, as God, he has infallible foreknowledge. The fulfillment of that insight would support his claim to be the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies. The disciples would come to see, in a few

hours, that Isaiah's prediction of the suffering servant, who would be numbered with the transgressors, was not a general statement about God's people but a precise statement of history yet to be realized in Christ. All that Jesus suffered was according to God's plan and provides an assurance that the promise of resurrection and Heaven stand firm!

Prepared Place [November 2]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.1-4)

Troubles and Trust – The disciples had heard a string of discouraging news from Jesus: one of their company was a traitor, they would all fall away, Jesus was going to leave them, Peter would deny him, Jesus was going to die. Without question they needed encouragement. So Jesus' approach is first to acknowledge that there was a challenge to be faced. We cannot deal with our troubles if we deny that they exist or suppress them. Then he encouraged them to have trust. While the form of both parts of his instruction can be either in the indicative mood (i.e., 'you do trust') or imperative (i.e., 'you, trust!'), it appears that he may be giving them a command in both cases: "Trust in God! Trust also in me!" These commands indicate that:

- *God is trustworthy* – God has planned the entire landscape of history and knows the beginning from the end. He knows what he is doing, working all events toward a most glorious conclusion for all of his children.
- *Jesus is God* – Since you trust in the invisible God, you should also trust in the visible God-man. Faith in Jesus is not trusting in something *in addition* to God; it is trusting *in* God.
- *Trust in God is effective* – The most effective antidote to troubles that worry and discourage us is to trust God. When we resign our worries to him, we will see him lift them from our backs.

Jesus does not just leave the disciples, or us, with a simple command to trust, he goes on to provide much more encouragement (through chapters 14-17, in John's Gospel), and in particular he follows his commands with three specific hopeful prospects, which we will now consider.

Prepared Place – This is one of the rare places where Jesus provides

some insight into the nature of Heaven; he speaks more often about the nature of Hell than of Heaven. In this instance, he tells us that Heaven is:

- *Paternal* – It is a father's house. It is not just a cold, sterile hotel with rooms filled with strangers, but a home for all God's family, all of Jesus' brothers and sisters.
- *Pleasant* – It is *the* Father's house where God chooses to dwell, so there cannot be anything unpleasant or evil in it, but only love and joy.
- *Palatial* – In his house are many rooms, indicating that the family of God is vast, because he is saving a multitude (Rev 7.9).
- *Permanent* – It is a house, not a tent like the Tabernacle. Our earthly pilgrimage ends when we reach Heaven and are welcomed home.
- *Place* – Heaven is a real place. It is not a product of dreams or myths. It is not only real as the spiritual realm is real, but it is also real in physical terms since in it live a number of persons with physical bodies (Jesus, Enoch, Elijah, and probably others [Mt 27.52-53]).
- *Promised* – It is a certain reality because it is promised by Jesus on the truthfulness of his word and the genuineness of his love for his people.
- *Prepared* – It is an inheritance (1 Pt 1.4) that Jesus is personally preparing for all true believers. Jesus is not wasting time preparing empty rooms. He knows with absolute certainty who all the elect are and is preparing a perfect place for each one.
- *Partaking* – Jesus is in Heaven, along with the Father, and he is coming to take us to be where he is so that we can share in his victory over sin and the eternal happiness of his reward.

Coming to Collect – Almost 2,000 years have passed since Jesus told the disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them, and that he would return to take them to be with him. We could understand this promise as having been fulfilled in their deaths as they were ushered into Heaven by the holy angels. However, it seems best to understand his words as a promise that he will be physically returning to earth to gather his people—at the great resurrection (1 Thess 4.13-18) when all the bodies of the dead will be reunited with their spirits and those who are

his people will join him in the new heavens and earth (Rev 21.1). Peter tells us that in the last days there will be scoffers who will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pt 3.3-4). We are not to be among those scoffers or doubters but, rather, among those who faithfully wait for the promise of his coming with wakeful expectation. Death is not a terror for us because we know that these things are true, and as Paul says (1 Thess 4.18) we can encourage one another with this promise.

Heaven’s Highway – The mass of mankind misunderstands the nature of religion—true and false—and claims that all religious rites and practices provide a path to Heaven. But everyone knows in his deepest subconscious, if not in his conscious thoughts, that this is not true and that there are not many roads to Heaven, but only one—repentance of sin and belief in Jesus as the payment for our debt of sin. Jesus tells his disciples that not only do they know where he is going—to Heaven—but also that they know that the way is through him—in faith, repentance, love, and obedience. He has been teaching this to them for three years. However, lest there be any confusion on their part about his being the way to the Father he expands on this in the next section of his teaching—which we will consider in our next mediation. In the meantime let us think about the three true prospects that we have considered:

- 1) There is a Heaven which awaits us,
- 2) Jesus is coming to collect us to take us there, and
- 3) We know him as the way to the Father.

Jesus: The Way to the Father [November 3] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.5-11)**

Uncertainty – Jesus told his disciples that they knew where he was going (to Heaven) and the way there (through belief in him). He had been teaching them these fundamental facts for three years. However, they continued to be confused as they were still expecting the establishment of an earthly kingdom with royal pomp and powers—they had all the facts like loose puzzle pieces, they just could not assemble them into a cohesive whole. Thomas expresses their uncertainty and perplexity by asking for directions. He sets a good example for us. There

will be times when we read the Bible and are uncertain about what it says. We are to ask God to make it clearer to us (James 1.5).

Ultimacy – Jesus responded with an almost cryptic explanation—his three-fold declaration. The disciples probably remained just as confused. However, in a few days the fog would dissipate and the light of truth would make very clear the meaning of his words. Jesus said “I am ...”. This is the sixth, of seven, of these declarations recorded in John’s Gospel. He is the:

- *Way* – Jesus is *the* way to God, forgiveness, and salvation. He does not simply point to the way as an abstract belief or doctrine or some ritual practice. He points to himself as the way, the highway (Is 35.8), between man and God—the means of atonement, and the means of restored fellowship. The way to the Father is through faith in Jesus Christ.
- *Truth* – Jesus is the truth from many perspectives. He is truth because he is God, and God cannot lie. Every word that came from his mouth is true, without error or deception. He is the fulfillment of all the prophecies and types of the old ceremonial order, so is the truth, or original, from which the copies were made. He is the ultimate source of all truth about the material universe (e.g., scientific fact) and spiritual realm (e.g., doctrine).
- *Life* – Jesus is the creator of all that is not God (Col 1.16) so is the source of all spirit and physical existence. He is also the source of spiritual life (Rom 6.11), as provided through faith in him. And, he is the source of eternal life (Jn 3.36) that begins with the resurrection of the body to life.

His three-fold assertion emphasises completeness. All that we need to exist and all that we need to live temporally and eternally is provided through Jesus. He is the way to truth and to life—the only true way to God—and he provides the only true life. Life in him is truth and the only way to truly live.

Uniqueness – He is without equal as the way, the truth, and the life and as such is the *only* way to the Father. John, of all the Gospel writers, emphasises the relationship between Jesus as the Son of God and the

Father (he records Jesus' references to the Father over 100 times in his Gospel and more than 50 times in the discourse in the upper room [Jn 13-17]). We must not miss this important point in our pseudo-pluralistic age. Many people today are very confused by religion and claim that there is no essential difference among the 'great' religions—each claims to lead its adherents toward God as a universal father. In reality all religions, except for Christianity, lead mankind to vain imaginations and to Hell. Jews and Moslems do not worship the true God because they reject the Trinity and Jesus as God. Hindus and Buddhists do not profess belief in the true God because their gods are at best nature itself or emanations from the universe. Every cult, including the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, also has a faulty view of God and Jesus and therefore does not lead to the Father. Christianity, through faith in Jesus Christ, is *the* Way (Acts 9.2), and the *only* Way (Acts 4.12; 1 Tim 2.5). This means we are to give no more credence to the false, popular religions today than we would to belief in the Roman or Nordic pantheons. In addition, since faith in Jesus is the only way to the Father, this destroys all of mankind's vain hopes that they can claim Heaven through their 'good' works or religious rituals.

Unity – Jesus goes on to explain why he is the only way the Father. The reason is that to know Jesus is to know the Father. This is not because Jesus and the Father are just modes of some monotheistic entity, but because he and the Father, while two distinct persons, share their essence in the Godhead. Jesus makes the profound and staggering claim that all who have seen him, and know him, know God. He declares that he is God, because he is God!

Unveiling – If you want to know God the Father (as Philip did) you will come to know Jesus—the facts about him, believing him, having a belief in him, and loving him—then you will know God. In Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead. He is the visible representation of the invisible God. He shows what God is like through his loving life and dying mercy. We should not seek to see the Father (who is invisible and dwells in unapproachable light) in some form of theophany, as lightning bolts from Heaven, or through some special signs demanded by us. We have God's

revelation to us, of his person and character, in the living Word, Jesus Christ. That is all we need.

Unconditionality – Jesus gives three witnesses to the reality that he is God: his way—his character is the same as the Father’s since they are coexistent—his words, and his works. We are to believe his word unconditionally. What he says is the truth and no one is to question it. But if for some reason we have doubts about his claims, then we can look to his works, which may include the miracles graciously given as signs to demonstrate that Jesus is sovereign over the creation, life, and death. Believe him and in him!

Powerful Prayer [November 4]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.12-14)

Foundational Faith – What is the condition of your prayer life? Is it lazy or disciplined? Is it just a few repeated formulas before a meal or is a passionate pleading with a friend? Is it effective or useless? Do you wonder sometimes if God hears what you ask for? Before Jesus speaks about prayer specifically, he lays down the essential foundation. With a solemn announcement (“I tell you the truth”) he tells us that faith is the foundation for our doing what he has been doing, and that this faith is expressed through prayer. If our prayers appear to be weak and ineffective it may be that we are praying for the wrong things or for the wrong reasons, but it is equally likely because we don’t fully believe in the infinite power and overflowing love of our Saviour. We have noted previously that true faith is not something we can create in ourselves—it is a gift from God—but once we have it we are to exercise it and make it grow. Faith causes us to pray more faithfully, and faithful prayer causes our faith to grow stronger. We have things backwards: we think that getting what we ask for in prayer is the blessing we need. But in fact it is in faithful asking that we are blessed; as our faith increases we learn to trust God who hears us.

Greater Guaranteed – Jesus guaranteed that prayer founded on faith and, as we will see, the right *kind* of prayer, accomplishes great things—

even greater things than he did. What greater things does he speak of? Some suggest that he is referring to the sign miracles that he performed to validate his Messianic role and they teach that if believers have true faith then they all will be able to perform miracles as Jesus did. Jesus does not, however, single out miracles. He refers to his *work* (10, 11), which would include miracles, but was certainly more than performing miracles. Only a portion of his work over the previous three years included the execution of miraculous acts. The bulk of his work was preaching and teaching, and befriending and caring for those whom he encountered as he travelled from town to town. When we look back over the *work* that evening in the upper room we see his humble act of washing the disciples feet, his lessons on service, and his great concern for the disciples' encouragement as they are about to face troubles. These works are the kind that Jesus has in focus, not the performance of spectacular acts of cooling fevers or manipulating nature. We are impressed by miracles, but what Jesus is expecting from us is the greatest miracle of all, being the proximate cause by which God raises the spiritually dead and brings about a transformation of sinners into saints. He says that the reason that this will be possible is because he is going to the Father. His departure completed the work of salvation, declared victory over Satan, and provided the impetus for sending the empowering Holy Spirit. We see the impact of his resurrection to Glory, for example, at Pentecost when Peter preached a single sermon and 3,000 were converted. Miracles like this have continued throughout the centuries as hundreds of thousands have come to believe in Christ through the preaching of men like Calvin, Whitfield, and Spurgeon. Jesus reached a few tens of thousands during his three years of preaching. His faithful servants, since he left, have probably brought into his kingdom over a billion people!

Causative Condition – Jesus adds two conditions that tell us what kind of prayer will be effective in accomplishing the amazing work of filling Heaven. The first, which he repeats twice, is that true prayer is to be offered in his name. We know that Jesus does not mean a half-hearted or rushed utterance of the word 'Jesus'. His name is not a magic wand that will make piles of gold appear on our table or remove the wrinkles from

under our eyes. To use the name of Jesus rightly means that we know him personally (his nature, his character, his wishes) and that we care passionately about the things that will please him. The first petition of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples asks that God's name be hallowed (revered, or treated as holy). Any request that we make that is selfish or vain does not treat the name of Jesus as holy and has no place in our prayer. When we pray let us remember that our name has no standing in Heaven. It is only in the name of Jesus that we stand!

Priority Purpose – The second condition is that our prayers must ask for that which will bring glory to the Father. When God is glorified, that means that we are humbled and put in our place as sinful creatures dependent on his mercy. What is it that brings the most glory to God? It is when his people live in loving service, lead many into the Kingdom, and worship him joyfully and properly. Our prayers then must be focused on furthering these objectives—that we and all his people may give him honour through our service and that all mankind can experience his love through salvation.

Humble Honour – We have the greatest privilege ever offered to anyone. Jesus says that we can ask him personally, or the Father, for anything and he will do it—he will do more than just ask the Father, he himself will act! But you say “I have been asking for the salvation of my husband, friend, son, etc. for twenty years and it hasn't happened! Why not? I am not asking for myself and it would bring great joy in Heaven if he were saved.” Or you say, “I have asked God to remove an impediment so that I can serve him with more power. But I still limp through life.” Are both conditions being completely met? Jesus himself prayed in the garden to have the cup removed, but only if that was the Father's will. True prayer seeks God's glory, humbly rests in God's will, and waits patiently for all to be revealed in God's time.

Love's Obedience [November 5]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.15-24)

Commands – In this section Jesus repeats, three times, his point that

anyone who loves him keeps his commands (15, 21, 23). What does he mean by ‘commands’? Most readers of this section might think he is speaking of the instruction he had given his disciples during the past three years, for example the *Sermon on the Mount*. Many interpreters claim that Jesus’ teachings are a new law for the Christian Church that replaces the OT law. These interpreters sadly deceive their audiences as they ignore what Jesus says in the *Sermon*. He is not bringing a new law, but showing how comprehensive God’s Law really is. In addition, both Jesus (Mt 5.17-19) and Paul (2 Tim 3.16, 17) tell us that the OT laws must be obeyed. The Ten Commandments, as a summary of God’s Law, are the standard for all nations today in the same way as God expected them to be the standard for the nations around ancient Israel (Is 51.4; Is 60.3). This, of course, does *not* mean that the detailed implementation, or form, of every OT law remains in effect (e.g., levirate marriage, particular holiness laws, and particular ceremonial observances). While the outward forms of observance of many of the OT laws have changed since the resurrection of Jesus, the principles underlying all the laws have not changed. God continues to desire to have a people in his Kingdom who will be obedient to the fundamental principles codified in his Law.

Cause – Many people who claim to be Christians react antagonistically to the suggestion that our standard for behaviour is the same as that for the OT saints. Why do they dislike God’s Law so much? They want to have Jesus as their saviour, but do not want him as Lord over their lives. They are happy to be saved *from* sin but are not thrilled about being purged *of* sin. Jesus tells us the problem is at root that we love the results of salvation (escape from Hell and a promise of Heaven) but we don’t love the person who makes salvation possible. Our motivation for obedience must be because we love Jesus. If we really know and love Jesus we will have a growing desire to do what pleases him—obeying what he commands throughout his entire book of revelation.

Counsellor – It is not a natural desire of mankind to want to love and obey God. Our natures, steeped in sin from the days of Adam, want to usurp God’s rightful place. Jesus knows that it is hard for us to love him and obey his law so he offers means to assist us. One means is the Holy

Spirit who provides:

- *Catechism* – He teaches the truth about God and our sinful situation.
- *Clarity* – He illumines the word so we understand how to apply it to life.
- *Conscience* – He dwells in us to help us discern right from wrong.
- *Counsel* – He guides us in the way of a loving obedience.

Coming – Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “another counsellor”. By this he implies that he is their (and our) first counsellor. But, as he has been teaching, he must depart for a time. So he promises that he will return to them soon. The return of which he speaks probably does not refer to his eschatological coming at the end of time, but rather to his return in his resurrection. He came back from the dead to give them counsel and comfort before he ascended to Glory. He is living now, teaching us through his complete word—the Bible—and acting on our behalf in Heaven. He is not visibly present, so the world does not see him. But we, through the eye of faith, continue to see him.

Cohabitation – Jesus says that there is also a third person who will help his people in the way of love’s obedience—the Father. We have the Father living in us because we have the Son and the Spirit dwelling in us. Have you paused to think how deep and amazing a thing it is that the entire Godhead, or Trinity, is present with and in each believer? God lives *in* you, not just above or around you. We truly do have an Emmanuel—God with us. We have life that is more than just existence because God breathed into our essence. Our lives have significance and purpose because God endowed us with his image. We know the meaning of love because we have Love flowing through our veins. We have spiritual life because God changed our dead wills and minds from hatred to love. We have eternal life because the risen God lives in us. If you can’t proclaim “Hallelujah!” to these things you are nothing but a cold stone!

Contrast – In response to these amazing revelations Judas (not Iscariot) asked why Jesus did not intend to show himself to the world. When you first read Jesus’ response, you might think that he does not answer the

question. He does, but not directly. He answers by setting up a contrast between the two classes of humanity. In the first part of his answer he speaks of those who love him and obey his teaching. These are the ones to whom God makes himself known by making his home with them. In the second part of his answer he implies that those who do not love him and obey his teaching are the ones to whom he does not make himself known. The world (unbelievers) cannot see or know the Holy Spirit (17); Jesus; or the Father, whose words Jesus proclaims. The reason is that the world lives by the physical senses and consciously believes that the material world is the substance of all reality. Even though all men know in their subconscious that there is one God—God Most High, creator of the universe—they suppress that truth and deny the existence of God, his eternal existence as non-material, his creative power, and his righteous demands. So their spiritual eyes are blind and they cannot see past the veil of space-time into the spirit realm.

The Promised Counsellor [November 6] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.25-27)

Presence – While Jesus was present with the disciples, one of his primary goals was to teach them about his purpose for coming to earth and the true nature of the Kingdom of God. They were to incorporate that teaching into the NT Scriptures and to disseminate it to the world. Jesus reminds them that he will be physically leaving them, but he will not be deserting them. One of the ways he will show his presence with them is through the Holy Spirit.

Paraclete – In our previous mediation we considered a key role of the Holy Spirit—he counsels us to follow in the right way by teaching us the words of Jesus. Jesus again announces that he will send the Holy Spirit as their advocate—this is one of the possible primary meanings of the Greek word *parakletos*, which is translated as ‘counsellor’ or ‘helper’. As an advocate, the Holy Spirit is *called to the side of* Christ’s brothers and sisters to assist and encourage them as they serve Christ. In this role, the Holy Spirit does not force anyone to act against his will, or do the work instead of us. Rather, he works with us so that we are able to make

it through this life and into Glory. Although God wills all that comes to pass, this does not mean that we are mere programmed computers. We are volitional and responsible creatures who, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, *will* to do what pleases God.

Procession – Jesus says in this instance that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples to represent him (in his name). In another place he says that he himself will send the Holy Spirit (Jn 15.26). During the first few centuries of the NT Church, the doctrine of the Trinity, including the way in which the three persons relate to one another, was formulated from Scripture. One doctrine that was settled by the Western Church, but not accepted by the Eastern Church, at the Council of Toledo (Spain, 589 AD), was what is called the double-procession of the Spirit—i.e., from the Father and the Son. This is a personal property of the Holy Spirit and is a comfort for us because we know that the entire Trinity is engaged in enabling our perseverance and in bringing us through this life and, by death, into resurrected glory.

Pedagogy – It may appear that when Jesus says that the HS will be sent to the disciples, this is something entirely new. However, we must understand that the Holy Spirit indwelt God’s people during the OT economy in the same way that he indwells believers today. NT believers do not have a gift that OT believers did not have. OT believers did not come to saving faith in the Messiah in a different way from NT believers—the Holy Spirit was, and is, instrumental in the conversion and preservation of every believer. However, there is a key aspect of the sending of the Holy Spirit that is different since the resurrection of Jesus—we now have a complete revelation from the Holy Spirit who is our teacher. This revelation includes:

- *Trinity* – New insight was given to the disciples about the nature of God. The Holy Spirit is a person (‘he’), not a force or mode of God—not an *it*. This concept would have been revolutionary for Jews who emphasized the oneness of God, and presented a challenge as they came to understand how God could be one, in three persons.
- *Teachings* – He would teach them all things—all that God wants man to know about the role of the Messiah, his plan for redeeming

mankind, the nature of the Kingdom, and how we are to live as citizens of Heaven.

- *Transmission* – He would also provide special knowledge to the disciples so that they would be able to remember all of Jesus' teachings. The purpose was so that they would be able to act as witnesses to what Jesus said and did and transmit that, through the NT Scriptures, to all mankind.
- *Truth* – What the Holy Spirit teaches is entirely consistent with the teachings of Jesus because both speak only truth (Jn 14.6, 17). The Holy Spirit teaches nothing more and nothing less than what Jesus taught. We must dismiss the notion that the Holy Spirit gives private revelations to individuals today that supersede, or add to, Scripture.

The Holy Spirit teaches the Word of God and guides us (not drags us!) so that we learn to apply the truth in every area of our lives.

Peace – The teaching the Holy Spirit gives us can help us overcome fear. The disciples would, naturally, have been afraid when they heard that Jesus was departing. So Jesus assures them that he will leave them with peace. He says that the peace that he gives is not that of the world. The world's idea of peace is, at best, the quest for an enduring absence of conflict. The peace that Jesus gives, through the Holy Spirit, is not dependent on temporal circumstances but consists of a restored relationship with God—there is no longer the threat of eternal damnation hanging over our heads; a calming of the quest for recognition and rewards in this life as we grow in contentment; an increasing joy as we learn more about what our Lord has done, and is doing, for us; and a boundless expectation as we look forward to a restored eternal wholeness.

Principle – Jesus concludes this section of his teaching by laying down a basic principle, as a command. We are not to let our hearts be troubled and we are not to be afraid. This is not optional for believers. Anyone who has the Holy Spirit living in him must trust God and believe that there is nothing in this created order that can separate us from fellowship with God (Rom 8.35-39). We are not to fear mortal man or death itself. God will bring us home!

True Love [November 7]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 14.28-31)

Pouters Warned – What is love? A gooey feeling? A clinging affection? Love is seeking what is truly good, and best, for another person. True love is not getting our wants but wanting to give. We can picture the disciples, after having heard Jesus’ teaching, pushing out their lower lips, making sullen faces, and saying “Why do you have to leave us?” Jesus didn’t want pouty children; he wanted strong men who would go boldly into the world to face desperate evil in the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of worrying about what was to happen in his absence they should have had, by this point, the maturity to rejoice with him as he was about to claim his Kingdom and prepare a place for them. A practical application for us is that when our believing parents or spouses leave for Glory we are not to slouch and sag in self-pity but to praise God that they have gone on before us to their great reward.

Poverty’s Way – Jesus tells the disciples that they should stop thinking about their own feelings, by a reference to his own example. He had left the glories and riches of Heaven, where he was adored and worshiped by angels and saints, and had voluntarily come to earth into humble circumstances—being born in a stable, growing up in obscurity, having nowhere to call home, and living on handouts. In this humiliation, as a man, he became subject to the Father and to his will. In his statement “the Father is greater than I” Jesus is not denying his deity or disavowing his equality with God (Jn 10.30; Phil 2.6). Rather, he is showing the disciples the extent that true love is willing to go for those it loves—putting aside all personal desires for the good of others.

Prophetic Word – Jesus goes on to display the extent of his love for them by explaining why he was taking time to help them understand what was going to happen. He is concerned that the disciples are going to be devastated by the events that will transpire over the next few days. So he reminds them that his being able to speak prophetically of coming events

demonstrates that none of the things that would happen to him was a surprise or a sign of defeat. The fulfillment of prophecy should encourage belief. We have the prophetic word of Jesus in sixty-six books. As we see how God has ordered his providences with great precision we also should believe and trust him—he knows what he is doing and all that he does is good!

Prince of this World – The specific event that would precipitate their temporary separation was the coming of “the prince of this world.” Jesus here refers to Satan who had possession of Judas and would shortly use him to lead the vigilantes to the garden to arrest Jesus. Why does Jesus give this title to Satan? It may be that Jesus gives a hint to the disciples that his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18.36). Satan has possession of this world, in its current form, and many of its inhabitants. However the world will be redeemed by Christ and handed over to the Father as a prize of victory (1 Cor 15.24).

Priestly Work – It is difficult for us to comprehend how clueless Satan was about the true situation. As the hour of the crucifixion was drawing near he must have been chuckling with a perverse glee thinking that he would gain ultimate control over the world of men. If he had really understood what was going on he would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2.8). The fact was that the way of the cross lead to Satan’s destruction because, as Jesus indicates, Satan had no hold on him. There was nothing that Satan could pin on Jesus—no giving in to temptation, no weakness, no regrets, no sin, and no guilt. So the cross, instead of bringing about the end of God’s plan for saving men from the clutches of Satan, would be the very means of securing the redemption of a vast multitude. Jesus could have, from one perspective, banished Satan to Hell forever and left mankind to wallow in eternal misery. But because of his love for his people, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice so that his merits could be applied to the sin-debt of his people and God’s justice could be satisfied. Those who are in Jesus are eternally secure and Satan has no hold on them either. This is true love!

Proving to the World – Why did Jesus go through infinite suffering?

Yes, because he loved us. But there is an even more important reason—because he loved the Father and showed his love through obedience. Jesus tells us that the greatest command is to love God first, and the second command is to love our neighbour. Jesus loved the Father and that love was exhibited by a careful and exact adherence to the will of the Father—to God’s commands. It is ironic that so many today, even in the Church, claim that a strict adherence to God’s Law is legalism. Legalism tries to keep the law to earn merit with God, but keeping the law is not legalism! Keeping the law is *how* we can show that we love God (Jn 14.15). True love keeps God’s commands—even to death.

Preparing to Withdraw – On equating obedience with love, Jesus was ready to lay down his life to demonstrate the degree of his love for the Father and for his elect. So he told the disciples to get ready to leave and to accompany him as he went out to complete his mission. The disciples would have risen from the table, put aside the remains of the Passover meal, collected their bags, and put on their cloaks to head into a night that would be darker and colder than any they had ever experienced. While they were preparing to leave, as we will see, Jesus used every moment to continue their instruction.

The Vine and the Branches [November 8] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 15.1-8)

Relationships – As the fellowship of the Passover was ending, Jesus used the afterglow of a harmonious meal as an opportunity to instruct the disciples on the nature of true relationships—to himself (1-8), to one another (9-17), and to the world (18-25). God is a relational being with relationships among the equal persons of the Trinity, each of whom has different functions and roles through which he interacts with the others. Similarly, mankind, created in the image of God is a relational being—first with two complementary genders, each with different functions and roles; and, second, manifested by his need for companionship and fellowship (Gen 2.18). Jesus uses this final of his seven “I am” statements recorded by John, in the form of a parable, to declare himself to be the true vine. The Father is the gardener who cultivates and cares

for the vine and the disciples (true believers, the Church), who are in relationship with him, are the branches growing from the stalk of the vine. In the OT economy, Israel was often portrayed as a vine, selected by God, and cared for by him.²⁰ God wanted Israel to produce the kind of fruit a vine in a well-tended vineyard produces. Instead, Israel, because of idolatry and degeneracy, produced no fruit or, even worse, only rotten fruit. Ironically, the vine had become a symbol for Israel—a vine with a cluster of grapes was embossed on some of the coins minted for the Maccabees and a gold-leaf vine decorated the doorway to the temple built by Herod. Jesus may have been thinking of the vine on the temple as he was speaking. Whereas Israel was a faithless and fruitless vine, Jesus is the True Vine who produces the kind of life-sustaining fruit that pleases the Father. Also, while the man-made temple had only a gilded vine, Jesus is the living vine *and* the living temple.

Remaining – No branch can bear fruit by itself, since it does not have access to the life-sustaining nutrients that are provided by the root and the stem. Likewise, in order for Christians to be fruitful, they must remain in Jesus. For us to *remain* in Jesus means that we have his life-blood (as administered by the Holy Spirit) flowing through us and sustaining us (Jn 6.54, 56); continue to persevere in belief (Jn 8.31, 32); and have his word (7) in us to direct our lives, which is equivalent to saying that we keep his commands. A key means of strengthening our relationship with Jesus is through prayer (7). When we are filled with the life of Jesus, we will reproduce that life. Without Jesus living in us, we are nothing more than pieces of dried wood.

Removal – Any, and every, branch that does not bear fruit is cut off from the vine, by the gardener (vinedresser), and thrown away. We must not interpret this to mean that a true believer can lose his salvation; this would contradict what Jesus himself taught (Jn 10.27-30). The branches that are cut off are from two sub-classes of unbelieving mankind:

- 1) *Untrue Confessors* – These are people who have made a profession of faith in Jesus that is only outward and not the result of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and truly converted. They have not

²⁰ Ps 80.1-19; Is 5.1-7; Jer 2.21; Jer 6.9; Ezk 15.1-8; Ezk 17:5-10; Ezk 19.10-14; Hosea 10.1.

remained in Jesus. These are similar to the seeds that fell among the rocks in Jesus' parable (Mt 13.3-8), that sprang up but did not endure under the scorching heat. Judas Iscariot is an example of this class. He pretended to believe that Jesus was the Messiah for three years, but did not really believe in Jesus. Jesus may have had him specifically in mind when he referred to the dead branches that were cut off.

- 2) *Unfaithful Covenanters* – These are people who are born into the Church and have had the sign of the covenant placed upon them (circumcision in the OT economy, and baptism in the NT economy) but who, as they grow up, do not make a true profession of faith. This would have included many in the nation of Israel, and in particular the Pharisees.

These branches are cut out of Christ and his Church because they are lifeless and worthless. They are left to be picked up and thrown into the fire to be burned. Jesus is here intimating that their destiny is the burning fires of Hell.

Results – In contrast, the living branches are organically connected to Jesus, who is the stalk and roots, from whom they obtain continual sustenance. Christians are not independent entities who live in isolation from God or fellow believers. Rather, they are in constant communion with God through prayer, in the name of Jesus; and through reading his Word, guided by the Holy Spirit. In addition, Christians are connected to one another through their union with the Vine. All true believers, regardless of their denominational affiliation, are part of the Vine and are alive because they remain in Christ, and so they bear fruit. Not only do they bear some fruit, but they bear *much* fruit because of the tender love and care the Father shows for these branches, by pruning them. This brings pain in the short term but purifies us and makes us more valuable to the Father. Some of the pruning that we endure comes in the form of trials to strengthen our faith and discipline to purge us of our tendency to sin. The *much-fruit* that we bear takes many forms, including: obeying the commands of Jesus, showing the world through our word and witness that we are his disciples, growing in holiness, and displaying the attributes of the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5.22). When we produce this kind of fruit God is given the honour and glory through us. As branches in the Vine, we have many privileges but also many responsibilities.

Love Each Other [November 9]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 15.9-17)

Compassion – People who are antagonistic toward God—the only true God, revealed in the Bible—often express hatred and anger in words such as “It isn’t fair!” or “Why would a loving God do *that*?” They claim that it is unfair for God to punish particular sinners (e.g., a hypothetical native in the jungle who has never heard of Christ or a particular loved-one who lived a ‘good’ life). They also state that a loving and all powerful God should not permit the evil he has to punish, or that he should not condemn people to Hell. We cannot consider here the logical inconsistency of someone crying foul over an apparently unfair act who in turn denies the reality of an absolute standard, or the demonstrably invalid arguments presented by people who attempt to trap God in a dilemma as he works out his sovereignty in love and justice. God knew that people would raise these arguments, and places the charge of injustice where it belongs—on sinners. Instead, we note that Jesus provides the best counter argument to all claims that God is unfair or unloving—the love he shows for mankind is an outworking of his love within the Trinity, and the love he has shown for us in his death is the chief example of compassion that can ever be displayed. No one can honestly claim that God is not love since Jesus died for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5.8).

Commands – The essence of love is obedience. Jesus demonstrated his love for the Father by obeying the Father’s commands. If we claim to love Jesus, then we will also demonstrate our love by keeping his commands. It is short of amazing how many professing Christians show that they have little interest in keeping God’s commands—whether by pursuing selfish interests on the Lord’s Day, marrying unbelievers, divorcing covenant partners, fornicating like dogs, or introducing human

inventions into the worship of God. If you claim Jesus as your friend, then you will want to do what pleases him.

Community – Jesus leaves the disciples with a specific summary command that is *the* definitive standard for both the representative pattern displayed by him and the required precept delivered by him—to love each other. Love within the community of faith is not optional; it is a duty shown by caring for those with restricted temporal provisions (Jam 1.27), teaching (2 Tim 4.2; Titus 2.3), encouraging (1 Thess 5.11), visiting (Mt 25.36), offering hospitality (1 Pt 4.9), forgiving (Col 3.13), and praying (Jam 5.16). We cannot be saved *by* our works of love, but we also cannot be saved *without* works of love. As we care for each other we give evidence of being in Christ.

Completeness – After laying down the command that the disciples of God are to love each other, Jesus gives three reasons to strengthen his exhortation. The first is that when we show our love for God by loving the brothers and sisters of Christ, our joy is made complete. The world thinks that happiness comes from licence and licentiousness, without realizing that, ironically, they are slaves to sin and Satan. They think that the life of a Christian is a dull, constrained, and cheerless existence. Some Christians may live that way, but only because they are half-hearted about their faith, love, and obedience. They struggle with trying to serve two masters, hoping for the best from each, but end up with only the worst of both. And, anyone who has not put his faith in Jesus is really the one with the dark, fearful existence that ends in despair. The unbeliever ekes out a few years of pleasure before decay, pain, and the fear of death overwhelm him without hope for eternity (Eph 2.12). Christians alone live expectantly, with purpose, as they serve God. Christians alone have joy in the truly abundant life (Jn 10.10) that comes from having the guilt of sin lifted from their backs and the prospect of soon being purified of the remnants of all sin. Christians alone have hope for eternity.

Chosen – The second reason for Christians to love each other is that we have been chosen by Christ. Normally students sought Rabbis who were

reported to be the holiest or best teachers and asked them to be their tutors. In contrast, Jesus called the eleven, and he calls us, to be his disciples. Do not let this go to your head! Our pride makes us think that the initiative is ours and that we ‘decided for Jesus’. Our vanity lets us believe that it was because of our talents and gifts that Jesus needed us to advance his cause. Oh how quickly we forget that election is all of grace. If it were not for the love and mercy of God we would still be lying in a moral gutter and in the vomit of our sin.

Calling – The third reason that we are to love each other is that we have received a calling from Jesus—out of the world into a new kingdom in which we are given new roles. Jesus no longer called the disciples slaves, but rather friends. Slaves cannot be partakers of kingdom decisions and are not sent to represent the king as ambassadors. Friends are viewed as near-peers of the king and given roles of royal status. All Christians are viewed by God as even more than friends; they are sons of the King, as princes, with promised inheritances in the Kingdom (Rom 8.17; Gal 4.7; 1 Pt 2.9). Slaves are told to act without being given a reason; friends and sons are brought into the king’s counsel and given explanations for his decisions. So Jesus made known to the disciples everything he had learned from the Father. We also are given knowledge about the Father’s will, purposes, and plans for mankind through our communication with him in prayer and through his revealed will in the Bible. With this knowledge we are appointed and equipped to go into the world to bear fruit by witnessing to what Jesus has done for us, and in us.

The World Hates Christians Because it Hates Christ

[November 10]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 15.18-25)

Root – there are regular news items in the conservative media that speak of violence against Christians in the Middle East, South East Asia, or Africa. We also hear of forms of intolerance against Christians in the West, when their church buildings are bombed, they lose their jobs or are fined because they spoke against homosexual practices or abortion, wore a cross, or had a Bible in their workplace. Jesus warned the disciples, the

foundation stones of the NT Church, that persecution is inevitable for those who are his people. The contrast which Jesus speaks about, between the Church and the world, is clear—believers are to be known for displaying love for Christ, each other, and strangers; but the world is known for its hatred of Christ and his people. The root cause of the world's hatred for Christians is its hatred of Christ.

Reason – There are a number of secondary reasons why the world hates Christians. Jesus identifies two at this point (19), where he mentions the 'world' five times (in the Greek and some English translations), to emphasize the contrast between Satan's kingdom and God's Kingdom:

- 1) *Community* – Unbelievers as a class of mankind have no true community since that can only be found in a cohesiveness centered on, and sustained by, Jesus. Christians, as part of the Church belong to a community that the world cannot understand. They are different from the world because they no longer follow the sinful ways of the world (Rom 12.2; 1 Pt 4.4).
- 2) *Chosen* – All the members of the Church have been personally chosen by Christ. It is for them that he died, and it is they who are given joy and hope as they await their reception into Glory to be with Jesus for eternity.

The world hates the exclusiveness of the Church. Their pride will not let them humbly receive the gift of membership from Jesus and they view Christians as being uppity and condemning because of their difference from the world.

Relationship – Jesus reminded the disciples of what he had said, earlier that evening, when he had told them that a servant is not greater than his master (Jn 13.16). In that instance he was encouraging them to imitate his humble service. Now he strengthens their resolve to identify with him in suffering.

Resistance – The world hates Christians because we take the name of Christ as our new surname as we join his family. As the Anointed (*christos*) of God, Jesus has a mission assigned to him by the Father. The world has no interest in his mission or in his person because it does not

know God, and chooses not to know God—suppressing their innate knowledge of him. A third reason that the world hates us is because we align our lives with Jesus and thus with God.

Rebellion – If Jesus had not come to the world and communicated his word (through the prophets and apostles) men would have been guilty of *only* all the sins that they innately know are wrong and yet commit (Rom 1.32). But, since he has communicated his oneness with the Father, men who reject Jesus as God and the Messiah are now doubly guilty (Acts 17.30-31). Jesus puts to rest all claims that God isn't fair when he judges and punishes men who have not heard about him. Those who have never heard the Gospel are condemned for breaking the Ten Commandments. Those who have heard of Jesus and rejected him are condemned for disobedience and contempt.

Reduction – Anyone who hates Jesus hates God the Father as well. In this statement of truth, Jesus makes the emphatic and astounding claim to be God. We must understand the significance of this in our purportedly pluralistic age. All other religions reject the fact that Jesus is God. Therefore, their claims to be seeking for God or of knowing God cannot be true. Reduced to the basics, if a religion rejects Jesus as God, its definition of God is false and the entire religion is built on a foundation of lies. The 'politically correct' politicians of the Western nations tinker with whether we should allow mosques with minarets, women to appear in public in *burqas*, or Sikhs to wear turbans instead of Stetsons as part of police uniforms. But they miss the reality that they are doing the equivalent of a man washing his kitchen floor while the fires of Hell are burning down his house.

Rejection – Jesus speaks of having performed his miracles (Gk: 'works') among the Jews, who then rejected him. This made them triply guilty of sin—first for breaking the Law, second for denying that he was the Messiah, and third for rejecting the signs that gave evidence of his being God's messenger. The same charge can be laid at the feet of all men who see the miraculous in the created realm—particularly as God creates life in the womb and sustains it. When men attribute to chance and

evolutionary processes the work of God's hands, they display their hatred for both Jesus who created all things (Col 1.16-17) and for the Father who commissioned the creation.

Revelation – Men really do love darkness rather than light. And so, for all their claimed intelligence they are really stupid. It is irrational to hate the God who created you and who sustains you. And, it is unreasonable to hate the God who provides the only means of escape from sin and Hell. But this has been the situation since Adam and Eve showed their malcontent at being subordinate creatures in the midst of manifold blessings. Thus, Jesus says that the prophetic word proclaims truth—they hated him without reason.

Testimony to Christ [November 11]

(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 15.26-27)

Spirit of Truth – For the third time, in his words after the Passover meal, Jesus tells the disciples that the Counsellor will be sent to them from himself and the Father. In this instance he provides additional information about the Holy Spirit. In particular he teaches that he is the Spirit of Truth and that he is sent to testify about Jesus. Previously Jesus declared himself to be truth (Jn 14.6). Here he aligns the Holy Spirit with truth, and teaches that the Father is the source of truth (26). The Bible does not explicitly say that “God is truth”, the way it says that “God is love” (1 Jn 4.8). However, since all three persons in the Trinity are truth personified, we can confidently state that God *is* truth. A key objective of the Holy Spirit's ministry among men is to:

- *Deliver truth* – The Holy Spirit reveals truth into the realm of spiritual and temporal falsehood. God's truth is all truth, whether in the domains of logic and mathematics, philosophy and science, theology and history, or economics and government. Many people today, within or outside of the Church, seem to think that we live in a bicameral universe with God ruling in the spiritual world, and man and his ideas and opinions ruling in the physical universe. They like to claim that there are two types of truth, one kind is relevant in the unseen world and is derived from our groping after God, and the

other is derived from science and governs our thinking in the physical world. This is one of the biggest lies that man has ever concocted. Truth is *truth*, period! All truth is derived from God alone. Mathematics works only because it is a revelation of God's mind. Scientific facts are facts only when they are consistent with how God created and governs the physical universe. It is the same in every domain of knowledge. And, ultimately the Bible, through which the Holy Spirit delivers truth (2 Pt 1.21), is the final authority for *all* truth. We must dismiss the silly and dangerous claim that the Bible is only relevant for the life of faith. What the Bible says in all domains of knowledge, including theology, history, and science, must be accepted before the supposed knowledge of men.

- *Defend truth* – In the face of the world's infidelity and love affair with lies the Holy Spirit defends truth. He instils in believers an understanding of truth that helps them to see the inconsistencies and falsehoods that permeate all human systems of thought. He also causes human systems to self-destruct under the weight of their irrationality. We are seeing this today as secularized educational systems become increasingly ineffective and as the modern myths of evolution and anthropogenic global warming collapse under the weight of their fabrications.

Sent Testifier – As the Spirit of truth, there is one area in particular that the Spirit has a uniquely assigned responsibility—that is to testify about Jesus. There are no aspirations of vainglory among the persons of the Trinity. The Son set his focus on pleasing and honouring the Father, and the Holy Spirit delights in nothing more than seeing Jesus loved and praised. The Spirit's desire is that men would not bring attention to himself but, rather, that they would bow before Jesus as King of kings (Phil 2.10, 11). His means of testifying to Jesus as the God-man are varied (Heb 1.1), however, they fall into a number of classes of revelation:

- 1) *Innate* – All men know in their 'gut' that there is a God, that he has laws against sin, and that they are accountable before him.
- 2) *Creation* – The heavens declare the glory of God and his presence.

- 3) *Scripture* – The Bible is God’s explicit means of presenting Jesus to men.
- 4) *Personal* – He works in our hearts to turn us from sin to Jesus.

Student Teachers – God has chosen to use intermediate instruments to work out his redemptive plan. He created mankind with a purpose—to share in his fellowship and to honour him by ruling over the rest of the created realm. Even though mankind rejected this mandate and tried to steal God’s throne from under him, God still delights in having men as his co-workers as he saves people from the very mess that they have made. It is true that ultimately the work of salvation is all of God—planned by the Father, worked out by the Son on the cross, and applied by the Spirit in the conversion of sinners. And, from one perspective God could have simply designated his elect and directly changed them from sinners into saints. Yet he has determined not to work that way and instead chose to assign a role for man in this work. God uses his people in every generation as the channels through which he communicates the good news that there is salvation from sin. This is why Jesus says to the disciples, and all the Church, “You must testify”. In the case of the disciples, they had been with Jesus from the beginning of his public life and they would be the initial instruments of expanding the scope of his ministry from Judea to the edges of the Roman Empire. Also, as eyewitnesses, they would be responsible for ensuring that the teachings of Jesus would be faithfully recorded in the *Annals of Christ*—the Gospels. The mission of the Church continues today, and all disciples of Christ must testify. This means that even in the face of opposition we are to engage with the persecuting world in various ways—through evangelism, preaching, performing works of service, or teaching new converts and the next generation. We should not live in ‘Christian’ ghettos in an attempt to disengage from the world, much like many of the monks of the Middle Ages tried to do. While Jesus’ words are a command, they are also a statement of fact. Not only must the Church testify, but it does. This is a great encouragement for us. The work of expanding the Kingdom of God is not thwarted by those who are anti-Christ.

Pending Persecution [November 12]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 16.1-4)

Jesus had just told his disciples that they would be hated because of his name (Jn 15.18-25). Now he expands on this prophecy by telling them about some of the forms by which this hatred will be displayed, and his reason for letting them know in advance of the pending persecution.

Dismissal – One form that persecution will take is expulsion from believers' former communities. The synagogues which expelled Christians in the days of the Apostles were not composed of believers in the Messiah or they would not have excommunicated their family members and friends. Today, this form of persecution continues when members of other religions drive out of their communities anyone who converts to Christianity. The adherents of Islam are particularly notorious in their treatment of those whom they consider to be apostate. Even within the organized Church this form of persecution can be observed. For example, many of the clergy in the Church of England would not permit George Whitfield to preach in their buildings because they despised both his doctrine and his evangelistic techniques. We also see current examples when denominations leave their historic principles and effectively drive out those who desire to remain faithful.

Destruction – A more pernicious form of persecution is the execution of those who are professing believers in Jesus. Persecution unto death began with the first NT Church martyr, Stephen (Acts 7.59), and a number of the Apostles at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the Romans. The Romans continued to torture and murder Christians until the time of Constantine. During the Middle Ages, Islam became a persecuting force throughout North Africa, the Levant, and Asia Minor. Then the Church hierarchy, with the complicity of the state, became a fearful engine of destruction targeting the Waldensians, Hussites, Lutherans, Huguenots, and Covenanters. Jesus declares that those who pursue this course of destruction of Christians will claim that they are offering a service to God. Paul certainly believed this to be a fact before he was converted (Phil 3.6) and the Inquisition operated under the

pretence of keeping the Church ‘pure’. Today, Islamic Jihadists claim that they are performing God’s work when they kill ‘infidels’.

Definitive – Persecution is inevitable. So it is definite that it will come upon the Church in every generation. Jesus told the disciples as much when he said that the hating world would do “such things” (expulsion and murder). He had also taught, three years earlier, that persecution would come, in various forms, upon believers (Mt 5.10, 11). The Apostles also teach that persecution is to be expected by those who live a godly life (2 Tim 3.12; 1 Pt 2.20, 21). We must therefore not be surprised by persecution when it comes upon us, but rather be prepared for it by maintaining a strong relationship with Jesus.

Darkness – The reason that the world persecutes Christians is, at root, quite simple—they do not know God, out of the darkness of their sin. Jesus makes it clear that the only definition of God that counts is the one that includes the Trinity. Anyone who does not know Jesus does not know the Father (and *vice versa*), because the two are united in the Godhead. Men do not know Jesus as God, or God’s will, not because they are ignorant of truth—all men know the righteous demands of God—but because they choose to repress the innate knowledge that they have and to ignore the Gospel when they hear it. They do not want to accept the truth about the true God because they do not want to be held accountable for their evil actions, do not want to bow down before Jesus, and do not want to acknowledge that they need him as their Redeemer.

Defence – Jesus was preparing the disciples to face a future in which he was no longer going to be physically present. He wanted them to know in advance what was coming so that they would not be surprised; since preparation is a good form of defence, or as the idiom says: ‘forewarned is forearmed’. Since the Church always suffers persecution we also need to know what is coming and how to face it. However, since there is a fine balance between knowing enough and too much, Jesus gives us general guidance about the coming persecution without causing us to worry about the specifics; just as we know we will die, but are generally not told specifically how we will die because we would have a tendency to

fret about it. So consider what he says about:

- *Remaining* – One reason for providing the information about persecution is so that we will remain faithful and not stray from him and from the path leading to Heaven. If persecution came upon us without preparation, we might be tempted to be offended by the cross of Christ and to defect.
- *Remembrance* – With the general principle in place, when the actuality arises, we will remember what Jesus has taught and recognize that his foreknowledge of these eventualities proves the faithfulness of his word in all areas and increase our confidence in him. We can trust him when he says, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” (Dt 31.6)
- *Removal* – While Jesus was physically present with the disciples, the world’s hatred was directed primarily at him and he was able to deflect the animosity and teach the disciples, by example, how to handle it. With his pending departure, he wanted to ensure that they would understand that his support would still be available through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit—the Counsellor or Comforter (Jn 14.16, 26; Jn 15.26).

The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit [November 13] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 16.5-11)**

Grief Response – Have you ever been in a situation where you were sharing with a friend the details of a troubling situation (e.g., a cancer diagnosis) and had the feeling that the person wasn’t listening but, instead, was only thinking about a petty concern like a rescheduled hair appointment. This is similar to the situation in which Jesus found himself. He was trying to get the disciples to understand the seriousness of his pending departure, and all they could think about was their own problem—they were worrying only about how lonely they thought they were going to be if Jesus left them. They didn’t even show enough interest in the matters that concerned Jesus to ask him where he was going. Do not look askance at the disciples; we are all just as selfish!

Good Reasons – Jesus didn’t let the fact that they were so selfish abate

his love for them, and continued to show them that he had their best interests in mind. It would be for their good that he went away since his departure would result in the completion of the most important work any man has ever performed—the atonement for sin and the vicarious procurement of eternal salvation. It was only upon the completion of Jesus' mission to earth that the Holy Spirit would be poured out with extraordinary power on believers, and the Gospel proclaimed widely beyond the boundaries of the Jewish people to the world. With the disciples, we are the blessed recipients of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Like them, we need to learn that it is not the physical presence of Jesus that we need now, but his ongoing reigning and governing in Glory. Likewise, it is inappropriate for us to cling to the shadows of rituals that have been superseded by the new order that was instituted through his perfect sacrifice. We should now worship, in spirit and truth, the person who transforms all things through the power of a completed reality.

Guilt Revealed – The work of the Holy Spirit is not only to convert and convince, but to convict. He works effectually in the hearts of those who are Christ's elect to make them willing to repent and look only to Jesus for their hope. He also works in the minds of unbelievers, who remain in their hatred against Jesus and the Father, by exposing the guilt of their degeneracy. He turns their anti-Christian scorn on their own heads. In their supercilious attitude they despise believers in Jesus as fools. But the Spirit brings an indictment on them and condemns them to an endless torment in the inescapable prison of Hell. Jesus expands on the manner by which the Spirit reveals the world's guilt in three areas:

Grace Rejected – First, the Holy Spirit convicts the world for not believing in Jesus. Jesus speaks of an unpardonable sin; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Lk 12.10), but he says that even blasphemy against himself can be forgiven. Paul was a blasphemer against Christ (1 Tim 1.13) and yet found forgiveness. Many others, who in the past have used the name of Jesus as a punctuation mark or flippant curse, today cherish his name as the name that is above every name. It is not committing specific sins that sends a man to Hell; it is continuing a life

of sin without repentance. Even if a person could avoid committing every specific breach of the Ten Commandments, under his own power, that would not be sufficient to procure salvation, if one particular sin remained un-repented—the sin of unbelief (Jn 3.18-21). This is the primary reason that all religions except Biblical Christianity are false. Every other religion makes salvation dependent on something a person does (knocking on doors, handing out literature, crawling up the twenty-eight steps of the *Scala Santa*, or wrapping his body with a bomb-belt) but rejects Jesus as the God-man (fully God, and truly man) and the one who shed his blood to pay the debt of sin. The ultimate reason that men do not believe in Jesus is that they believe too much in themselves. They really think they are without sin (maybe a few faults or quirks; but no sin!) and that they don't need someone else to stand in their place through a prefect life and a perfect sacrifice.

God's Righteousness – Second, the Holy Spirit convicts the world for rejecting Jesus as *the* Righteous One. The Jewish leaders handed him over to die the cursed death of the unrighteous (Acts 3.14; Gal 3.13), and the Romans crucified him as a criminal. They are guilty as charged. But so is everyone who classes Jesus as simply a good man or teacher. If Jesus is not received as the only man who has ever lived without any sin, then he is rejected. Jesus is either the righteous redeemer or a perverse liar, since he said that no one could convict him of sin (Jn 8.46). But a liar he most certainly is not! The resurrection vindicated Jesus to be the Holy One of God.

Grievous Recompense – Third, the Holy Spirit convicts the world for its alignment with Satan. He is called here, the 'prince of this world', since the world is temporarily under his dominion (Jn 14.30) and everyone in his kingdom delights in his attempts to pull down Heaven's gates. Men not only do evil, but they delight in doing evil and encourage others to do the same. But with at the resurrection of Jesus, Satan would be crushed and condemned to the pit for eternity, and all those who persist in rejecting Jesus will be thrown into the pit with him. Men claim that they cannot see God and the coming judgement. They hide behind every conceivable excuse. However, in the darkest moments of their existence

when pains and death are strangling them, they know that that they stand condemned before the most holy God.

The Communicating Work of the Holy Spirit [November 14] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 16.12-15)

Totality – Jesus had told the disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit as the one who convicts the world for not believing in him, for rejecting him as *the* Righteous One, and for its alignment with Satan. However, he does not continue to teach them about the world’s evil reaction to himself since it could cause them to become discouraged. He turns from considering the Holy Spirit’s work of convicting the world to his work of communicating to believers. Jesus was the master instructor and during his three-year teaching ministry he used the same basic principle of progressive revelation that the Spirit used for revealing truth in Scripture. Jesus knew when his pupils were ready to learn advanced concepts, how to introduce radically new ideas, how to make a message memorable, and when to change the subject so as not to overwhelm the learners. Teachers and preachers today need to apply the techniques of Jesus and learn to say only what needs to be said on a particular subject in a given situation, and no more. Great teachers do not exhaust or overwhelm their audiences but use a balance of content, pacing of delivery, and a variety of techniques, as they present the totality of their material.

Truth – Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit’s approach to progressively revealing truth when he says that he would *guide* the disciples into all truth. Once Jesus was no longer with them, the disciples did not stop learning about God’s redemptive plan. Rather, after the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit guided them to a fuller understanding of the deity of Jesus, the meaning of the cross, and how Christians are to live before the watching world. As they read their Bibles (the OT Scriptures) their understanding was opened to the new vistas of fulfilled prophecy in Christ and how Jesus truly was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. The Holy Spirit is like a master mechanic who can assemble the parts of a complex engine in the proper sequence. He works in individual hearts and minds in a careful way, teaching truths as we

need them and when we are ready to receive them. Here is another lesson for teachers and preachers. They are to be guides, following the Spirit's model. Guides do not force feed their charges. Rather, they lead by example and explain points of interest that help direct ones' course.

Transference – For the third time, during his after-dinner discourse, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14.17; Jn 15.26; Jn 16.13). We have already seen that all three persons of the Trinity are associated with truth, since God is truth. We have also noted that a particular role of the Spirit is to deliver and defend truth and that, since he communicates truth, his teaching is entirely consistent with the teaching of Jesus. The Spirit teaches nothing more and nothing less than what Jesus taught. It is this latter point that Jesus now reinforces. Jesus makes an incredible claim when he says that the Spirit "will bring glory to me." In this he claims that God, the Holy Spirit, glorifies him. If it is not true, then Jesus should be dismissed immediately as a perverse liar and evil megalomaniac. But it is true, because Jesus is God, co-equal in every aspect with the Father and the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is not to draw attention to himself but to lead unbelievers to see Jesus as the God-man and to honour and respect him. The Spirit also does not speak his own words, but only the words of Jesus. He glorifies Jesus by transferring the words of Jesus, spoken in eternity-past, to believers to guide them as they follow Jesus.

Teaching – The Holy Spirit ensured that the account of Jesus' teaching and works was incorporated into the Gospels faithfully by the disciples who were the eyewitnesses of all that Jesus did (Jn 14.26). But he did more than simply help the disciples recall the events in the life of Jesus—he guided them into 'all truth'. He enabled them to see beyond the specific events and understand their deeper meaning so that they could instruct us. The remainder of the New Testament is the outworking of this assistance of the Holy Spirit. He guided Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James and Jude as they wrote their epistles to the dispersed Church so that their instructions, theological insights, and prophecies would complete the word that Jesus wished to leave with mankind as his witness to truth. There are many 'scholars' today who

attempt to create a divide between the OT and the NT and between the words of Christ and the teachings of the Apostles. The Bible, in its entirety, is the word of Christ, and the Holy Spirit enabled the human authors to write only what Jesus wanted communicated. The search for an ‘historical Jesus’ behind the ‘apostolic accretions,’ is bogus. The claim that Paul, for example, confuses the simple message of Jesus by complex ideas, or that he doesn’t teach the same thing as Jesus, is total nonsense. The Holy Spirit ensures that one clear message is communicated in the revelation of the Word—Jesus is Lord!

Trinity – There is no division of purpose or motivation in the Trinity. Each person in the Godhead is fully interdependent with the other two persons and shares harmoniously in working out their common mission—to save a vast multitude from mankind. What belongs to the Father belongs also to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit does not have a separate initiative or message from the other two. His work is to make known to mankind only what they all have determined to reveal—mankind’s origin and purpose, his deathly separation from God by sin, the means of restoring the severed relationship between God and man, and the expectant hope given to those who are looking forward to the renovation of the created order when our Lord returns.

Grief Will Turn into Joy [November 15]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 16.16-24)

Confusion – What does Jesus mean when he tells the disciples that shortly they will *not* see him and then they *will* see him? Even from our perspective, after the completion of the Gospels, it is not simple to determine exactly what he means. No wonder, then, that it was unclear to the disciples who were still confused about the nature of the Messianic Kingdom and expecting some form of earthly principality. We should not therefore be hard on the disciples, and think that they were simpletons who couldn’t understand truth that was clearly presented. Jesus’ statement remains puzzling to this day. He is likely speaking most immediately of his death and resurrection. In a short while (about 15 hours) he would be dead, and also in a short while (about 2 days) he

would return from the grave. We might wonder why Jesus didn't just tell them straight out, "I am going to be crucified tomorrow and early on first day of the week I will come back to life." However, he does not use this cryptic approach to hide truth. Nor is it that he could not tell them the plain facts. He had already told them that he was to be crucified and rise again on the third day (Lk 18.32-33). It seems that he uses this veiled message to communicate a deeper truth. It may be that he had multiple departures and multiple returns in mind—not only the crucifixion and the resurrection, but also his ascension, and coming (through the Holy Spirit) on the Day of Pentecost or at the destruction of Jerusalem, or even at the end of this age. If a 'multiple fulfillment' is underlying this statement, then his words to the disciples are also an encouraging message for us. In absolute terms (i.e., compared with timeless eternity) his second coming is only a short time off. In a little while we will see him. The departure of Jesus is not final, he will return and we can look forward to it with expectant hope.

Contrast – Jesus knew that his words were confusing, but he didn't offer to give the disciples an explanation, since he knew that within a couple of days they would have more knowledge of his purpose for coming to earth and over time, under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, they would gain understanding. Rather, he presented a solemn contrast between their pending unhappiness at his departure and the world's rejoicing at his death. Satan had tried for about 4,000 years to eliminate the lineage of Seth, through Abraham and David, to the Christ. At one point he cheered when it looked as if Abraham would not produce an heir, at another time he used Athaliah in an attempt to wipe out the promised line (2 Ki 11.1-3), and another time he used Herod as his hired assassin to kill the baby Messiah. God overruled Satan's plans and Jesus came to the crucial point where he would have to face ultimate suffering and rejection. The hour of the cross drew near and Satan and his henchmen, the Jewish leaders, were certain they had defeated this up-start, self-proclaimed, Rabbi, from Hicksville. In their actions and attitude they represent all men who have not had their stony hearts crushed by the converting work of the Spirit and had living hearts implanted in the new soil. Today, people still rejoice when Christ and his people suffer. However, as they danced a

little jig for joy at the pending demise of redemptive hope, they had no idea that God was about to turn events upside down. Within hours the disciples' mourning would turn to joy as they met again with their risen and glorified Lord. The momentary happiness of the world would be turned into fear and loathing as they realized that their hatred of Christ would suck them into the eternal pit.

Change – Jesus uses a parable—of a woman giving birth—to illustrate his statement that their grief would be turned into joy. The parable does not teach that there will be no pain for Christ's disciples—the message of the Gospel is not health and wealth in this age. The woman in the parable experienced real anguish as she delivered her baby. However, once her baby had arrived, she quickly forgot about the pain and rejoiced to have a child. So it is often for Christians. They may experience real grief in many forms—serious illness, concerns for unsaved relatives, financial difficulties because they refused to compromise obedience to God's law, ridicule for their faith, or persecution for the Gospel. These things come because of the general consequences of sin and also because of the world's specific hatred of our Lord. For the disciples, their immediate grief was compounded as they saw him arrested, tried and crucified. But what had caused their grief became a source of joy as they met with Jesus after the resurrection, and came to see how necessary it was for Jesus to fulfil all the righteous requirements of the Law, including receiving the punishment of death. We also may, at times, be able to reflect on painful events and see how God used them for his glory and our good—as Joseph must have marvelled as he saw what came out of his brothers' mistreatment of him. Beyond our reflections now, when we reach Glory, we will see every painful event in our lives from God's perspective and be amazed at how he used the events to build our faith and to work out his redemptive plans.

Clarity – Jesus concludes this lesson by teaching the disciples that prayer is the means by which our experiences of grief are turned to joy. He teaches them that they are to pray to the Father, in Jesus' name—with the implied message being that only what is agreeable to the will of God can be requested in his name. We are not to conclude that prayer in

Jesus' name is like a magic bottle with a genie who fulfils all our wildest wishes. Rather, Jesus teaches that when we ask the Father to help us understand his will for our lives, he will provide clarity and turn our grief into joy. Prayer transforms grief to joy.

Overcoming a Clear and Present Danger [November 16]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 16.25-33)

Figurative Language – Why did Jesus teach with parables and figures of speech? As a master teacher he knew how best to deliver a message. At times he used figurative language to mark the division between those whose minds were enlightened by the Spirit and those who were slaves of Satan. More often, however, he used this technique to present truth in a memorable way and to reveal deeper truths which could have an immediate application in the disciples' current context, and also ongoing application to future generations. During this after-dinner discourse he had used a number of images to deliver his message: washing feet, likening the kingdom to a vine with branches, and the parable of a woman in labour pains. He knew that the disciples were confused by what he had just told them—about seeing, and not seeing, him (Jn 16.16)—so he tells them that he now will speak plainly about his Father.

Father's Love – There are two things, in particular, he wanted them to know about the Father. The first was that his Father was now *their* Father. Because of their faith in Jesus and love for him, they had been accepted into God's household as sons. For the disciples, this meant that they could now appeal directly to the Father, in the name of Jesus, without having Jesus voice their petitions on their behalf. All believers in Jesus have this special relationship with God the Father and have direct access to him (Rom 5.2) through prayer. We are individually and personally loved by the Father because Jesus has turned away God's wrath against our sin. We can also approach him with confidence in prayer knowing that he delights in showing love to his children.

Finished Labour – The second thing Jesus wanted the disciples to know about the Father was that he had come from the Father (i.e., from the

glories of Heaven) and was going to return to him. In a few words Jesus summarizes his mission to this world as: *Heaven to Earth, and back again*. He speaks of his incarnation (taking on a human nature and becoming a man) in the words ‘I came from ...’ His humiliation and suffering by mistreatment and death are implied in the words, ‘I entered the world.’ His exaltation, through the resurrection and ascension, are referenced in the words ‘leaving and going back to the Father.’ He loads into a single sentence the great message that Heaven has a plan to redeem mankind and it is accomplished through Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2.6-11.

Faith’s Limits – The disciples seem to understand him, and affirm their faith in him. However, they do not say that they understand all things but that they see that he knows all things. They can see clearly from what he says that he has knowledge that transcends their knowledge. Recognizing his omniscience (“you know all things”) they have no other option than to acknowledge that he came from God. However, their faith yet has its limits. They did believe that he was the Messiah and that he is God. But they still were not yet willing to place their entire trust in him—to bring them through all the trials of this life; through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and into eternity.

Forsaken Lord – Jesus questions the totality of their faith, if not its sincerity, and predicts their behaviour over the next few hours as evidence of where their trust-level currently stands. They could not see their own limitations, but he knew their minds and hearts better than they knew themselves. Thus, he told them that they would desert him and be scattered to the places where they lived and worked before they followed him as disciples. In fulfillment of the OT prophesy (Mt 26.56; Zech 13.7), what he said in the upper room was realized. In spite of knowing how the disciples would react in the moment of crisis, Jesus was tender and loving with them and he took solace from the fact that he knew that ultimately God the Father would not forsake him or his sheep—the disciples would return and through the power of the Holy Spirit would become a means of turning the world upside down. We are warned by this solemn prediction. We think we are mighty men and woman of God

who, if faced with tough challenges, will make a stand for Christ. I cannot know the state of your heart, but beware lest you fall! (1 Cor 10.12)

Final Lesson – Jesus concludes this last session of their instruction before the crucifixion with a message of encouragement. The lessons of the evening were given to them so that they might have peace when troubles would come their way. Jesus wants all of his disciples to be courageous when they face temptations and trials from his enemies in the spiritual or temporal realms. The foundation of our courage is not our own strength. He has just told us that we are likely to waver as the disciples did, if we depend on our own abilities. Rather, the power to face every kind of problem is based on one ultimate reality—Jesus has overcome the world. The peace that we have in Christ during this life is not necessarily, and rarely, physical comfort—as we all will face physical infirmities, illness, the untimely death of loved ones, financial challenges, doubts, temptations, or persecution from enemies of the Gospel. The peace of which Jesus speaks is, rather, peace with God through a restored relationship and a peace of mind from knowing that all that comes our way is in the will of God and that Jesus is working out all events as the sovereign over the universe. Take comfort in Jesus’ victory over the world of devilish passions and evil actions. Take comfort from knowing that Jesus left the upper room to go to the cross, not as a victim but as a conqueror.

Jesus Prays for Glory [November 17] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 17.1-5)**

Concluding Gaze – When and how we pray affects how we live; how we live affects how and when we pray. Jesus was in constant communion with the Father because he lived in conscious awareness of God’s near presence and of his assigned duties. The Apostle Paul instructs us to pray continually (1 Thess 5.17); and like Jesus we should be constantly aware that we are walking in the presence of God and that our duty is to obey and serve him. So, Jesus, living in this reality, ended the after-dinner instruction with prayer. His prayer is full of hope and glory: for himself

(1-5), for his disciples (6-19), and for all believers (20-24). In the opening petition we find:

- *Reverence* – Jesus looked toward Heaven. God is everywhere, yet he has declared himself to be the God of Heaven. Raising our eyes and gazing toward Heaven, or bowing our faces to the ground, are means whereby we make our posture reflect our attitude. In contrast, it would be unseemly to rap out a prayer under pulsing strobe lights.
- *Relationship* – He opens with an appeal to his family relationship, just as he taught his disciples, and us, to pray: “Our Father ...” (Mt 6.9).
- *Recognition* – Jesus knew that the time had finally arrived for him to fight the definitive battle between Heaven and Hell, and that he had done what he could to instruct the disciples before his departure. He now had an appointment with death to purchase redemption.
- *Request* – His opening request is that God may be glorified—through the Son to the Father. He is asking that God’s name be made holy (hallowed) by covering the curse of the cross with a gown of glory.

Christ’s Grant – While Christ is the gift of God to mankind (Jn 3.16), the elect are God’s gift to Christ. The father has given the Church—a multitude of worshipping believers—to the Son as a great gift of love and as a reward for his labours. The Father has also granted the Son authority to procure and provide eternal life for his people—all the elect; all believers. As Jesus looks ahead a few hours to his death, his focus is not on the requirement—pain and suffering—but on the result—eternal life for us. Even while praying for grace to complete his work his love overflows to the glory of God and to our good.

Comprehending God – In the next statement Jesus defines eternal life as a relationship of knowledge. There are many today, whether Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Jehovah Witnesses, or Mormons who claim to know God. In fact they do not know God. They know of a god of their own imagination. It is not a politically correct thing to say today, but all religions do not seek after God (Ps 53.1-3). Knowing the true God the true way, must include knowing Jesus as the God-man, and knowing God as a Trinity. However, it is not the facts about the nature of God that

Jesus is focused on. We could know the precise facts about the person of God, as Satan does and as his legions of demons do, and not *know* God. Jesus uses a term that is often used for sexual intimacy (Gen 4.1; Mt 1.25). If we know Jesus in a personal, loving relationship, then we know God in a saving way and we have eternal life *now*—not just endless existence, but being with Jesus forever and being blessed with his blessings. It is not our parentage, works of mercy, observance of religious rituals, or strict discipline to avoid sin that bring us into eternal life; it is loving Jesus, as our friend who saves us from our sin. It is that simple! This, at root, is where Christianity differs from *all* other religions. Christianity is a love-affair with Jesus. All other religions hate and deny Jesus—they are anti-Christ.

Completed Grace – In his conversation with the Father, which is voiced for the benefit of the disciples, Jesus refers to the glory that he has brought to the Father through the assigned work that he *has* completed. What work does he have in mind? Certainly he includes healing and teaching crowds throughout Palestine and the training of the disciples, which he had just completed. This work brought glory to God because it revealed him more clearly (through the God-man) and showed his power over the physical and demonic forces. However, Jesus is likely speaking primarily of his sacrifice on the cross (Heb 9.24-28; Heb 10.11-18). It is true that he had not yet completed that work; it was still about twelve to fifteen hours away. But, from the eternal and infinite perspective of the Godhead there was no doubt that the task Jesus had taken on himself—to atone for the sins of his people—would be completed. From our perspective the cross is ugly, bloody, and blackened with sin. From God’s perspective it is glorious and shining with the light of his grace—herein is true love: Christ died for sinners. It is the finished work of Christ on the cross (Jn 19.30) that is of ultimate importance for our eternal security. And, it is this work of Jesus that Satan tries to hide with his lies from lost mankind.

Consummate Glory – The life of Jesus on earth was glorious (Jn 1.14), his works of ministry were glorious, the cross was glorious, and the resurrection and ascension were glorious. But all of these earned glories

do not compare with the glory that Jesus, as God, has in his person. He speaks of this glory as that which he shared with the Father before the world began—i.e., eternally. He had laid aside his preincarnate glory to take on the role of a servant and to humbly carry out the work of redemption. He asks that this glory be restored to him. And so it was (Phil 2.9-11)! Now, with both his divine and human natures—in a physical, though glorious, human body—Jesus rules in Heaven as Lord of lords and King of kings. His redeeming work really is finished.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples' Preservation [November 18] **(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 17.6-12)**

Possession – The disciples were the possession of the Father as his creatures, and by virtue of being members of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Thus, as their Lord, God the Father had the authority to give the disciples to whomever he wished—in this case to the Son. God is the owner and master of all mankind and has the ultimate right to determine the eternal disposition of each one of us. In reflecting on this truth in his prayer, Jesus presents a fundamental doctrine, which is called predestination (Rom 8.29-30; Eph 1.5, 11), that God determines the destiny—Heaven or Hell—of each person. Predestination includes two related doctrines which are implied in Jesus' statement, "whom you gave me out of the world":

- 1) *Unconditional Election* – The disciples were chosen and called by God's free will (Rom 9.11; Eph 1.4-5, 11); not based on their own merits or their desire to become disciples.
- 2) *Irresistible Grace* – The disciples' wills were conformed to the will of God and they became followers of Jesus (Jn 6.37).

These two doctrines are part of a set of five, which are often called the *Doctrines of Grace*, which were identified from the Bible as a response to the false beliefs held by the followers of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who taught theology at Leiden. As we will see, the other three doctrines are also included in this portion of Jesus' prayer for his disciples.

Provision – Jesus provided the disciples and us, through them, the truth that must be known and believed by anyone who would be part of his

Kingdom. In his prayer he refers to a particular truth he revealed—‘your name’. In biblical thought the name of a person reflects his nature. To reveal a person’s name is to reveal him and his character. So Jesus had used the personal name of God—‘I AM,’ from the Hebrew *YHWH*, and rendered as Jehovah or LORD in our translations. He applied this holy name to himself in his seven ‘I am’ statements and when comparing himself to Abraham (Jn 8.58). Jesus revealed, gradually over time and not in a burst of blazing glory, the gracious nature of God the Father by his teaching and miracles. Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col 1.15). Thus the disciples came to accept the truth that Jesus is the Lord sent from Heaven and to believe in him.

Particularity – Jesus tells the Father that he is not praying for the world. He does not mean that he is excluding Gentile believers. He was sent to save the *world* (Jn 3.16; i.e., people from every nation, not just Jews) and desires that all people would believe (Jn 17.21). He is, rather, expressing the truth that his death would save the elect, making secure their salvation—this truth is called *particular atonement*. While we should be eternally thankful that Jesus died for us, we should also reflect soberly on the situation of those who are passed by, for whom Jesus did not die and does not offer prayers of mediation. It should remind us that we are reprobates who are no more worthy of salvation.

Presence – Jesus then voices a concern in his prayer. Because he would be in Heaven, and no longer be present with the disciples, his desire and will is that the disciples would still know the presence of God—by implication through the Holy Spirit whom he told them previously that he would send to them.

Protection – His particular requests are that the disciples would be given protection through God’s name—through his power—and united as one, like the Godhead. Christian unity is important since we are part of the family of God. Believers are not to be isolated or to disassociate from other believers for inconsequential reasons. However, in the context of his prayer, Jesus is not actually dealing with organizational unity. The reason Jesus is asking the father to protect the disciples is because they

are his; and valuable to him. He asks that they would be, or remain as, one. His desire is that not one of them would be lost (like Judas, the ‘son of destruction’). We need God’s protection because we remain weak without it. Only his protection can keep the Church whole. There is also another dimension to the relationship between protection and oneness. We need each other for protection. One of the means that God has chosen for protecting his people is the Church. Through the Church we find fellowship, the communion sacrament, teaching, encouragement, discipline, and mutual care. All of these are means of protecting believers from the attacks of Satan and the corruption of the world.

Perseverance – We all have to die at some point, but God’s plan may be to take some of us home early, from our perspective. God’s purposes may also require that we suffer persecutions for the sake of the Gospel. Therefore, the protection Jesus speaks of is not essentially temporal, but eternal. He asks the Father to safely bring his people through life and death, and into eternity. The gift of believers from the Father to the Son is sure, forever. This idea is often called the *perseverance of the saints*, and is a great assurance of hope for our glory—what God begins he completes! Jesus sets up a contrast between those he wishes the Father to preserve and Judas. Jesus did not ask for Judas to be kept safe, since he had not been converted. He is not an example of a believer who was stolen from God’s grace. Rather he was an unbeliever who pretended to love Jesus. He is an example of what the *total depravity* of the human nature does. He was doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled (Ps 109.4-13) and so that God’s justice might be made glorious.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples’ Happiness [November 19] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 17.13-19)

Satisfaction – What is, likely, the one thing that everyone on earth wants? It is to be happy. The US *Declaration of Independence* opens with these words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Without doubt, we all want to be happy. Most people believe

that the route to happiness is through material possessions or pleasures. In contrast, true happiness, or joy—the two are essentially synonyms; either can be used to translate the Greek *chara*—is much deeper than a feeling of pleasure. True happiness is being in a state of well-being, contentment, or satisfaction with all aspects of our existence. This is the state Jesus was in throughout his earthly life, and in particular during his last hours before facing the cross. He knew clearly what his mission was, that he had completed it by saving all his elect, and that he had pleased the Father immeasurably. While, at times, he was acquainted with sadness, his overriding spirit was one of joy. There was nothing gloomy or despondent about him. Even when some of his disciples left in unbelief or betrayed or denied him, or when he encountered the death of a friend or faced his own death, his pervading joy could not be diminished. People who came to Jesus would have found him only full of hope, at all times. And, he wants to share his full and satisfying joy with us! How can we have his joy? The remainder of his prayer for the disciples provides the source of real happiness.

Separation – The foundation of real happiness is separation—being set apart from the world. This starts when we are re-born into a new world—one in which God is *our* spiritual and eternal Father. This rebirth comes from our having received the word of Jesus as the truth. Our eyes are opened and we see that this world cannot be our home, the baubles and trinkets of the world are vapour and dust, the world's values are rubbish (Phil 3.8), and the pleasures of this world are faint tickles compared with the substantial mass of life in the new dimension. Once we have this understanding of reality we are hated by the world because we have an alien nature, hold to a different value system, and expose the world's devious and dangerous devices. Even hatred by the world confirms that we are from another realm, since sinful human nature is bigoted against anything foreign and truly counter-cultural.

Safety – A second aspect of happiness is to know that we are being kept in safety. Thus, Jesus asks for protection for his disciples. God does provide physical safety for his people (Ps 121.1-8). We see many examples of this in the Bible, including provisions for the Israelites

during 40 years in the desert, shutting the lions' mouths to save Daniel, and saving Paul from a shipwreck. However, while physical protection is included in his petition, it is not what Jesus primarily has in mind. He is more concerned about spiritual and ethical safety—protection from the temptation to sin. Often believers think that if they can escape from the world by hiding in cloisters, limiting associations to only other Christians, or by sending their children to 'Christian' institutions, they can provide protection. They forget that sin accompanies us wherever we go, because it is in our hearts. Thus, while we are in this world, we need to be protected from the evil one by the Father.

Sanctification – The third aspect of happiness mentioned in his prayer would be a surprise to the world, but it should not surprise us. Jesus asks the Father to sanctify (make holy) his disciples. The world would consider this the last thing imaginable for happiness. They would claim that we Christian prudes are just putting a damper on their fun. The irony is that the more the world indulges in its wanton fun, the less happy it becomes. The pleasures of sin last only for a moment and then evil consequences follow. The miser hording bags of gold becomes suspicious and envious, the fornicator ends up loveless and mortally ill, the power broker retires hated and insecure, and the narcissist decays into sagging flab. Sanctification is an event and a process. First, we are sanctified (set apart) when we trust Jesus as our Saviour and become part of his Church. His holy life and perfect death are applied to us (19) and we are declared holy. We are then progressively sanctified (made holy) as we apply the word of truth (17). Knowing the word of truth brings us happiness because we come to understand the requirements of God for our lives. Again, this is counterintuitive to the world. The world thinks that happiness is having no restrictions and boundaries. In reality we are most happy when we know what God expects of us and we do what pleases him.

Sending – Finally, true happiness comes from having a mission. Mankind, as an image-bearer of God, needs to know that he has a purpose for his existence or he feels that he is of no more value than a large rock blocking the highway of life. A lack of a sense of meaning in

life is a common cause of depression and suicide. Man's primary purpose is to serve God. When we are converted we begin to understand that this means giving up our self-serving attitudes and actions and replacing them with service of others for the sake of God. In particular, when our service for God is directed at bringing the Kingdom to the world, we become energized. There is nothing more exciting than seeing someone saved from Hell. Thus Jesus speaks to the Father of his having sent the disciples into the world. By implication he is asking the Father to give each of us a clear vision of our purpose and mission as we serve him.

Jesus Prays for All Believers [November 20]
(Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Jn 17.20-26)

Whole – Jesus has just completed praying for his own glory and for the disciples' preservation and happiness. However, we must not think that the latter petitions applied only to the disciples. He says that his prayer (all of it) is not for the disciples alone (20). However, he now adds petitions identified specifically to be for the whole Church—believers in every generation. The focus of this section is on the Church's unity and glory. A common interpretation of his request for unity is that the various organizations that make up the visible Church today should be united into a single body. Thus, verse 21 is often appealed to by those leading various forms of union and ecumenism. Without question, divisions in the institutional Church are a reproach to Christ; particularly when they are the result of pride, selfishness, and stubbornness, which are often the cause of fractures. However, Jesus is not praying for an institutional unity that is based on woolly beliefs and compromised principles—two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3.3). The fact is, every true believer is already united with Christ (see his teaching on the vine earlier in his discourse in the upper room). Jesus is not specifically asking the Father to facilitate Church unification activities in the 21st century. Rather, he is asking that the Father *maintain* the unity of the Church. First, his desire is that all professed believers would remain in the unity of one *Spirit*—that not one of those for whom he would die would be lost (Jn 17.12). Second, his desire is that all true believers will remain in the spiritual unity of one *spirit* (or attitude) which transcends

temporal organizations, being animated by love (Jn 17.26) and obedience (Jn 17.17).

Wonder – What does Jesus mean when he says that he has given us the glory he has from the Father? Is this a subjective or an objective glory? Looking at a definition of *glory* does not help to clarify the meaning. In the OT, the root of the word (*chabod*) translated ‘glory’ meant weight. In the NT, the word *doxa* meant primarily splendour. We find synonyms used for glory such as radiance, eminence, grandeur, praise, honour, and repute. Jesus may leave the specific meaning of glory open so that it can apply in number of ways. We have his glory in that we marvel at the work he has done on our behalf on the cross and we see him now lifted up in majesty, interceding for us. But, there is also another aspect. The wonder of the Gospel is not just that we see the glory of God, but that we actually become glorious ourselves. Jesus says that he is in us. Through our covenant relationship with Jesus, and as his brothers and sisters, the whole Church (Rev 21.9-11) shares in the glory that is God’s!

Witness – Jesus’ desire is that as the Church is brought to a complete unity in love, the entire world might see it and believe in God’s:

- *Mission* – The Father sent his Son to earth to save sinners.
- *Motive* – The Father loves the Church as intimately as he loves his Son.

Jesus displays the Divine compassion for the entire world that is currently lost in sin and does not know the Father (25). God takes no pleasure in seeing sinners rebel against him or in punishing them (Ezk 18.32). We will not at this time address the apparent conundrums that are often suggested, such as God’s power must be limited if his desire to save *all* men is thwarted by their unbelief; or that God should save all men regardless of their attitude toward Jesus, if he really desires that the world be saved. God’s love and mercy and his justice and judgment are without reproach (Gen 18.25). Rather, we will accept without question that Jesus wishes the Church to be a glorious witness to his love, through Christians’ love for one another. When we strive to obey God in every area of life and put aside jealousy and discord, particularly in the Church, the world notices it. Christian love has an evangelistic purpose.

Welcome – Our translations present Jesus as *desiring* that all the elect might be with him in Glory (24). It would be better to translate his statement, not as a request, but as a statement of fact: “I *will* that those you have given to me be where I am.” He gives his *Last Will and Testament*, and states what action is to be taken with his inheritance. In this he provides assurance of our being welcomed into Heaven, through:

- 1) His *Award* – We have been eternally elected and given to the Son by the Father as an irrevocable gift
- 2) His *Authority* – He states emphatically that his people will be with him. He can say this because he has paid the price for our debt of sin.
- 3) His *Acceptance* – He was loved by the Father from before the creation of the world and the Father gives to the son what he asks.
- 4) His *Action* – He is continually mediating on our behalf, as in this prayer.

Believers in Jesus will be with Jesus in Heaven and see his glory. Not only will we behold his glory, but we will share in it (Col 3.4). There is absolute certainty in this. Fellowship with the Godhead will be ours.

Wisdom – How do we come, experientially, to know this truth? Through his word. But knowledge alone is not sufficient; it can lead to pride instead of humility and love. Many people know facts about God and his redemptive plan but do not believe in Jesus. Jesus makes himself intimately known to us through the Holy Spirit, who takes the knowledge we have about Jesus and applies it to our hearts. This is saving wisdom—knowledge in the head applied to the heart, and love in the heart that makes us want to know more. Be wise! Know Jesus in your intellect and teach your heart to love him; love Jesus with all your heart and learn to know him as your Saviour.

The Hallel Hymn of Hope [November 21] (Jerusalem, in the upper room, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.30; Mk 14.26)

Music is important in most cultures. In ours, kids have headsets growing out of their ears and popular singers have a huge following which treats them as if they were royalty. There is something built into our nature that

yearns for music. Without question, music is a gift from God. Sadly much of what our culture listens to is junk, has an explicit anti-Christian message, or presents a non-Christian world view, particularly regarding sexual ethics. The Church has been infected by the culture and has absorbed its norms into its religious songs rather than being counter cultural. In this meditation we will consider what hymn Jesus sang, why he sang it, and what significance it has for us.

Hallel – What hymn did Jesus and his disciples sing? We must not be confused by the word *hymn* used in our translations. When the word hymn came into English from the Greek it was applied primarily to the Psalms. It has only been in the past few hundred years that the word hymn has come to mean a different class of religious songs from the Psalms. Almost without exception commentators believe that they sang a portion of the *Hallel* Psalms (113-118). These Psalms were traditionally sung during the Passover. It is believed that the second part of the *Hallel* (115-118) was sung with the 4th cup, which was probably the cup that Jesus blessed in the institution of the New Covenant Supper. We can imagine them singing Psalm 116.12-14 referring to the cup of salvation, the cup he used to symbolize his suffering and blood. The words that follow (17-19) are a profession that God will watch over his Holy One as he goes through the trials of Gethsemane and Golgotha. Jesus, the suffering servant, went to the cross to fulfill vows that were made in eternity-past in the eternal covenant. We can leave the upper room and walk with Jesus on his way to Gethsemane around midnight with the words of Psalm 116.12-14 on our lips, and forever praise and thank our Saviour.

Hymn – Why did they sing a hymn (Psalm)? To worship God. But why did they use this means rather than another such as offering a sacrifice, burning incense or playing instruments? To answer this we need to understand the use of *singing* in the context of worship. In the OT economy singing, along with musical instruments, accompanied the offering of animal sacrifices (2 Chron 29.27-28). By moving the singing of the *Hallel* from after the Passover meal, to after the New Covenant Supper, Jesus teaches that the ordinance of Psalm singing is to continue

under the New Covenant and that the fruit of our lips, in Psalms, is the spiritual equivalent of offering burnt sacrifices (Heb 13.15):

- *Way* – We should follow the example of Jesus who often quoted from the Psalms and sang them as he was going to his greatest trial.
- *Word* – The Psalms speak of Jesus (Lk 24.44). They are quoted in the NT more than any other OT book since they speak of his humiliation, priesthood, suffering, kingship, and exaltation. We sing the Psalms to learn about the work of Christ.
- *Wisdom* – When we sing the Psalms they bless and counsel us as they did Paul and Silas at midnight in a prison in Philippi (Acts 16.25). They offer a message of salvation and comfort. Athanasius says that the Psalter “possesses ... this marvel of its own—namely, that it contains even the emotions of each soul ... these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul.” (*Letter to Marcellinus*)
- *Worship* – We sing the Psalms because they please God. They are words breathed out by the Holy Spirit and therefore perfect sacrifices of praise. When we sing them we unite with the Church in history and with Jesus in the upper room, in reverent worship that pleases God (Heb 12.28).
- *Witness* – Paul, in Romans 15.9. quotes Psalm 18.49 showing that the Psalms have missionary motive. They present man’s sin, God’s glory, God as king and judge of all the earth, and the salvation he provides. There is nothing better for evangelism than singing the Psalms.

Hope – The *Hallel* is full of hope. We have already noted the application of Psalm 116.12-19 directly to Jesus’ own situation. Other portions of the *Hallel* apply also to the coming events. For example 116 (4, 7-9) speaks of his body being assigned to the grave but his soul being delivered from death, and of the resurrection. Similarly, the *Hallel* speaks of Jesus being punished for us but not remaining dead (Ps 118.17-18) and as the gate of righteousness (19-20). The Jews thought of the gates as leading to Jerusalem. We can now see that Jesus is the gate “*to* [Hebrew] the LORD”. He is the way opened to Heaven. The Jews misapplied the

Psalm (22-23) to their nation as rejected in the captivity and then restored. Jesus gives it its proper meaning in himself. Jesus, who was rejected by the Jews, was now to become the stone to cap the work of salvation. From Jewish reckoning they were already in the evening of new day. Before that day would close it would be the day of salvation (24) as Jesus died on the cross as the final paschal lamb (25-27). While he was singing these words he was anticipating his coming betrayal, trials, death, and resurrection. No one could sing them with more meaning. When we sing the *Hallel Hymn of Hope*, for example during an observance of the Lord's Supper, we can think of Jesus going out of the upper room and approaching the Mount of Olives. From there, at a short distance, he could look toward Golgotha and contemplate the work to be done. From our perspective we can view the great wonder of the work that God has done for us.

Gethsemane

Agonizing Prayer [November 22]

(Gethsemane, outside Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.36-46; Mk 14.32-42; Lk 22.39-46; Jn 18.1-2)

Situation – Like his forefather David (2 Sam 15.23), Jesus was a rejected king who left the city with friends and crossed the Kidron Valley. He went to an olive grove in a garden called Gethsemane, a secluded spot where he had camped (Lk 21.37). Judas knew of the place and anticipated that Jesus would go there after the Passover. God likely planned the final temptation of Christ to occur in a garden to remind us that history began in a garden and that temptation and sin arose there because of Adam's failure to obey. In the garden, the Last Adam overcame the temptation to resist God's will, and, in obedience to the Father, overcame Adam's sin and conquered death. He therefore can now provide a renovated garden for eternity (Rev 22.1, 2).

Support – Jesus took with him his disciples, and from them selected his three closest friends, to be with him in an hour of great temptation and trial. When God created Adam he declared that it was not good for him

to be alone. Men need human companionship and encouragement. Jesus needed, and wanted, these as much as any other person because he is a man. He wanted to share with them his overwhelming sorrow and ask them to pray with him. While he may have asked them to pray for him, the specific petition that is recorded is to pray that *they* would not fall into temptation. Even when distressed to the point of death, Jesus continues to show love and concern for his disciples.

Supplication – He was a stone’s throw from Peter, James, and John and they likely were able to see and overhear his agonizing prayer that is recorded:

- *Posture* – In a prostrate position he displays his worshipful submission.
- *Personal* – He speaks intimately to God as “my Father” and as “Abba”.
- *Petition* – He asks that the cup of suffering could be taken from him.
- *Possibility* – He declares that with God all things are possible.
- *Pronouncement* – But states that his desire is to do only the will of God.

Even though Jesus was a man with human instincts that would tend to self-preservation and pain avoidance, it was not a fear of physical torture and death that caused his agony. He faced these with courage and peace, knowing their purpose—to pay the debt of sin. Some attribute his agony to a tension between his human and divine natures or between two wills. Whether Jesus has two wills has been debated for two millennia. However, we don’t need to delve into that debate to consider the challenge Jesus was facing, since his agony probably was not the result of the mystery of his humanity and deity. The ‘cup’ he was about to drink was much more than physical death. It was becoming sin (2 Cor 5.21; Gal 3.13) for his people, being punished for their sin while sinless (1 Peter 2.24), and being forsaken by the Father (Mt 27.46). We cannot understand even a fraction of the significance of these, but we can be sure that Jesus as God the Son, in his divine nature, was in agony over these things. Jesus felt the burden of sin, and his holiness was repelled by it. His request, even while knowing the answer, was that if there was any other way to deal with sin than for God to *become* sin, the Father should

provide it.

Strengthening – The Father sent Jesus a token of his eternal care in the form of an angel who visibly appeared to him and comforted him. That an angel had to be sent shows the failure of his disciples, angels’ role as ministers (Ps 91.11), and the humiliation of Jesus in requiring the assistance of a creature. We don’t know what the angel said or did. We may confidently guess that he spoke to Jesus of his glory and the glory of salvation for his people. It is also possible that he wiped the sweat from Jesus’ brow and gave him a drink.

Sleepers – Jesus found his disciples sleeping. He rebuked them—particularly Peter, the proud boaster (Mt 26.33)—gently, asking that they stay vigilant for a short time (an hour). He acknowledges their failure to be the result of a human sinful weakness. It is ironic that as he grapples with the challenge of taking the world’s sin on his back, his disciples cannot resist one temptation. While they were failing, he was succeeding and would redeem even them.

Submission – Jesus prayed twice more in a similar manner as at first. Luke, a doctor, tells us that ‘his sweat was like drops of blood’. Whether he means that, due to the emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels ruptured in his sweat glands and produced a mixture of blood and sweat that escaped through the skin, or if he merely uses a simile (‘like’) because his sweat was dripping so profusely, does not need to be debated. The point is clear; the agony of Jesus was great. But, after praying three times about the matter, Jesus humbly and willingly submitted to the Father’s will and went to complete his life’s work.

Sinners – After his prayers he returned to the disciples and woke them all from their sleep with an urgent rebuke—“Enough!” The time for sleeping had passed as the hour had arrived for his betrayal into the hands of sinners—the wicked leaders of the Jews who were intent on destroying the Messiah—that would initiate the whirlwind of events leading to his death and burial. Even as he told them to get up, Judas, the betrayer, was arriving with the cohort of soldiers to arrest Jesus. Jesus

knew precisely what was to transpire to fulfill God's eternal plan. Nothing was out of control. Sinners were under God's sovereign hand. Redemption was being purchased. Salvation was certain. We can rest assured—God is overcoming sinners as he works out our salvation!

Surrendering to Satan's Swarm [November 23]

(Gethsemane, outside Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.47-56; Mk 14.43-52; Lk 22.47-53; Jn 18.3-12)

Swarm – Almost everything in this account is the opposite of what we might expect, and filled with irony. This surreal scene opens with the arrival of a large crowd, including a cohort of Roman soldiers, usually consisting of 480 men. They came with weapons against a peaceful rabbi and his small band of disciples, clearly indicating that they had not understood his message that his kingdom is not of this world. The leader of this rabble was none other than one of his professed friends, who a few hours previously had eaten bread with him. These people came with a warrant from the Sanhedrin which claimed to be the official organization for God on earth. The hordes of Hell, with hatred and intentions of war, were swarming against the Prince of Peace.

Surrender – Expecting armed resistance and attempted escape, they counted on the element of surprise to arrest Jesus. But instead the crowd was met by an unarmed Jesus, approaching them as one anticipating their arrival. He turned the surprise on them. When they might have expected evasion, denial, and blame-casting on being asked whom they sought, Jesus instead answered emphatically that he was the person they wanted and that the others with him should be released. Thinking they would meet a fearful man, they met a courageous one. While planning, if necessary, to throw the 'brigand' to the ground, Jesus threw them to the ground with a single statement. Coming to arrest a 'trouble maker', they were confronted with the eternal "I AM" (the literal wording in the Greek that is translated "I am he"). Anticipating opposition they found surrender.

Signal – The symbols of friendship and love were perverted into the

signal of the most despicable betrayal of history, as Judas fervently approached his master with a false greeting and feigned kiss. All that Judas touched was perverted. As treasurer for the disciples, he stole from the money bag; his name means *praise*, but his life was a curse; and he sold the most valuable prize in the universe for a pocketful of change. Jesus reflected on the irony as he asked Judas about the means of his betrayal and called him ‘friend’ as he told him to get on with his dirty deed.

Sword – Unlike Islam, Christianity is a religion of peace. There is no place among the people of God for using the sword to compel conversions or to advance Christianity. Regardless of what accusations people throw against Christianity, for example about the Crusades or the Inquisition, they are not representative of Christ’s kingdom. Likewise, the ‘Wars of Religion’ in 16th century France had little to do with *religion* and much to do with the political aspirations of their perpetrators—the houses of Bourbon and Guise. When Jesus said that he came to bring a sword (Mt 10.34), he was teaching that his people would be the recipients of hatred and persecution, not that they are to fight spiritual battles with physical weapons (2 Cor 10.3-5). In spite of this, Peter believed that he needed to protect Jesus from those arresting him, by drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. His boastful words (Lk 22.33) clouded his thinking and he foolishly exposed the King and the Kingdom to ridicule, and his fellow disciples to danger. Earlier, he had been asleep when he should have been praying, now he challenged authority when he should have been submitting.

Service – Jesus rebuked Peter by commanding him to put away his sword, and said that he could summon twelve legions of angels. Peter with his puny sword against a cohort was nothing compared with the force of 60,000 angels available to Jesus. We cannot excuse Peter by claiming that he was concerned for Jesus’ welfare or had misunderstood the nature of Christ’s kingdom. His intentions were wrong and counter to the eternal plan of redemption because he had not really been listening to what Jesus had taught the disciples for over three years—for example in

the *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5.9-12). Jesus, facing arrest, torture and death, shows how Christians should react to abuse—with loving service toward their enemies. He worked a final miracle before his death and compassionately offered grace in response to malice. We can be sure that Peter never forgot this rebuke and lesson (1 Pt 3.14). He became a different person after the resurrection of Jesus and his courage was no longer focused on fleshly means but on the power of the Spirit and righteousness.

Sovereignty – Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who used the shadows of darkness to execute their evil plans against a peaceful man. This was their hour, when darkness reigned. But its reign was only temporary. While they thought they had the upper hand, every prophecy of Scripture was being fulfilled in exact detail as the eternal plan of the Sovereign Lord of the universe was worked out—even through their plotting and scheming. It is impossible for a single word of God to fail.

Solitary – The burst of courage failed and the boastful disciples left Jesus alone to face his enemies. Even an uninvolved observer (likely Mark) was so desperate not to be associated with Jesus that he ran from the scene naked. Later, also the Father would judicially forsake Jesus. Jesus faced the powers of Hell alone; with no angels, no friends, and no temporal and physical support from the Father so that we need never be separated from God again.

Jewish and Roman Trials

Jewish Trial, Phase 1: Before Annas [November 24]
(Courtyard of the High Priest, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Jn 18.13-24)

Annas – It may not be obvious at first glance, but we encounter here a Jewish mafia and the kingpin of their backroom power brokers. Jesus is not taken before lawfully constituted authority for his initial interview, but rather into the presence of Annas who was high priest from 6-15 AD and had then been deposed by the Roman procurator of Judea, Valerius

Gratus. At the time of Jesus' arrest Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, had held the office for almost 15 years. Eventually, five of Annas' sons would also become high priest. The fact that Annas had been officially out of office for so long and that Jesus was taken, after his arrest, first to him indicates that Annas held the real power in the Jerusalem intelligentsia, regardless of the current incumbent in the office (Lk 3.2). Thus began the travesty that passes for a trial. The unconscious prophecy of Caiaphas, that it was good if one man died for the people, compounds the grotesque perversion since Jesus' condemnation by the Jews and Romans was not determined by guilt and just desserts but expediency. The irony in this is that Jesus, who did not deserve to die, was declared guilty before his unjust trial even began. Yet we, who are truly guilty, are declared innocent in Jesus after a lawful and just trial, when we should be condemned.

Access – Peter, who had maimed the servant of the high priest and would not normally have been allowed into the high priest's courtyard, was able to gain access because another disciple (John²¹) was known to the high priest. There is also an irony in this because the special access granted to curious Peter left him in a vulnerable position when approached by a servant girl.

Ashamed – The servant girl and porter at the entryway to the high priest's courtyard asked Peter if he was one of the disciples of Jesus. Apparently she expected a negative answer, and Peter slipped into the easy response and denied that he was a disciple. It appears that Peter was alone at the door (possibly with John) and yet was unnerved by the question of a girl! If this is the case, we encounter a timidity that is in stark contrast to his previous boast (Jn 13.37; Mt 26.35). From his example, we see how easily even strong believers can be ashamed to proclaim that they are Christ's disciples (2 Tim 1.8), and can easily slip into denying their Lord. All believers must be warned of the danger of

²¹ Some question that it was John, wondering how a fisherman from Galilee was known to the high priest and suggest it was Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea; others suggest that John was a cousin of Jesus and also of Elizabeth or Zechariah who were of the priestly line.

denial!

Arraignment – While Peter was denying his Lord, Jesus was not deserting his disciples. He was being interrogated by Annas who was looking for any evidence on which to base an accusation of subversion, blasphemy, or heresy which could be used to provide a charge leading to the death penalty.

Avowal – Jesus refused to answer Annas’ questions directly and referred him to his teachings to the crowds in the synagogues and temple. Jesus was not being uncooperative, but rather reminded Annas that Biblical law required that all accusations be substantiated by two or three witnesses, and that the current proceeding was contrary to legal precedent. He was also declaring that his teachings were not those of a secret cult, whispered in grottos, or the ambiguous oracles of a pagan deity. His teachings were public, for all to assess. Most false religions have ‘tiered teachings’—directives for initiates and advanced mysteries for the masters. With Jesus and his word in the Bible, truth stands open—the entire world can hear what God has declared, analyze it, and stand justified or condemned based on their reception of the Word.

Abuse – The mockery of justice continued when one of the officials nearby struck Jesus in the face, accusing him of insubordination and impoliteness to the high priest. Many today in the West would claim to be appalled if a court official abused someone who had just been arrested and had not yet been formally accused of a crime. However, in reality, every society and every unbeliever is only a hair’s-breadth away from committing the same kind of evil that was perpetrated on that spring Friday morning in 33 AD. If Jesus were present today, many in the religious establishment would team up with the ‘politically correct’ leaders in government and academia and take any steps they felt necessary to silence him. Likewise, when Christians are seen as a threat to their authority we can expect to be assaulted as our Lord was.

Appeal – We believe, as a basic principle of law, that a person is innocent until proven guilty, but Annas was not interested in proper

procedure. When Jesus asked Annas to state the charges against him, his appeal was ignored. In asking for evidence, Jesus indirectly declared that his teaching was true, that he was sinless and without guilt, that it was impossible to produce legitimate witnesses to his having done anything wrong, and that Annas was an unjust tyrant. Jesus had made his appeal, but he did not insist on his rights or press the matter. He allowed the injustice to continue to fulfill all righteousness, to carry our sins to the cross, and to provide us with an example of how to suffer for the Kingdom—as Peter, who witnessed it, tells us (1 Pt 2.19-25; 1 Pt 4.12-19). Annas had no interest in truth or in doing right—he loved darkness rather than light (Jn 3.19; Rom 1.18). His sole objective was to silence someone he viewed as a threat to his power and position, so he passed Jesus along to the next stage of his trial and likely participated in manufacturing false witnesses.

Jewish Trial, Phase 2: Before Caiaphas [November 25]
(Courtyard of the High Priest, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.57, 59-68; Mk 14.53, 55-65; Lk 22.54a, 63-65; Jn 18.24)

Assembly – The guards moved Jesus across the priests’ courtyard from the house of Annas to Caiaphas’ palace, into a room where he and a portion of the Sanhedrin could meet with Jesus. It was necessary for them to meet in the middle of the night so they could reach a verdict before Pilate began his day’s activities, and they could hand over Jesus as a condemned man for execution. It is a sad irony that the Jewish leaders who were supposed to be among the worshipers of God assembled to hold a ‘trial’ to condemn the God—in human form—whom they claimed to serve. Their action is typical of all false religions, (including Judaism that rejected the true Messiah) whose leaders often use their assemblies to make decisions to attack Jesus and his faithful followers. We need to be constantly vigilant that even our own Presbyterian assemblies do not pass judgements which are contrary to the Word of God.

Allegation – The assembly was unable to find two witnesses who could give consistent testimony against Jesus—indicating that he was

innocent—so they manufactured false evidence; likely buying the witnesses as they had bought the betrayer, Judas. They twisted God's Law (Dt 17.6; Dt 19.15) for their vile purposes and encouraged perjury when they were supposed to be examples of righteousness. The trumped up charge that they concocted was that Jesus had said that *he* would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Of course, he had not said this. He had said that if *others* destroyed the temple (Jn 2.19) he would rebuild it, and he wasn't even speaking of the physical temple, but of his own body (Jn 2.21). Another irony is evident in their twisting of his words. While they testified that Jesus claimed he would destroy the temple, later that day they would destroy the very temple of which he had spoken. Thankfully, the destruction of the temple of his body led to his resurrection, the defeat of sin and death, and our eternal salvation.

Adjuration – Jesus remained silent when confronted with the false charges. Our normal reaction to a false charge would be to declare vociferously our innocence. We would also probably add a vow such as, "I swear!" to support our contention that the charges were fabricated. In contrast, Jesus, who is the only truly innocent person, didn't bother to respond. His example reminds us of what it means to be meek (Mt 5.5) before the enemies of Christ who persecute his Church. Jesus' unresponsiveness probably angered Caiaphas who stood up and kept asking for an answer. Finally he adjured Jesus, in the name of the living God to state whether he was the son of the Blessed God. Another irony is so evident in this action—a Sadducee who had no regard for God took an oath in the name of God, while standing before the God-man.

Answer – It was only once he was placed under an oath by a lawful authority that Jesus responded. The office of High Priest, even if it was filled by an unjust man, was still to be respected. Jesus teaches us to honour all those in authority over us. He also shows, by his example, the error of people who claim that Christians must not take any oaths, based on their faulty interpretation of Matthew 5.36, 37. In addition, his action shows how human legal systems can deviate from God's standards. For example, in the 5th amendment to the US constitution we read that a person is not to bear witness against himself—i.e., to incriminate

himself. Jesus' self-incriminating (from Caiaphas' perspective) answer demonstrates the fallacy of an arrogant view that we do not have to state truth about our behaviour. It also removed, as far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, the need for any other witnesses. However, Jesus did not allow his enemies to have the final word. While they thought that they had cornered him in their charade passing for a trial, by his declaration of deity ("Son of Man", taken from Daniel 7.13), he warned them that they would be held accountable before his august judicial bench when he took his rightful place at the right hand of the Father.

Accusation – Caiaphas was confronted by the most important dilemma that faces all mankind: either to accept the truth that Jesus is God and worship him or to deny that he is God and accuse him of blasphemy for claiming to be God. Caiaphas chose the wicked route and accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned him to death, sealing the destiny of most Jews, who reject their Messiah Priest-King. He tore his clothes as a symbol of disgust or mourning over sin. He pretended to abhor blasphemy, but he was the blasphemer, denying Truth and desecrating the priesthood before the true High Priest. We can see in his action, rather than an end to Jesus, a declaration of the end of the earthly priesthood and its associated ceremonial forms.

Assault – The assembly then assaulted Jesus by spitting in his face, insulting him, beating him, and challenging him to demonstrate his power by naming his persecutors while blindfolded. It is painful to think about what these men did to the sinless Jesus, the one who taught only truth and did only good. This was necessary to fulfill the prophecy about his suffering (Is 50.6), but also to subject the saviour to the worst abuses of mankind's sin so that his love and mercy would overflow in grace. But we should cringe when we consider what would face these men when they came before the resurrected Lord Jesus in all his glory. Each of us has to consider our own destinies based on how we have treated Jesus: with contempt or with respect.

Peter's Additional Denials of Jesus [November 26]
(Courtyard of the High Priest, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 26.58,

69-75; Mk 14.54, 66-72; Lk 22.54b-62; Jn 18.25-27)

Peter's denials are reported in all four Gospels. This indicates that the Holy Spirit and the human writers believed that a record of the denials is important for the Church. We find in the record of his denials warning and comfort.

We normally assume that Peter denied his Lord three times, since Jesus had told him that before the rooster crowed he would make three denials (Mt 26.34). However, it appears from a comparison of the four gospel accounts that he may have denied that he knew Jesus four, and possibly more, times. If so, there is not a contradiction in Jesus' words since four denials can include three and Jesus may have been speaking of a specific set of denials in the courtyard. This is similar to Mark's noting that Jesus said that Peter would deny Jesus before the rooster crowed twice (Mk 14.30) whereas the other Synoptic Gospel writers say only 'before the rooster crows'. We have already noted Peter's first denial when the servant girl, acting as a porter, challenged him. His additional denials, recounted in the passages noted above, appear to be in response to two additional servant girls and one or two different men. Of course, it may be that one of the servant girls mentioned in these passages is the same one mentioned in John 18.17, and we are not provided with enough information to work out the exact sequence of events. Regardless, we see the sin of Peter escalating in each denial.

Jesus appears to have wanted the disciples to stay away from the trial so that their faith in him would not be tested (Jn 18.7, 8). Peter (and probably John) didn't obey, and followed Jesus and came into the courtyard where we find him warming himself at the fire with the high priests' guards and staff. We find him following the path of the ungodly mentioned in Psalm 1.1: walking with them, standing with them, and sitting with them. This placed Peter in a vulnerable position where he was open to temptation.

In the first instance a servant girl, looking closely at Peter, identified him as one who had been with Jesus—possibly meaning during the previous

week in Jerusalem, or in the past few hours in the garden—and asked whether or not he was a disciple. She asked her question in front of the crowd at the brazier and Peter denied that he knew Jesus by claiming that the woman was confused in her assertion.

He appears to have moved from the fire into the entryway to the courtyard; possibly to prevent anyone else from identifying him. However, another observant servant girl noticed him and said to those nearby that he was with Jesus of Nazareth. Peter denied Jesus again by saying that he didn't know the man. This second time, his denial probably came easier since one sin leads to another.

Another temptation followed about an hour later when Peter had returned to stand near the fire. This time, a relative of Malchus (whom Peter had hurt by cutting off his ear) identified Peter as having been present in the Garden. Peter must have made some form of response (an unrecorded denial?) so that the men standing there were able to identify his accent as being from Galilee. They persisted in their assertion that he was one of Jesus' followers. His response was to make an oath and to call down a curse on himself as he again lied about knowing Jesus. It is a testimony to God's grace and electing love that he did not respond to Peter's maledictory curse by destroying him, and depriving him of existence on earth and in Heaven.

At the very moment that Peter made the oath denying Jesus, a rooster crowed for the second time that morning. Although Peter may not have reflected on it at that time, the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy about the rooster crowing was no mere coincidence. Jesus had demonstrated again that he has absolute control over the created realm—he is, after all, its creator. In spite of being bound and abused by the High Priest, nothing was happening that was not in accord with God's predetermined plan and unfolding as Jesus had predicted.

It appears that at the same time as Peter was denying his Lord with a curse on himself, Jesus was being moved to where the Sanhedrin would assemble to condemn Jesus to death. As Jesus was passing through the

courtyard the rooster crowed and Jesus looked directly at Peter. We can conjecture that in that look there was a mixture of disappointment and love—injured love.

The look pierced Peter's heart and he remembered the word of warning in which Jesus had predicted his denials (Lk 22.34). We are not told that he also remembered the word of restoration (Lk 22.31-32) that Jesus gave him just prior to announcing the pending denials, however we can conclude that he likely did. These words probably encouraged Peter to make full confession of his sin in bitter weeping and to repent by asking God to forgive him. It is to Peter's credit that a look from Jesus was sufficient to bring him to repentance. The reality of temptation, of even the most sincere believers, is a warning that we can all fall into sin. The example of forgiveness upon sincere repentance is given to us as a promise that full pardon is available for any sin, no matter how gross, for all those who are resting in Christ (1 Jn 2.1).

Jewish Trial, Phase 3: Before the Sanhedrin [November 27] (Temple, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.1; Mk 15.1a; Lk 22.66-71)

Determination – The full Jewish council²² convened at daybreak after Annas and Caiaphas had examined Jesus. They met early in the morning to honour their tradition that trials had to be conducted during the day, based on their interpretation of Exodus 18.14, and because they said that “justice must be done in the light of day”, an idea similar to ours: “justice must be *seen* to be done”. It is ironic that they were concerned to be procedurally correct while denying their Messiah and planning to condemn him to death illegally.

Demand – Their demand was to determine if Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (Christ) since they knew that he had recently been presenting himself this way (e.g., during his entry into Jerusalem about a week prior). This is the ultimate question which all men should ask, and many men do ask. However, as with this Jewish council, most men who ask the

²² Possibly Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (Jn 19.38-42) did not attend this council meeting or, if they were in attendance, they abstained from the deliberations.

question have no desire to believe in Jesus or to honour him as the Christ. Rather the council's desire was to trap him in contradictions and to discover counter arguments to his claim. Many people today who examine his claims (e.g., in the search for the 'historical Jesus') are no different, in principle, from the Sanhedrin, and they seek to dismiss his claims as of a devious con artist.

Divine – Jesus knew that they had no interest in a meaningful answer. Even if he told them that he truly was the Messiah, they were not going to believe it. The problem was not with the lack of facts but with their perverted wills. They had the facts about his teaching and had seen the miracles that provided evidence that he had come from God. But they did not want to accept him as the Messiah because it would interfere with their worldly power and status. Jesus had experienced their unwillingness to deal with evidence (Lk 20.3-7) and would not engage them in further debate by asking them questions. The Jewish council displayed a character trait that is found in all sinful men, not enlightened by the Holy Spirit: an unwillingness to deal seriously with God's truth when it is presented before them. We see this when our associates or neighbours won't discuss the purpose of man's existence or God's moral law; or scientists refuse to entertain an explanation of reality that is not based on their contrived presupposition that they cannot permit either an intelligent designer or the supernatural into their models. So Jesus restated the truth that he had placed before Caiaphas: that he is the Son of Man (meaning that he is the second person of the Trinity; Dan 7.13). When unbelievers refuse to consider God's truth, it is imperative that we leave them with the simple fact that they will face the Jesus they are rejecting on the day of Judgement.

Declaration – The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was taking the title of divinity from Daniel's prophecy and applying it to himself. They understood him to be claiming to be God—notice that he had said, 'Son of Man' and they responded with 'Son of God'. In spite of their limited understanding of the nature of God and the Trinity, they realized that the OT prophecies spoke of a divine second person in the Godhead. To their request for clarification, Jesus responded in the affirmative. His simple

declaration, moments before he was led away to the Romans, is one of the most powerful statements ever made in the history of the world—other equally important statements had come from his lips while he was teaching and would be heard while he was on the cross. No matter what liberal ‘scholars’ say about Jesus, he *did* make the claim that he was God. And, in spite of the counter claims of false religions, such as Judaism or Islam, Jesus is God.

Decision – Upon his making this declaration, the council decided that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and worthy of punishment, so they determined that there was no need to examine him further or to produce additional witnesses against him. We have in this instance an example of men accusing God (the God-man) of the sin of lying. Men set themselves up as the standard by which they will judge God. They accuse God of being cruel, two-faced, unjust, unfair, or evil. For example, as we noted previously, Dawkins does this in *The God Delusion* where he calls God names such as: misogynistic, homophobic, genocidal, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, and malevolent. The proud hubris of the creature before his creator is beyond incredible!

Death – Men not only want to accuse God of crimes against humanity, they want him dead. Nietzsche was not the first with this desire, and he won’t be the last. His famous quip, “*Gott ist tot*” (God is dead) is well known. In his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he says, “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? ... Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?” The Jewish leaders held the same opinion and set themselves up as gods as they condemned the God-man to death and handed him over to the Roman authorities so that the sentence of capital punishment could be carried out. The “religious trial” has ended. The “civil trial” is about to begin. Both Jew and Gentile are implicated in the destruction of the Messiah, but what men intended for evil, God intended for good. Praise God for Jesus, our Saviour, who willingly went through these trials to go to the cross.

Judas Commits Suicide [November 28]

(Temple/Potter's Field, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.3-10; Acts 1.18-19)

Remorse – Peter denied his lord and Judas betrayed him. The differences between the sins lie not in their gravity, since they are equally evil, but in the perpetrators' subjective responses and in their objective outcomes. Peter truly repented, was forgiven and restored, and became a leader in the Church. In contrast, Judas did not repent. His remorse (reported as a change of mind) was not effective for salvation. It was a response to the overwhelming guilt of being implicated as a contributor to the farcical trial and false sentencing of Jesus. He could not enjoy the wages of his sin since the money he had been paid was a reminder of what he had done, so he returned it to the priests. Judas knew that he had sinned, but this knowledge led to despair and suicide, not to repentance. Acknowledgement of having committed sins against God is not sufficient to save a person. Many a criminal admits he murdered, robbed, or raped. Even feeling sorry for the hurt and problems a crime causes for the victim or for the perpetrator does not result in salvation. While both conditions are necessary for salvation, they are not sufficient conditions. True repentance includes asking God to forgive us, in Jesus.

Responsibility – The priests responded to Judas by saying that the betrayal of innocent blood was his responsibility. In this instance they spoke the truth. Even though Judas was hired by the authorities and his actions were predetermined by God (Acts 1.16; Acts 2.23; Acts 7.52), this in no way removes or diminishes his own responsibility. He received the reward for *his* wickedness (Acts 1.18). We must never blame others for our sins or let the truth of eternal predestination affect, incorrectly, our understanding of our personal accountability for our actions before God.

Reward – The account speaks of the silver pieces as Judas' reward (Acts 1.18), but it lasted for less than twelve hours. One reward he received, instead of the money, came his way when he went out and hanged himself. Scripture does not sanitize the account but explicitly describes

the results. His noose must have been poorly tied, the tree branch broke, or the rope was weak, since he fell off the cliff head first, and his body burst open spilling out his guts. Throughout history disembowelling has been a gruesome way of punishing traitors. It may be that God repaid Judas' betrayal with this form of death as a symbol of his treason. Another symbol of the results of his action is that he probably plunged into the Hinnom Valley. This valley was used as the garbage dump for Jerusalem where a fire burned to consume the refuse. One of the names for Hell is Gehenna (e.g., Mt 5.29), which is derived from the valley's name. The symbolic message is clear: anyone who betrays Jesus Christ will receive eternal damnation in Hell as his ultimate reward.

Remittance – The chief priests discussed what to do with the returned blood-money. They applied the law prohibiting donations to the house of God from fees remitted to female or homosexual prostitutes (Dt 23.18) to exclude acceptance of the returned money. They had concluded that Judas' betrayal of Jesus was a form of prostitution—he had lusted after money and committed spiritual adultery with material pleasures. But, ironically, they were too blind to see that their hatred and connivance against Jesus was murder (Mt 5.21-22). They were careful to observe the outward aspects of the law, while being guilty of breaking it in their hearts, just as Jesus had said of them (Mt 23.23).

Remembrance – The priests used the money to purchase a potter's field as a burial place for foreigners—that is, for pilgrims to the feasts who had died in Jerusalem. Acts 1.18-19 attributes the acquisition of the field to Judas. He didn't personally purchase the field, but rather purchased it indirectly by returning the money. It is not known where the field was located, however it is believed to have been in the Valley of Hinnom. Many commentators claim that the location of the purchased field could not be the same as the location of Judas' suicide. They say that the Jewish leaders would not have purchased a field for a cemetery that had been tainted by suicide. However, it may be that God had planned another irony. The death of Judas' may not have been discovered until after the field was purchased. If so, the field is appropriately named Akeldama (Aramaic for Field of Blood) because it was purchased with

blood money and because in it Judas left his blood. The gruesome death of Judas became known throughout Jerusalem and his actions are forever remembered as the archetypal betrayal, with just recompense.

Revelation – In every detail of these events (as with all events!), God was working out his great providential plan. We are reminded of this through Matthew’s quotation of the OT revelation. He applies, in a typological sense through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, words spoken by Jeremiah (Mt 27.9) and recorded later in Scripture by Zechariah (Zech 11.12, 13; see also Jer 19.1-13; Jer 32.6-9), to the acquisition of the burial ground. Matthew takes care to ensure that his original Jewish audience knew that every OT prophecy related to the first advent of the Messiah was fulfilled exactly as God had planned and prophesied. We must take to heart Matthew’s concern and believe that all of God’s revelation in Scripture is equally trustworthy, and in particular believe that events prophesied about Christ’s second advent will be fulfilled in ways what will cause every person to bow in awesome wonder at what the Creator has accomplished.

Roman Trial, Phase 1: Before Pilate [November 29]
(Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.2, 11-14; Mk 15.1b-5; Lk 23.1-5; Jn 18.28-33, 38b)

Court Charade – Jesus was bound after he was arrested in Gethsemane. At some point, during his trial before the Jewish leaders, the ropes must have been removed. He was, after all, not violent and was cooperative so they must have felt that there was no threat of his fighting or fleeing. However, when they were ready to move him to the civil courts for the next segment of his trial they bound him again and led him like a lamb to slaughter (Is 5.7). This minor historical detail is of more relevance than it might seem. The Jewish leaders were concerned with outward appearances and wanted to make it look like Jesus was a criminal when they brought him before Pilate. Even so, Pilate may have been sceptical when he first enquired about the charges the Jewish leaders were bringing against Jesus. They evaded his question. Their response, “If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you.” was

like someone today saying, “Trust me!” when he is really not to be trusted at all. Their response was proud and rude and, if not already sceptical, Pilate was certainly questioning the nature of the charges by this point.

Ceremonial Cleanness – Before we consider Pilate’s response, we should note that the Jewish leaders had not entered the palace when they delivered Jesus. They stood outside talking with Pilate. John observes that the reason was to avoid ceremonial uncleanness so that they could continue to eat the meals of the week-long Passover observance (Ex 34.18). Most commentators note that while the Jewish leaders did not hesitate to condemn an innocent man to death, they were careful not to defile themselves by entering the residence of an uncircumcised Gentile. Their superstition and hypocrisy in observing their ritual traditions, while intent on murder, appears to us to be astounding. However, it is not much different from the posturing we see today among the politically correct who expel Christianity from the public forum while endorsing pantheistic substitutes that worship the environment, or who scream about ‘rights’ while millions of babies are being aborted.

Criminal Charges – On being pressed by Pilate to provide the charges against Jesus, they did not mention the charge of blasphemy on which they had based their sentencing. Pilate would probably not have been concerned if someone claimed to be a son of a god, since the Roman pantheon had many gods and sons of gods. Rather they stated three new charges against Jesus—each of which was a perversion of reality and completely unsupportable:

- *Subversion* – His teachings were not contrary to the Law, but rather gave the proper interpretation and application of the Law and showed how the Jewish leaders were the ones who had really led the nation astray.
- *Treason* – He had not opposed paying tribute to Caesar, but had taught that deference and tribute were to be given to both God and to the civil magistrate respectively (Mt 22.21). In contrast, anyone who collected taxes on behalf of Rome was despised by the Jewish leaders.

- *Usurpation* – He was not intent on revolution. He had stated that his kingdom is not of this world. In reality, most of the Jewish leaders were keen on seeing the overthrow of Rome.

Crucifixion Call – Pilate probably didn't believe that there was any merit to these charges and felt that the Jewish leaders were unable to present a tenable case against Jesus. So he suggested they take Jesus and judge him according to their law. The Romans permitted subject people to retain many of their customs and Pilate realized that the charges against Jesus pertained, at best, to matters of their law and not to Roman law. He did not want to get involved in a local religious matter that might provoke the people, especially during the Passover. Hyperventilating, the Jews made it clear that they wanted Jesus put to death by the Romans. They claimed that they could not execute Jesus, but not too long after this they would have no qualms about executing Stephen. God's set purpose and foreknowledge (Acts 2.23) were being worked out. It was necessary for Jesus to die by crucifixion as a curse (Dt 21.23), that none of his bones would be broken by stoning (Ps 34.20), to implicate both Jews and Gentiles in his death (Acts 4.27), and so that he would be lifted up (Jn 3.14).

Christ Challenge – Pilate returned to the praetorium and asked Jesus if he was the Christ, the King of the Jews. Jesus gave a non-threatening answer to the challenge (we will consider the challenge and Jesus' answer in our next mediation) and made no reply to the other charges. This convinced Pilate that he was dealing with a fabricated case against Jesus.

"Cleared!" Conclusion – Pilate had no desire to do the Jewish leaders any favours and knew that they had handed Jesus over because of envy (Mk 15.10). So he completed his examination of Jesus and, finding no evidence that Jesus was a violent revolutionary and no valid reason for putting him to death, was ready to clear and release him. He announced this to the chief priests and the crowd, who responded by saying that Jesus had been a trouble maker in Judea. Pilate, being a lazy and selfish man, saw a way to escape his dilemma when he heard that Jesus had

been teaching in Judea—he could hand Jesus over to Herod who had responsibility for that region, and who was in town because of the feast. He took the easy path, didn't press for dismissal, and abdicated responsibility. He assumed that he was done with Jesus.

Roman Trial, Phase 1: Jesus, *the King* [November 30]
(Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.11; Mk 15.2; Lk 23.3; Jn 18.33-37)

Incredulity – Pilate considered the charges that the Jewish leaders brought against Jesus. They said that Jesus was guilty of subversion of their teaching, treason against the Roman authority to collect tribute taxes, and usurpation by setting himself up as a king. On returning to the Praetorium, after meeting with Jews who stood outside, Pilate focused on the charge that represented the most likely breach of Roman law—the claim that Jesus was the king of the Jews. From his perspective, looking at the humble and beaten man before him, it seemed incredulous that Jesus could be a king. However, he felt it necessary to examine this particular charge to ascertain if it were true. He could not have a Jewish rebel, claiming to be a messiah, inciting the people to riot against Rome, particularly at the Passover when Jewish sentiments were elevated due to what the Passover represented for them—their escape from bondage under a foreign power. Incredulity about Jesus runs throughout the human race. At first glance men think that it is a fantastic idea that he could be God, the Creator, and the Lord of lords and King of kings. But perceptions are not reality. All of reality is not as it appears, or as we judge it to be.

Idea – Jesus' response, asking Pilate if it was his own idea or if it came from others, is not a smart-aleck response. Jesus asked this question to help Pilate understand more fully the nature of his kingship. If Pilate was thinking of a pandering king like Herod or one of the other kings in the subject nations that made up the Roman Empire, then Jesus would respond one way. If, however, Pilate was thinking of the type of king the Jews were expecting who would crush Roman rule and establish an indestructible kingdom (Dan 2.44) he would respond in a different way.

Jesus showed by this question that he was in complete control of the unfolding events. Ultimately, he wasn't the one on trial; Pilate was—he had to determine what he believed about Jesus as king. All men must answer this question: What kind of king is Jesus?

Interrogation – Pilate was flustered by Jesus' question. Like all people who are confronted with the truth that Jesus is King. He understood the direction Jesus was taking the interrogation and did not want to give an answer. So he evaded the question by saying that he couldn't understand it since it dealt with Jewish religious particulars. Today people avoid dealing with Jesus as King in a similar way, by saying with disdain or sarcasm about Christianity such things as, "Well it's okay if you want to believe that, but you can't expect everyone to believe it." or "I'm happy that you have had a religious experience, but I don't need your religious crutch to help me get through life." or "That is what your religion teaches, but who's to say you are right?" Pilate attempted to cool down the hot seat he was on, and to turn the interrogation back onto Jesus, by throwing out the painful reproach that it was Jesus' own people who had rejected him (Jn 1.11) and by demanding that Jesus tell him what he had done that caused the Jewish leaders to arrest him and condemn him of a capital offence.

Importance – Jesus had not done anything worthy of being handed over to Pilate, so does not bother to answer Pilate's question. Instead he describes the nature of his Kingdom, which is:

- *Spiritual* – Not of this world. It is principally an other-worldly and non-material kingdom. Its distinctive attribute is its spiritual nature, being founded on holiness and love, and having citizens with new hearts.
- *Separate* – However, while the Kingdom is spiritual, it is also physical. Jesus says that it is from another *place*—Enoch, Elijah, some raised dead (Mt 27.52-53), and Jesus all exist in Heaven with physical bodies.
- *Staffed* – It is populated by the servants of Jesus—those who love him and obey him—who are holy angels and sanctified humans.

- *Sovereign* – Jesus said he could have prevented the Jews from arresting him. So also, he could have stopped the proceedings before Pilate. This indicates that the reign of Jesus is sovereign over all kings and kingdoms.
- *Significant* – The fact that Jesus bothered to tell Pilate anything about his kingdom indicates that it was necessary for Pilate to hear about it. So all men must hear that he is *the* King—not only of the Jews but of all men.

Insistence – Pilate then stated that Jesus is a king. He probably intended it as ridicule, but came to the right conclusion in spite of himself. Jesus declared it to be fact by insisting that he was a king. By designating himself as a king he makes it impossible for us to be neutral about receiving his office. We must acknowledge his sovereign reign and bow before him in worship, or we must declare him to be a fraud and a pretender and deny his right to rule over us. There is no third option; no middle ground!

Intention – Everything that Jesus says is filled with significance. With a few words he declared his humanity (“I was born”), pre-existent deity (“I came into the world”), and purpose for coming—presumably to receive or establish a kingdom. However, he puts a peculiar twist on it. He says that his intention is to testify to truth. He circles back and indicates that his kingdom is not like any kingdom of this world that holds power by natural weapons of war—his kingdom is founded on truth, and everyone who is on the side of truth listens to him and receives him as Truth. At this point Pilate asks, “What is truth?”

Roman Trial, Phase 1: What is Truth? [December 1] **(Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Jn 18.37-38)**

Declaration – Jesus declared that his reason for coming into the world was to bear witness to the truth. Our response might be to ask, “But didn’t Jesus come to save sinners?” In fact, the two are not mutually exclusive. In order to save sinners, God must reveal truth—man has sinned against God’s Law and Jesus is the means he has provided to deal

with the problem of sin. Without an understanding of God's truth about the Law and sin, man cannot know that he has a problem and needs to be saved. Jesus told Pilate that he, along with all mankind, had to decide if he would stand on the side of truth or resist it. How did Pilate respond, how will men respond, and how will we respond?

Demand – Pilate's response was to ask, "What is truth?" With the person who embodies all truth standing before him, he had the possibility of hearing the most profound statement of truth ever given. There is debate as to whether Pilate's question was sincere ("Please tell me what truth is!"), a snide sneer ("Who are you to think you know truth?"), or a wistful sigh ("I wish it were possible to know truth."). The fact that Jesus did not give an answer to Pilate tells us that his question was not sincere. Jesus would not have ignored any honest enquiry; even in this dark hour (as with the thief crucified beside him) he would have taught Pilate the truth.

Definition – "What is truth?" Philosophers debate the meaning of *truth* because they don't want to accept the correct definition that truth is a state (or statement) that is in accord (consistent or coherent) with a single, absolute, factual and objective reality. They invent alternative proposals such as: truth is a natural construct influenced by our biology, or truth is what the majority in a society believe, or truth is what works or is expedient in the current situation. In contrast to these and other invented approaches to truth, *truth* does not change; it is invariant through time and space. Truth encompasses all of the factual descriptive attributes of physical objects (e.g., colour, height, and weight), valid concepts in the rational realm (e.g., logic, mathematics, moral imperatives, and law), and reliable statements about entities in the non-physical realm (e.g., God is a spirit). Truth is knowable by man; however man does not know all truth, nor is all truth equally accessible. Truth is made available to man by God through progressive revelation and through our God-given abilities to apply empirical research and methods of logic.

Divine – Ultimately, the source of all truth is God. Jesus declared

himself to be truth (Jn 14.6). He also taught that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and that the Father is the source of truth (Jn 15.26). The Bible does not explicitly say that “God is truth”, the way it says that “God is love” (1 Jn 4.8), but since all three persons in the Trinity are truth personified, we can confidently state that God *is* truth. Jesus is the Truth in a human form (Jn 1.14). Every word that came from Jesus’ mouth was true (Jn 8.45-47). The Bible (and no other book beside the Bible) is the breath of God (2 Tim 3.16) and the record of all that God wanted communicated to mankind, so it is also revealed truth. Just as God cannot lie (Num 23.19) the Bible, as God’s word, cannot be in error.

Dimensions – All truth is God’s truth—God’s thoughts revealed to man and discovered by man. There is not one kind of truth in science that is derived only through empirical means, another kind of truth in philosophy that is developed by reason, and a third kind of truth for faith that is revealed by God. Truth does have a number of dimensions but is unified as a whole, with one source and one standard—God. So in every domain of knowledge God’s mind is supreme. The natural man, in sin, does not want to hear this because it places God at the centre of epistemology and not man. It means that what God says in his Word is the definitive standard of truth in all areas in which it speaks. This has significant implications for our understanding of the world around us. When the Bible records history, it is not just another source for history, to be compared with archaeology and manuscript evidence; it is the final source. Thus, when it gives a name, event, or date all other sources for history must be correlated with the Bible. Similarly, when the Bible declares anything that falls into the domain of what we call ‘science’, it speaks with absolute authority. So, since it says that God created the universe in six days, and provides a chronology that places that creation about 6,000 years ago, then all of cosmology, geology, and biology must be brought into harmony with that truth. Likewise, in anthropology, psychology, sociology, political theory, and economics the Bible stands supreme over all of man’s theories.

Dismissal – Pilate was a fool who chose to live for the pleasures of this world and to ignore a once-in-history opportunity to hear the truth as

never before proclaimed. He turned away from Jesus and did not follow up on his own question. This is how most people act with the challenging questions of life—How did this universe come into existence? Why am I here? Why is there evil or good? Why do men die? What comes after death? They ask the questions but turn away from the only source of truth from whom they could hope to find the answers—the Lord Jesus. Rather than seeking him as the one who is of more value than rubies, they consign him to the garbage heap of history. Ironically, Pilate claimed, before the Jews, that he found no basis for a charge against Jesus—that is, he was faultless because he is Truth. He came to the right conclusion but wasn't willing to act on the truth he had.

Roman Trial, Phase 2: Before Herod Antipas [December 2]
(Herod's Palace, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Lk 23.6-12)

Country – Isaiah, prophesying of the days of Jesus, said that the land of Galilee would be blessed with a light that would expel spiritual darkness (Is 9.1). The great darkness that had come over the land included the government of the Herodians. The Herodians, who were Idumaeans (also Edomite) usurpers to the throne of David, ruled under the authority of Rome. The extremely wicked Herod, called 'Great', had ruled the territory of Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth. After his death (in the year Jesus was born), the territory was split into smaller 'kingdoms'. One of these was the tetrarchy (ruled quarter) of Galilee which was governed by Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's equally wicked son. It was this Herod who had executed John the Baptist and who Jesus called a 'fox'. Yet, in the midst of this evil day Jesus had spent most of his life and teaching ministry in Galilee and had brought the light of the Gospel into it. When Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, and supposedly under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Jesus to him, since Herod was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. There was no legal requirement for Pilate to send Jesus to Herod, as Jesus had been accused of committing crimes in Jerusalem and Pilate was the Roman governor over the entire Roman province of Palestine. However, Pilate, being a shrewd politician, may have seen an opportunity to get the problem of Jesus off his hands and may have hoped that Herod, being more experienced with the Jews,

could find a way to placate them. We know, of course, that Jesus was not a Galilean, but rather *called* a Galilean, since he was born in Bethlehem of Judea, near Jerusalem. Pilate's concern about Jesus' country of origin is indicative of the problem all sinful men have with Jesus. To most people in the world today, Jesus belongs to the West, is part of 'white man's religion', or is 'just *your* belief'. What Pilate missed, along with the majority of mankind, is that Jesus cannot be confined to a country or territory—he is King of kings, over all the kingdoms of this earth.

Curiosity – Herod had had a great curiosity about Jesus since he had heard of his teaching and miracles in Galilee, and was pleased to have Jesus brought before him. He hoped that he might see Jesus perform a miracle. Herod was no different from many in the crowds who followed Jesus, who were only interested in his miracles and not in his teaching. They hoped that they or their family members could be healed of their illnesses and deformities or that Jesus would usher in a golden age of prosperity so that they could be fed sumptuously and clothed with fine garments. The focus of mankind is largely on its stomach, pleasures, and entertainment. Few are interested in the serious matter of considering what Jesus has to say about our eternal welfare.

Calumny – Herod did not receive any satisfaction out of his audience with Jesus. Jesus refused to answer any of his questions. When Pilate asked Jesus about truth, Jesus didn't answer him because he really did not want to know the truth. Likewise, Jesus did not answer Herod's questions, since he was only interested in being entertained. Also, the Jewish leaders made it difficult for Herod to carry out his cross-examination of Jesus. They accompanied Jesus to make sure that there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Jesus was a criminal worthy of death. We can almost hear their calumny as they utter false charges with shrill voices, and maliciously manipulate the situation to keep Herod from coming to the same conclusion that Pilate had—that there was no basis for a charge against Jesus. One of the characteristics of the proponents of many false religions (such as Islam or Hinduism) is that they become hotly vehement in their animosity against Jesus and his Church when they feel that their authority is threatened. Falsehood

cannot survive in the light of truth, so it becomes loud in its irrationality and hatred against truth.

Contempt – When confronted with truth, evil often escalates its hatred of Jesus and his people by resorting to violence. Thus, Herod and his soldiers showed the depth of their depraved natures by mocking and ridiculing Jesus. Today we see the same gratuitous evil—pointless, and without any logical necessity for a ‘greater’ cause—perpetrated against God’s people. Consider, for example, how Islam is the cause of much of the persecution of Christians, how homosexual activists burn church buildings when they feel threatened by God’s Law, or how the personality cult in totalitarian North Korea attempts to eliminate all vestiges of Christianity. Where men go, without the grace of God, extreme evil follows. As Paul says in Romans 1.28-32, men not only do evil but also love doing it and encourage others in it.

Cronies – Herod then sent Jesus back to Pilate, without passing judgment on his case. His inability to state the charges and to issue a verdict against Jesus (Lk 23.15) tells us that, like Pilate, he gave no credence to the accusations of the Jews, but he was too set in the way of evil to resist their demands and to advocate for due process and justice. As a result of their complicity with evil, Herod and Pilate became friends. This is how it often is in the world. Two very different systems of thought or belief will become co-belligerents against truth, their common enemy. You see this, for example, when radical feminists defend the ‘rights’ of pedophiles or claim that we must tolerate Islam in spite of its maltreatment of women, because of their blind hatred against anything that they perceive to be supportive of Biblical morality. The people of this world will find ways to overcome temporarily their differences so that they can unite in an attack against Jesus and his brothers and sisters.

Roman Trial, Phase 3: Pilate Releases a Prisoner [December 3]

(Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.15-21; Mk 15.6-11; Lk 23.13-19; Jn 18.39-40)

Charge-less – Pilate was exasperated with the Jewish leaders since neither he nor Herod could find anything with which to charge Jesus. However, he was a corrupt official who had shown no interest in the truth, and now shows no inclination to see justice administered. When truth is scorned it becomes easy to deviate from moral principles. So, rather than having the courage to stand for truth and justice and release Jesus immediately, Pilate took the convenient route of self-exoneration and compromise—he stated that Jesus was innocent and not worthy of death but, regardless, he would punish him to satisfy the Jewish leaders. Pilate is one example of many unprincipled politicians and officials who fill history books and newspapers with their unwillingness to face an inconvenient truth and act on principle rather than pandering to the people or surfing the latest politically correct current.

Custom – Custom and crime should be enemies but sadly they are too often friends in king’s courts and on the street corners. Pilate, who had been the governor of Judea for about five years, had developed a program of amnesty similar to the easily abused US systems of presidential pardons and governor reprieves. Pilate appears to have used this system to curry favour with the Jews and, in this situation, he hoped to use it to further absolve himself. He likely figured that if he presented an extreme contrast—between a clearly innocent man and a notorious thief, insurrectionist, and murderer—he might sway the crowd to request the release of Jesus. Pilate was obviously not an observant student of human nature! The alternatives of whom to release—a local hero of the resistance movement against Rome or an itinerant rabbi who spoke of a kingdom from another world—would turn out to be a *no-brainer* for these fickle people.

Choice – The choice Pilate presented was between Barabbas and Jesus. The name of the criminal means ‘son of a father’ in Aramaic. We should savour God’s providential irony as he presents this local and temporal contrast, between a son of a father and the beloved Son of the Father, as the great choice confronting all mankind. The fact that Jesus ended up taking the place of Barabbas and being sentenced to the punishment that

Barabbas deserved, illustrates the reality that Jesus takes to himself the place of sinners.

Caution – Pilate was still hesitant to condemn Jesus—he knew in his heart that Jesus was innocent and that to condemn him would be a great travesty. His caution arose, first, from his being aware that the reason the chief priests had handed over Jesus was out of envy—that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, that the people had welcomed him with praise, and that he had been teaching with authority while the Jewish leaders were deceiving them. The second reason he was cautious was that his wife came to him with a warning from a worrisome dream that she had had during the night. While God was progressively delivering his truth, as revealed in Scripture, he used various means (Heb 1.1) to communicate—most of these communications were sent through his prophets, but at times he gave direct revelation to others, including unbelievers (e.g., Pharaoh, Balaam, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar). He did not provide his revelation indiscriminately but, rather, at significant points in redemptive history. However, no point was more significant than this occasion, when the Son of God was standing before a human tribunal. When his wife brought her warning, Pilate could not avoid being concerned that the unfolding events were bigger than he perceived them to be and that the man before him was more than he appeared to be.

Crowd – The Jewish leaders understood human psychology better than Pilate did. They knew that it would be easy to create an uproar in the crowd (Mt 16.5). So they likely used a pervasive hatred of Rome and a patriotic fervour, among the people assembled for the Passover feast, as a means of stirring them up to ask for the release of Barabbas, the rebel against Rome, and that Jesus be executed. The behaviour of crowds is difficult to predict, but a particular flashpoint can be reached when a crowd will explode. The events relating to Paul and the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41), is an example. Ideas, incidents, and individuals can all be the cause of stirring up crowds so that they become uncontrolled; acting out of their feelings rather than with their reason. Yet, even while the Jewish leaders, in the thrall of Satan, were attempting to engineer the destruction of the Christ, God was superintending over these events and

was implicating that generation of Jews with the responsibility for the death of his Son.

Connivance – When Pilate again came out of his judgement hall into the colonnade, to face the assembled Jews in the courtyard and to ask them whom he should release, the crowd was primed like an armed cannon. Explosively they cried, “Barabbas.” Within the span of a week the crowd had turned from voicing their ‘Hosannas’ (Mt 21.19) to crying ‘Away with this man!’ *This* man was the Son of God! Evil was declared good, as a thief and murderer became a popular hero; and good was declared evil (Is 5.20), as they cast their vote against the only truly righteous man who ever lived. What they did not choose to know, as they suppressed truth, was that they were actually casting a vote that would condemn them to eternal destruction.

Roman Trial, Phase 3: The Soldiers Mock Jesus [December 4] (Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.27-31a; Mk 15.16-20a; Jn 19.2-3)

State – The *Apostles’ Creed* says that “[Jesus] suffered under Pontius Pilate.” In these three Gospel accounts of the trial proceedings, we encounter Jesus’ suffering when Pilate permitted a company (estimates vary; in the range of 200-600) of soldiers to abuse him in the Praetorium, the official residence of the governor and the appointed place for judicial decisions. When we consider what Paul says about the role of the civil magistrate (Rom 13.1-7) we expect, and hope, that the state will operate on the foundation of law and justice. It is an abomination when government officials misuse their authority and powers for their own evil purposes—whether to fill their bank accounts, play partisan politics, advance their prestige, support their pet projects, or to indulge their lusts and passions. However, the suffering Jesus experienced, while inflicted at the whim of blasphemous men, was a key component of God’s redemptive plan. We see in this twisted ridicule of honour, God declaring his son to be the Messiah, the anointed one, the Christ.

Scarlet – Matthew informs us that the soldiers clothed Jesus in a *scarlet*

robe, whereas Mark and John mention a *purple* robe. There is not a contradiction between the accounts. The difference arises from natural variation in how events are reported by eyewitnesses and from a matter of emphasis. The two terms were used interchangeably to refer to the cloaks worn by royalty, the rich, and leaders of the military. The dye that was used for these robes was expensive, since only a drop could be obtained from the gland of a medium-sized Murex snail. It required about 8,000 snails to extract a gram of dye. The garments dyed with this extract were a violet-red, and varied in hue. Matthew often shows how events in Christ's life fulfilled prophecies. He may have chosen his word to describe the colour of the robe to tie this action with the symbol for sins that need atoning (Lev 14.4, 6; Is 1.18). He may be telling us, figuratively, that Christ was clothed in our sins.

Sovereign – In the Garden of Eden, as a result of Adam's sin, God cursed the ground by having it produce thorns and thistles (Gen 3.18). Christ is here crowned with thorns, as he takes on himself the curse placed on all creation. His temporal anointing is with the blood that runs down his face, rather than with the oil of healing (Ps 133.2). Yet, in spite of the malicious actions of the soldiers, they are compelled by God's overriding providence to recognize Jesus as the crowned and anointed one. What man intended for evil, God intended for good (Gen 50.20).

Sceptre – Kings wield sceptres as symbols of their authority. The sceptre as a symbol of Jesus' sovereign reign was promised to him in the OT (Gen 49.10; Ps 45.6). The soldiers put a staff, instead of a sceptre, in his hand to mock him, without realizing that he first had to take the way of a humble shepherd before he could take his throne of power (Phil 2.6-8). Everyone who ignores Jesus as Lord and despises his laws, in effect, tries to take the golden sceptre from Christ's hand and to thrust in its place a wooden stick or a broken reed. But Christ will have the last laugh (Ps 2.4) and vengeance for their rejection of him as he breaks them with a rod of iron (Ps 2.9)

Scorn – Kings in the past were honoured by their subjects who bowed, or knelt, before them. So the soldiers, playing their vicious game,

mocked Jesus by kneeling in front of him and hailing him as the king of the Jews. While they meant it as scorn, they did not realize that one day they will be bowing before Jesus again (Phil 2.10), when he makes his reign visible to all mankind on the Day of Judgement. There are many today who feign submission to Jesus. Their honouring of the Lord is no more sincere than the actions of the soldiers; since they live for the pleasures of the world, pollute his worship with their prideful inventions, and despise his holy day. Anyone in this world who bows the knee to Jesus, without bowing his heart is a mere pretender who scorns the King of kings.

Spite – The soldiers’ mockery of Jesus included disrespectful actions that no man would dare proffer to any earthly king. In this respect, their actions do not appear to have any connection with even a mockery of honour. Yet, there is a deeper meaning to their ridicule. Their spitting on him is their degraded equivalent of kissing the Son (Ps 2.12), and their repeatedly striking him with his staff is a perversion of greeting a king with a salute. While they were laughing at the novelty of their sport, God the Father was bruising his Son (Is 52.14), in our place, so that Jesus could procure eternal life, sinless glory, and everlasting joy for us.

Submission – Before they led Jesus out to be crucified, the soldiers put back on him his own clothes. They, symbolically, stripped him of royalty and led him out to an extreme of humiliation—death on a cursed cross. Jesus did not react to this, or any of their abuse. He had set his face toward the cross to save his people—the people whom he loves and the chosen ones who had been given to him by the Father from eternity. Men act like kings while they are mere paupers and servile subjects of Satan. In contrast, Jesus submitted to the role of a servant, to abuse, and to death as a criminal while being the true anointed Holy One of God. He did this for us, so that in him we also can be declared kings (1 Pt 2.9; Rev 1.6).

Roman Trial, Phase 3: Allocation of Responsibility

[December 5]

(Praetorium, Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.22-30; Mk 15.12-19; Lk

23.20-25; Jn 19.1-16a)

Ridicule – Pilate subjected Jesus to flogging, slapping, and ridicule; and to abuse by mockery as a king—with a purple robe, crown of thorns, and false hails. Yet, God’s record does little more than just list these evils—it mentions the torture only briefly so as not to engender an overly emotional response. So, we should not dwell on the nature of the whip or even on the pain Jesus suffered, but rather ask *why* he was treated this way? The temporal reason includes Pilate’s thinking that he could get the Jews to look on Jesus with pity and accept his release. But, a more perverse reason is that Pilate had a sadistic streak. We may not expect this, since we live in a ‘civilized’ society which tries to hide the reality that most men are a breath away from exercising unimaginable cruelty. However, the ultimate reason for his mistreatment lies in God’s purposes—to show man’s guilt in rejecting Jesus, and to remind us that he subjected his son to this abuse as punishment for our sins (Is 53.5).

Reasoning – Pilate tried to reason with the Jews by presenting Jesus to them in his degraded state—“Look here is the man. What a sight! Have some pity on this innocent dupe.” It is possible that he expected, in spite of his own maliciousness, that the Jews would be more charitable than he had been.

Rabid – But he severely misread the situation and miscalculated the outcome of events. The Jewish officials present in the courtyard were filled with a rabid rage that was violent, insatiable, and demanding. Their blood lust was as sadistic as Pilate’s, and could be satiated only with the infliction of pain and death through the gruesome crucifixion of Jesus—so they cried, over and over, “Crucify him!”

Reaction – Pilate reacted to their demand by telling them to take Jesus and crucify him themselves—he was still trying to abdicate his responsibility as a judge. The Jews in turn reacted by accusing Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God, and told Pilate that such a claim was worthy of death, according to the law—implying that it was blasphemy for Jesus to claim to be divine (Lev 24.16). Ironically, they were the ones

breaking the law since they committed blasphemy by rejecting Jesus as God.

Request – Pilate was impressed by Jesus' words and behaviour, and awed by the warning his wife had given him from her dream, so when he heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God his superstitious inclinations caused him to become more afraid and he requested to know where Jesus was from. Jesus didn't answer and the silence irritated Pilate, who expected to be obeyed. So, he threatened Jesus by flaunting his power over life and death. Vain threats come easy to those who like to think of themselves as powerful.

Response – Jesus would often not answer his enemies' questions when they demanded an answer, and instead would deal with a more pertinent matter. In this case he dismissed Pilate's claim to have any power and dealt with guilt—both Pilate and Caiaphas were guilty of the greatest sin ever committed. They accused the Son of God of lying, subjected him to a false trial, and butchered him. However, Caiaphas was guilty of the greater sin because he, as a Jew, sinned against a greater knowledge and rejected the true Messiah.

Ruse – It is interesting that even though Jesus accused Pilate of sin, Pilate didn't flare up in anger. He knew that Jesus spoke the truth and so tried again to free Jesus. In response, the Jews resorted to a devious ruse by suggesting that if Pilate let Jesus go he would become an enemy of Caesar. This worried Pilate since a negative report of his ruthless escapades might make its way to Rome. As is often the case with sinners, he resorted to a greater sin—he kept an innocent man in custody—in an attempt to divert the sins encircling him.

Rejection – Pilate tried a final time to avoid sentencing Jesus, not because he cared for Jesus or for justice, but because he had no wish to be implicated in the death of an innocent man. He presented Jesus to the Jews as their king and asked what he should do with him. The Jews, as a people (but not every individual; Rom 11.5), sealed their destiny as they rejected God and his Anointed. They declared that the Messiah was not

their king, that the emperor who held them in bondage was their king, and that they wanted the Christ to be crucified. We are appalled at what they did to Jesus; however it doesn't surprise us. They did nothing essentially different from what Adam did in the Garden. He also rejected God as his king and handed mankind over to eternal death. All who reject Jesus as Lord do the same thing as the Jews did, who assembled outside the judgement hall early that Friday morning in 33 AD.

Responsibility – Pilate concluded that he was not going to convince the Jews to give up their destructive quest, so he washed his hands before the crowd and handed Jesus over for crucifixion. He claimed to be innocent of Jesus' blood and projected blame onto the Jews, who accepted the responsibility and cursed themselves and their children. However, Pilate could not abdicate his own responsibility so easily. The conclusion of the entire farcical trial is that the sin and hatred of Jew and Gentile, Priest and Governor, male and female, rich and poor are responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Crucifixion

Road to Calvary [December 6]

(Jerusalem to Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.31b-34; Mk 15.20b-23; Lk 23.26-33a; Jn 19.16b-17)

Capital Crime – Within less than twelve hours Jesus was arrested, tried, sentenced, and led out for execution. Injustice was swift! If Jesus had been born into a society like ours, he would not have been led away for crucifixion but his case would have made lawyers rich as they filed appeals. Then he might have spent decades on death row or in a 'life' term and been eventually released for good behaviour. We would still be waiting for the debt of sin to be paid. Christians who oppose the death penalty in *every* situation should see the profound inconsistency of their position. If capital punishment—capital crimes that require a corresponding degree of retribution—is, in principle, not legitimate in God's eyes, then Jesus could not have died for our sins.

Cross Carrier – As they led Jesus from the city, he had to carry a timber (weighing about 45Kg) that was a symbol of his being condemned as guilty. However, he was very weak from the abuse he received during his trial and probably stumbled under its weight, so the execution squad grabbed a passer-by and forced him to carry the cross piece. Jesus would later be nailed to this beam and hoisted onto a pole. There is nothing random in God's providential dealings with mankind (or for that matter, in all his governance of the universe!). The man whom they chose was Simon, a pilgrim from Cyrene in North Africa. That he is named, along with his sons, indicates that his brief encounter with Jesus changed his life for eternity. He had gone to Jerusalem because he had a hope in a coming Messiah, little realizing that he would play a part in the Messiah's carrying away the sins of the world.

Crying Crowd – Gawkers wanting to gratify their bloodlust followed to the place of crucifixion. However, among the crowd were women who mourned and wailed over the treatment Jesus was receiving. So often, in the midst of evil and cursing, God opens a window so that a small beam of his sunshine streams in. So it was even in that dark hour. Jesus had not been entirely deserted; he was still loved by some who cared greatly for him (we will meet them again at the foot of the cross). It is a beautiful testimony to Jesus and to Christianity, that there is not a single instance in the Gospels of a woman maltreating, abusing, or cursing Jesus. His example of treating them as human equals (e.g., at a well in Samaria), his teachings (e.g., with the woman caught in adultery), and his saving work have liberated women in a way that no man-made religion has ever done, or ever will.

Compassionate Charge – Even while Jesus was approaching an even greater challenge—the cross—he never lost focus on his purpose for coming into the world, which was to lead his people to eternal salvation. To this end, he gave a compassionate charge to the weeping women walking beside him. His hope was to warn them to flee from the wrath of God on an unrepentant nation, to be manifested in the destruction of Jerusalem. Their sympathy for him was misplaced. Rather, they should have been weeping for their nation that was going to suffer greatly under

the Roman armies led by Titus—particularly the women and children, as Josephus records. Jesus was a green tree—that is, alive—as he walked toward Golgotha knowing fully and certainly the outcome; but the nation he loved was dead, like a dry tree, and was about to be thrown into the fires of Hell because of its sin of rejecting the Messiah

Criminal Couple – He was numbered with the transgressors (Is 53.12), as two criminals were lead out with him to the place of execution. We will meet these two again, so we note only: 1) that God was again demonstrating his amazing providential governance of history as he fulfilled Scripture written almost 800 years before the event, and 2) that Jesus’ association with the criminals indicates that he became sin for us (2 Cor 5.21).

Coming to Calvary – They arrived at Golgotha, the Place of the Skull; or as we more often call it ‘Calvary’. *Calvary* is from the Latin translation (*calvariae locus*) for the ‘place of the skull’, and has come to mean essentially the same thing as Golgotha. While no one knows for certain where the crucifixion took place, we do know that it took place *outside* the Holy city, so that the death of Jesus would be associated with another curse (Lev 24.23; Heb 13.11-12), and he would be viewed as one who had been excommunicated and cast out. Each step, and associated event, from the upper room the night before, to his death on the cross, piled on Jesus another humiliation. It was God’s design to make his son bear every imaginable abuse and curse to demonstrate the incredible weight and evil of our sin, and the depth and glory of his love, by offering him as our substitute on the cross.

Calming Concoction – Before the executioners nailed his hands to the cross piece and hoisted it onto the notch or bracket on the pole, they offered Jesus a drink of wine mixed with pungent spices. Jesus was thirsty (Jn 19.28) from the loss of blood and the perspiration of the effort of coming to the Calvary. So, at first he was ready to accept the drink. However, when he tasted it and realized that it was likely a narcotic to dull the pain of crucifixion or a poison (Ps 69.21) to hurry death, he refused to drink it. Jesus didn’t need the world’s calming concoction to

face his death. He was totally composed, knew exactly what he was doing, and was prepared to face his death with courage and purpose as he redeemed his people for eternity.

Crucified with Criminals [December 7]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.35-44; Mk 15.24-32; Lk 23.33b-37; Jn 19.18-24)

Grace – While men were busy attempting to destroy God’s Son and spewing blasphemy against him, Jesus overflowed with grace. The Gospel writers are excessive in their reserve—they only mention that Jesus was *crucified* and do not give any details about his painful and shameful sufferings. Therefore, we will avoid the approach of many popular pious preachers who appeal to the emotions and to an almost morbid curiosity. The Gospels, instead, direct us to consider the grace of God that is evident even from the midst of the horror. In the first instance, Jesus pleads with the Father to forgive those who were crucifying him. In later meditations we will see how Jesus deals graciously with one of the thieves crucified beside him and how he addresses the future needs of his mother. Jesus was no ‘victim of circumstances’. He went to the cross willingly and deliberately so that he could procure redemption for mankind with the most precious commodity ever offered in any transaction—his own blood! This was the extreme exercise of love (Rom 5.8), and Jesus displays God’s love by praying that the Father would not destroy those hoisting him onto the cross, but that he would forgive them. We find Jesus fulfilling his role as the great high priest and as the mediator of the eternal covenant, as he makes intercession for transgressors (Is 53.12). It is possible that at least one of the soldiers later repented, since he did confess that Jesus was the Son of God (Mk 15.39).

Gambling – Considerably more detail is provided about the soldiers casting lots for Jesus’ clothing than is provided about the crucifixion itself. I don’t think we are to use typology to explain this portion of the crucifixion account. The garments of Jesus, here, do not represent any particular aspect of the Church. Rather the reason that this information is

provided is so that we will believe that God controls all of the events of history. It was customary for the clothing of a condemned man to be forfeited and to become the property of his Roman executioners. A question we might ask is, why? In other cultures the belongings of the executed are given to his widow or other relatives. The reason that the Roman soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing is because God was superintending events so that they would be worked out exactly as he had declared, a thousand years before the event. Similarly, when the soldiers offered Jesus wine vinegar, they were fulfilling Scripture (Ps 69.21). We should thank God that nothing—absolutely nothing—was amiss on that Friday afternoon almost two thousand years ago. God was saving his people!

Guilt – Jesus was sinless and did not deserve to die, yet he chose to align himself with sinful men and to take upon himself our guilt. This is illustrated by his being crucified between two robbers. It is an amazing truth that the Holy One of God was willing to become associated with sin for us.

Gloating – The Jewish leaders should have been in the holy city participating in the events of Passover week. Instead we find them near the cross, gloating that they had destroyed the 'trouble-maker'. They are accompanied by others in the crowd who challenge Jesus to defend himself. The account speaks of:

- *Mocking* – Insults and sneering comments were heaped on Jesus, along with bodily gestures, such as head wagging. The people did all they could to scorn and ridicule the one whom they should have been worshiping.
- *Mankind* – Listed among those who mocked him were Jews and Romans; religious leaders: priests, teachers, and elders; lawyers and soldiers; the elite of society and commoners; and the outwardly moral and thieves. Some were walking by, some standing, and others sitting near the cross. All classes of mankind are implicated in the crucifixion of Jesus and show their hatred against him.
- *Misquote* – They misquoted him in order to find something with which to accuse him. He never said that *he* would destroy the temple

and rebuild it in three days. Rather, he had said that if *others* destroyed the temple (Jn 2.19) he would rebuild it; and he wasn't speaking of the physical temple, but of his own body (Jn 2.21). Ironically, he was going to destroy the physical temple in judgement, within that generation (in 70 AD).

- *Miracles* – They threw in his face his miracles—he had saved others by healing. They could not deny the evidence they had seen. But instead of accepting him as coming from God, they continued to see him as a devil.
- *Manifestation* – As with all sceptics, valid evidence is never enough, and they asked for more proof that he was the Son of God. Their claim that if he came down from the cross they would believe in him, was a sham. They were no different from people today who reject Jesus, not for a lack of evidence but from an unwillingness to repent.
- *Misplacement* – They said that his trust in God was misplaced because God didn't rescue him. Like most people, they drew false causal inferences from their observations. They ignored the truth that the ways of God are beyond our understanding (Is 55.8, 9).
- *Messiah* – they used a number of messianic terms, including Son of God, Christ of God, the Chosen One, King of Israel in their ridicule. They did what people do today when they blaspheme the name of Christ, using it as a curse and a comma, or pause, between their rants.

In all this, they could not understand the profound spiritual truth—Jesus could not have saved himself if he was to save mankind. His sufferings and death were God's appointed means of paying our debt of sin and rescuing us.

The Sign on the Cross [December 8] (Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.37; Mk 15.26; Lk 23.38; Jn 19.19-22)

In the British museum you can see many historic artefacts, including the Codex Alexandrinus, the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon, the *Magna Carta*, and letters written by Queen Elizabeth I. One significant object can be viewed there that is of a more particular interest today—the Rosetta stone; found by Napoleon in Egypt and surrendered in 1801 to

the British. On the stone are three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphs (the language of the priests), Demotic (the working language of the government), and Greek (the common language of commerce throughout the Mediterranean world). This was a stupendous find as it provided a key for translating the Egyptian hieroglyphs. The stone speaks of a decree to honour Ptolemy Epiphanes for his gifts to the temple on his accession and coronation in 196 BC. On this stone we find a three-fold inscription of a king going to his throne, who offers a material sacrifice. However, there is another instance of a three-fold inscription relating to a greater king who was heading to his throne, and who also made a personal sacrifice. The words recorded in that inscription are: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS:

Superscribed Title – Why was this sign placed on the cross over the head of Jesus? It was a notice of the charge of which he had been convicted. It spoke of reproach and mocking (Jn 19.3). In the charge we find:

- His personal name, *Jesus* (Lk 1.31), from the root word meaning *saviour*.
- His place of origin, Nazareth, which was a despised territory (Jn 1.46).

The first part of the charge places Jesus in history as a man.

- His title, as king. The Jews accused Jesus of setting himself up as a king.
- His dominion. He claimed a territory belonging to the Herods and Rome.

The second part of the charge implies that he was put to death because he was a threat against Rome and the Jewish Sanhedrin. The crowd wanted to make him a king in their own likeness (Jn 6.15), but his kingship is ultimately the work of God, against which the nations of the world conspire (Ps 2.1, 2).

Spectator's Time – Executions were popular, spectator, events; like the Roman games. The crucifixion was held in the middle of the day, near the city, beside a busy road leading to Emmaus, Joppa, and Caesarea. Thus, the crucifixion was not a private matter, but a public spectacle.

While we try to keep our sins secret, Jesus took upon himself our sins in a public manner. God declared to the world that the debt of sin was being paid. The spectacle of the sinners' substitute on the cross is to be declared to the world!

Significant Translations – To make the death of Jesus even more visible to the world, God arranged to have the inscription written in Aramaic (possibly Hebrew), Latin, and Greek. Like the languages on the Rosetta stone, these were the languages of the priests, the government, and the common language the people used for commerce and general communication. These languages represent the forces of evil which constantly battle against the King—the languages are those of the false prophet, the beast, and the sea of humanity; or false religions, government, and culture. The presence of these three languages tells us that God was declaring publicly that Jesus is not just Lord of the Church, but Lord over government and culture. It is our responsibility to ensure that Jesus is declared publically and visibly throughout the earth; for example through supporting translation of the Bible into the world's languages and confronting our proud politicians and smug culture with the truth that Jesus is Lord in every domain of life.

Subtle Trick – The priests protested that the message on the sign was wrong. They wanted the wording changed from what was declared, so that it would include “this man claimed to be king of the Jews”. They were far from subtle! They could not stand the thought that Jesus could be their king (Lk 19.14; Jn 19.12, 15). Their protest is the same as the protest of all unregenerate men who will not acknowledge Jesus as king. The world's religions claim that you do not need Jesus as Lord and Saviour; as long you do your best God will let you slide through. Our politicians say that ‘you can't legislate morality,’ but what they mean is that God's Law has no place in the decisions and policies of government. Culture says, ‘but everyone is doing it’ and they reject Christ's laws. Our own hearts can deceive us, and play the same subtle trick of the priests; the same trick Satan played on Adam and Eve—asking, “Did God really say?” When we reject or disobey God's laws and ignore his desires we rebel against our King and reject him just as the priests did.

Sovereign's Testimony – Pilate, for the first time in the entire process of the trial and execution of Jesus, showed some backbone and answered: “What I have written, I have written.” God’s sovereignty overruled his capitulation and compromising spirit and, without realizing or comprehending it, he had declared truth (Jn 1.49). Even from the mouths of unbelievers God ordains his praise. The ultimate truth is that Jesus is King. He is king of the true Jews, all those who believe and place their eternal surety in him. But he is more than king of believers. He is king over the Jews, whether or not they believed in him, just as he is king over all men, whether or not they even acknowledge his existence. Jesus was Nebuchadnezzar’s king (Dan 2.44). He ruled over Cyrus, Ceasar Augustus, Herod and Pilate. And, he rules over the leaders of the earth today (Phil 2.9-11). The sign on the cross is the divine sovereign’s testimony to his Son: Jesus of Nazareth is King of kings and Lord of Lords!

The Repentant Criminal [December 9] (Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Lk 23.39-43)

Provocation – When Jesus was crucified with the two criminals, their three crosses were likely arranged in a semi-circle. The two men, on either side, could therefore see Jesus’ face and read the superscription nailed to his cross. One of the criminals displayed the attitude of most men who ‘see’ Jesus as he is presented in the NT and who hear of his claim to be King. He hardened his heart in his pride and went to his death provoking God with his rebellion against the Saviour.

Penitence – The second criminal had taken the time, since he had been nailed to his cross, to reflect on his situation and eternal destiny, and to consider the attribution of Jesus’ lordship, presented in the sign above his head. He began to entertain feelings of regret over his life’s actions and confessed that he was afraid of God and the consequences of having disobeyed him. His penitence was the first step on the path to true repentance. Some people realize that their pride and selfishness has not led to a life of happiness, but end their lives with nothing more than

regrets. Others are led by the spirit, through a fear of Hell or a fear of eternal punishment, to go beyond mere regret for their actions and to consider Jesus to be the solution to their problem of sin.

Punishment – Most people, however, begrudge the truth that they are sinners and deserve to be punished for their sins. Even though they may fear death and what lies beyond it, they believe that their motives have been right and that their actions through life, whatever they were, have been justified by their particular circumstances. In contrast, the repentant criminal recognized that he had done wrong—ultimately sinning against God—and acknowledged that his criminal actions were being punished justly. He also confessed that Jesus was without sin. These are the two key ingredients in true repentance—coming to believe that we are sinners against God and that Jesus, as the Son of God, is the sinless one who died in our place.

Prayer – The repentant criminal would not have had time to work through all the doctrines or implications of his immature understanding of who Jesus was and how his death would provide propitiatory atonement for his sin. Yet, his faith in Jesus was sufficient to cause him to turn to Jesus in prayer. His repentance led to belief and faith in Jesus, and his faith in Jesus led him to seek salvation from Jesus. The simple prayer of a dying sinner to a dying Saviour consists of:

- *Petition* – He humbly went to Jesus asking for nothing more than that he be remembered. He was not seeking glory or riches; he would have been content to be a doorkeeper in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- *Praise* – He honoured and worshiped Jesus by praying to him, confessing that he is the true King, with a spiritual kingdom that transcends death and continues into eternity.
- *Power* – He recognized that Jesus had the power to save him from sin and from death. He saw in Jesus' death not the end, but the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

Prospect – The simple and straightforward answer that Jesus gives, in return to the repentant criminal, is full of profound truth:

- *Priestly* – Jesus speaking from the cross is Christ speaking from his throne. He is the Anointed one, to whom all authority in Heaven and Earth has been granted. When he speaks in judgment of this world, one person departs to eternal cursing, another to eternal blessing.
- *Protected* – Although Jesus was in personal physical and mental anguish, he did not neglect the repentant sinner. His word was given with the authority of an oath and promise. The salvation of the criminal was secure and guaranteed by the word of Jesus. This is the foundation for all salvation—the work and word of Jesus; not our works, faith, or claims.
- *Particular* – Jesus uses the singular form of ‘you’, speaking specifically to one repentant criminal; not to the other one. Salvation is not universal; but only provided to those who turn to Jesus with personal repentance.
- *Precipitate* – The repentant man was to receive his reward immediately. The belief in either soul sleep or an intermediate state, such as purgatory, is false. This man had been a great sinner (a thief and blasphemer; and likely a murder), and had had no time to perform acts of penance, yet he was going directly to Heaven. Our translation from Earth to Heaven (or Hell) is, likewise, immediate upon death (Lk 16.22-23; Phil 1.23).
- *Presence* – He would be immediately with Jesus. Jesus did not spend the time between his death and resurrection in Hell, as some suppose. Jesus went immediately to be with the Father, to receive his Kingdom (Jn 17.24); and he was there to welcome the repentant criminal into Glory.
- *Place* – The repentant criminal was to be *in* Paradise. Heaven is a created place, but it is a place. It has spiritual attributes but also it has physical dimensions of some kind since a number of persons with physical bodies (Jesus, Enoch, Elijah, and possibly others [Mt 27.52-53]) live in it.
- *Paradise* – Jesus calls Heaven *paradise* (compare, 2 Cor 12.3). Through the cross, the Last Adam restored the lost paradise that the First Adam had destroyed. The spoil and pollution of sin has been removed by the sacrifice of Christ, and the pleasant garden and the

Tree of Life are again available to mankind (Rev 2.7; Rev 22.2, 19), in a better, heavenly, paradise.

Jesus and His Mother [December 10] **(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Jn 19.25-27)**

Friends – Jesus was not entirely deserted as the darkness at noon settled over the land. It was not in God’s eternal plan to leave him friendless during his crucifixion. The Roman soldiers gambled over his clothes, the Jewish priests and leaders gloated at his demise, and the crowd jeered at him. Meanwhile, his former acquaintances, including most of the disciples, and his relatives stood at a distance watching (Lk 23.49; Mk 15.41). But there were at least five friends, who had enough courage to face the hatred and ridicule of the crowds, who came as near to the cross as they were permitted. They came to minister to his needs. There is some debate about who the five were, but it appears that they were:

- *His mother, Mary.* We don’t find her tearing her clothing or wailing over the treatment of her son. She was strengthened by God’s grace, and knew that this was the event she had been anticipating all her life, to fulfill Simeon’s prophecy: “A sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2.35).
- *Mary’s sister, Salome* (Mk 15.40). She was the wife of Zebedee, and the mother of two of Jesus’ disciples, James and John.
- *Mary the wife of Cleopas.* Eusebius reports a tradition that this Mary was another sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus; although this is questioned by others. She is named as the mother of James and Joses (or Joseph). This James may be the second of two of Jesus’ disciples named James (*The Lesser*). If so, then her husband appears to have been Alphaeus.
- *Mary Magdalene.* Jesus had expelled seven demons from her, and she was a devoted servant to him throughout his earthly ministry.
- *John, his cousin.* He was the son of Salome, and the youngest of the disciples. He is the John who wrote the Gospel from which this account is taken. He refrains from naming his mother and himself in the account.

It is probably significant that it is women and a youth who are

ministering to Jesus and not the confident Peter or the more ‘mature’ disciples. His other disciples were disillusioned by the events that had transpired over the past twelve hours and they had lost hope. This tells us where real faith lies; not in gender, age, or bravado, but in love. It is important that we learn to love Jesus and to stick with him, regardless of the discouragements that will come our way in this life. He will never leave us friendless, but will love us to the end.

Family – When Jesus saw his mother and John near the foot of the cross he showed the nature of his infinite love for his own. It is probable that Joseph, Mary’s husband, was dead and at this point his brothers did not believe in him as the Messiah (although after the resurrection there was a dramatic and rapid change [Acts 1.14] and James and Jude became important leaders in the early Church and wrote two of the books in the NT). Jesus appears to have been concerned that when he left the earth his mother would need to be cared for by someone who would not only provide for her material needs but would also ensure that she had spiritual encouragement and succour. He thus speaks to Mary and commends John to her, as her son; and delivers Mary to John, as his mother. John immediately accepted the sacred commission given to him by his Lord. By his actions, Jesus teaches of:

- *Fidelity* – Jesus was not above the Law. As its author, he lived by the Ten Commandments. He believed it to be his duty to honour his mother and carried out this obligation even as he was dying, by ensuring that she was provided for in her old age. His example shows us that it is our familial duty to care for our aged parents with respect, and to provide for their comfort and maintenance.
- *Faithfulness* – Jesus bestowed an honour on his cousin John by trusting the care of his mother to him. We know from his Gospel, epistles, and Revelation that John was a caring and loving person, full of great faith. Jesus had assessed John’s heart and knew it well. So, we also, must ensure that the care of our family members is put into the hands of those who will be faithful to Jesus.
- *Favour* – Jesus’ act of compassion toward his mother is an example of Divine favour to his servants, and is for our encouragement. God

may remove one blessing or comfort in our lives, but he will replace it with another which we might not expect.

Familiarity – While there are lessons for us from the example of how Jesus took care of his mother, there is another, deeper, lesson that we must also observe from the interaction between Jesus and his mother. We note that he did not call her ‘mother’ but ‘dear woman’. In his greeting there was kindness but also a distance. Jesus had to make Mary see that she could not cling to him as her son, but had instead to recognize him as her Lord. Mary would not be permitted by God, or by the Roman soldiers acting as God’s servants, to stay at the foot of the cross. She and the others, who loved him so dearly, would be forced to move back with the rest of the crowd (Mt 27.55-56; Mk 15.40-41) to observe the last painful hours, as Jesus procured salvation for his people. There is no place at the cross for anyone, other than the Mediator. Jesus could not be assisted by any human to procure our salvation, no matter how much she loved him or cared for him. Scripture had to be fulfilled (Ps 38.11), and Jesus had to pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death alone. We must learn the same lesson Mary had to learn, and look to Jesus, not as a son or as a mere man, but as her Lord—the creator of the universe and her saviour. We also must recognize Jesus as our Lord, above all else.

The Death of Jesus [December 11]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.45-51a; Mk 15.33-38; Lk 23.44-46; Jn 19.28-30)

Darkness – The crucifixion of Jesus was accompanied by darkness for three hours, from noon until 3:00pm. Then, Jesus died. A normal solar eclipse lasts about 15 minutes, and sandstorms aren’t totally dark; so whatever caused this darkness was extraordinary. God provided a sign-miracle to announce the judgement of Israel for rejecting its Messiah and also the judgement of all of mankind for the sin that Jesus took upon himself. There is no darker hour in all of history than when the God-man became sin (2 Cor 5.21) for his people. And, even though we can’t see it, there is a spiritual darkness hanging over the entire world that portends a coming day of judgement when God will hold all men accountable who

have not had their sins taken to the cross by Jesus.

Derelection – As Jesus took upon himself our sin—as a substitute dying in our place—the extent of his derelection was realized and he cried out to the Father asking why he had been forsaken. This plea (taken from Psalm 22.1) is not easy for us to fully comprehend. We know that ultimately Jesus was not forsaken as a person since in his divine nature he could not cease to be God and could not be separated from the Father or Holy Spirit, who are present everywhere. Also, his plea is not voicing a mere feeling of abandonment; nor are we to think that it was just a temporary phenomenon that would end in a few hours, or days—like an illness. The way to understand his being forsaken is not to view it as affecting his *personal* relationship with the Father but as speaking of his *judicial* relationship, as our covenant mediator, before God. His cry of derelection is an affirmation that he was truly viewed as a sinner by God. Since God cannot look at sin, Jesus experienced judicial separation from God as he was condemned as being guilty for our sin. His punishment for our sins could end only once the debt of sin had been paid through his blood, which God valued as of infinite worth.

Derision – Some of the gawking bystanders twisted Jesus’ plea to the Father into a call to Elijah so that they could taunt him with a demand for a miracle. In general, the world hates Jesus because he represents God’s holiness and righteous requirements. So, men continue to mock Jesus’ claim to be God, make jokes out his miracles, treat him as a wimp, use his name as a curse, flout his commands, and laugh at his warnings. They hide behind this abusive behaviour because they know that ultimately he is their Creator and Lord, but are unwilling to admit it. Mankind is like a person with terminal cancer or AIDS who has decided to live a life of wanton debauchery to hide from the truth that death is around the corner.

Drink – Ignoring the abuse, Jesus asked for a drink. The soldiers had a jar of inexpensive sour wine and sponges available so that they could relieve some of the suffering of those who were crucified and, at the same time, extend their painful death. John tells us that his request fulfilled Scripture (Ps 69.3, 21). Jesus asked for this drink not to ease his

own suffering but so that he would have strength for his final act of defiance over the powers of darkness.

Declaration – After he had received the drink he cried out in victory, “It is finished!” Every law had been kept perfectly, the final sacrifice had been made, all the ceremonial types had been fulfilled, the debt of sin was paid in full, the work of redemption was complete, the elect were saved, and the Kingdom earned. At that instant, the curtain in the temple was torn in two (Mt 27.51; Lk 23.45) symbolizing the end of the sacrificial system with its shadows and obstructions. The way to God has been opened so that we now can have bold and direct access to God the Father, through the Son.

Dependence – Jesus marshalled his strength for one final cry, and said loudly, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” His confidence in the justice and love of the Father remained steadfast to the end. He knew with absolute certainty that he had fulfilled all righteousness and that the work he had covenanted to complete was done, accepted, and pleasing to the Father. So on concluding that statement of dependence on the Father, he bowed his head and dismissed his spirit. Jesus was crucified by wicked men, but he was not *killed* by them (Jn 10.11, 17-18). Jesus was in control of every event that happened throughout his life, including the moment of his death. He did not pass into a coma after days of pain and exhaustion, but consciously and voluntarily gave up his life at the exact time predestined from eternity. This fact is evidenced by Pilate’s surprise that Jesus had died so quickly (Mk 15.44). Jesus looked beyond the veil of death and expected that within a few seconds he would once again be present with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and that together they would rejoice with him. We must not venture too far into God’s hidden counsels, but I believe that we can say with confidence that the Father and the Spirit welcomed Jesus into Glory with cries of “Well done!” God has displayed his love for mankind in a way that no one could ever have imagined. But now that we have the record of this amazing work we, who believe in Jesus as Lord, can confidently face death with the same assurance that our Saviour had (2 Cor 5.1-8; Phil 1.20-23). The Gospel writers did not give us details about Jesus’ death. That would serve no

purpose beyond titillating our curiosity and arousing our pity. The record of the death of Jesus is rather given that we might believe and have strong faith.

Witnesses to Jesus' Death [December 12]
(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.51-56; Mk 15.38-41; Lk 23.45b, 47-49)

There is no place for a 'swoon theory' or some other evasion of the truth that Jesus died and was buried. God provided seven witnesses to the death of his Son, including his entirely reliable word and the following six witnesses:

Curtain – The curtain in the Herodian temple, that separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple, was likely decorated with Cherubim like those woven into the curtain in the temple built by Solomon (2 Chron 3.14). The Cherubim symbolized the separation of Paradise, or Heaven, from sinful men (Gen 3.24). This curtain was torn from top to bottom; indicating that the action came directly from God in Heaven, and symbolizing the removal of the Cherubim and the opening, for believers in Jesus, of the way of access to God's presence (Heb 4.14-16; Heb 10.19-22) and to the Tree of Life (Rev 2.7; Rev 22.2, 19). The tearing of the curtain was also a sign that the old ceremonial economy of animal sacrifices was completed with the sacrifice of Christ's own body. There is no longer a need for repeated sacrifices for sins.

Convulsions – In sympathy with the saviour, the earth trembled at his death. This earthquake declared the wickedness of the crucifiers and the glory of what was achieved on the cross; and that not only man is affected by sin but the whole creation groans under the burden of sin, waiting for its redemption.

Corpses – In its convulsions, the earth gave up its dead, as many holy people were raised to life. These saints had died waiting for the consolation of Israel (Lk 2.25) and had been known to those still living in the city. They must have waited in the graveyard during the remainder of Friday and on Saturday (or were raised on Sunday morning from their

open sepulchres), and then on Sunday after the resurrection of Jesus they went into Jerusalem and appeared to their relatives and friends. We are not to think of this as some form of scary event like zombies marching into the city. I believe that these saints were given their perfect, eternal, spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15.44) and, after their appearance in the city, they were taken into Glory. Those who saw them would not have been terrified at seeing the walking dead but, rather, would have been encouraged by the evidence of the promised resurrection for those who had died in the hope of the coming Messiah. This passing observation by Matthew reminds us that, through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ conquered and destroyed death (our final enemy) and promises us a future resurrection at his appointed time.

Centurion – When the centurion charged with the execution of Jesus saw the earthquake and heard his final words, he concluded that Jesus was the Son of God. The Jews should have revered their Messiah, but they laughed at him. In contrast, a Gentile with a pagan background realized that Jesus was not a typical condemned criminal who would curse God and man with his dying breath, as he hung between earth and heaven. The centurion probably did not have a full comprehension of who Jesus was and may have meant something like, ‘a son of a god’. However he is recorded by the Gospel writers as being more explicit in his declaration. He understood, at least, that Jesus was a righteous man and not worthy of death and may have unwittingly said more than he understood. We can be hopeful that Christ’s prayer for the men who executed him (Lk 23.34) was worked out through these events and that the centurion thought further about the significance of what he had seen and heard that Friday afternoon, and came to believe in Jesus as his saviour.

Crowd – The crowd watching the spectacle of the crucifixion saw and heard far more than they expected—three hours of darkness, an earthquake, Jesus’ compassion from the cross, and his last words of victory. As witnesses they were appalled at what they had seen, and beat their breasts. However, it is likely that the impressions on them had no lasting effect. The words, ‘and went away’ seem to imply that they soon

forgot what they had seen. That they had been witnesses to the most important event in history—the purchase of man’s salvation—and dismissed it, compounds their guilt into eternity. It will be the same for anyone who reads the Gospel accounts and rejects them.

Caregivers – Jesus’ disciples—John is the exception—are not mentioned as being present at the crucifixion. They were probably present, standing among the crowd, watching at a distance. For example, Matthew may have been an eyewitness, as was Peter who relayed his account of the events to Mark. The fact that they are not named, however, is a telling indictment on their having deserted Jesus at his arrest (Mk 14.50), their extreme disappointment at the events unfolding around them, and their weak faith. Their boast, the night before, that they would be willing to die for Jesus (Mt 26.35), was proving to be a mirage at this time. In contrast, a number of women are named among the many that had cared for Jesus’ needs from the time he began his public ministry in Galilee about three years before. Some of these women showed the extent of their devotion to Jesus by being the last at the cross on Friday afternoon and the first at the sepulchre on Sunday morning. It is a credit to these faithful women, and to many other faithful women throughout history, that they loved their Lord no matter what circumstances befell them. However, it is a sad commentary on the state of the Church in general, in which men are often conspicuously absent. Thank God for faithful women and beg him to raise up more faithful men!

Burial

Death Certificate [December 13]
(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Jn 19.31-37)

Preparation – The Jewish leaders continued to show the incredible extent of their hypocrisy. Their concern about the proper observance of a ceremonial ritual, while dismissing justice and mercy by handing over the Holy One of God, is almost unbelievable. Jesus spoke of their hypocrisy when he rebuked the Pharisees with words from Isaiah (Mt

15.7-9). The Friday of the crucifixion was the preparation day before a high-Sabbath of the Passover week, and the Jews were concerned that their land would be polluted if the bodies of Jesus and the two criminals remained on their crosses into the Sabbath, and overnight (Dt 21.22-23). Since crucified men could ‘survive’ for some time in a lingering death, and the Sabbath would begin at sundown, they wanted the crucified men dispatched as quickly as possible. So, they requested that Pilate have the legs of the crucified men broken so that they could no longer hold up the weight of their bodies and would be asphyxiated. Soldiers were dispatched to fulfill the gruesome task of smashing the legs of the crucified men with a mallet. Our sensibilities are appalled at how men could inflict such cruelty and pain on others. However, we know that extreme evil resides in all men who have not been converted by the Holy Spirit—only a few cell layers below the surface of their skin. We see the manifestation of evil when Moslems wipe out a congregation of Christians in Nigeria or a group of New Jersey teens gang rape a seven-year old girl. If it were not for the general grace of God, that restrains most of this wickedness, mankind would not exist—we would have wiped out one another long ago.

Properties – When the soldiers came to break Jesus’ legs they found that he was already dead. However, to make sure, one of them pierced his side with a spear, bringing a flow of blood and water. Some suggest that Jesus died of a broken heart and that his blood had flowed into the sac surrounding the heart or into his abdominal cavity. It is more likely that the soldier thrust the spear upward into Jesus’ body on an angle, hitting the stomach and heart. Whatever the explanation is for why both blood and water flowed out of his body, John considered it important to report the flow of fluid. However, the significance is probably not to be found in the speculations of some. For example, they suggest that there are spiritual and sacramental symbols in the blood and water—the blood represents justification and the water sanctification through cleansing; the blood represents the Lord’s Supper and the water baptism. Others see in the opening of Jesus’ side an allegorical re-enactment of God’s having taken Eve from Adam’s side. They claim that in the case of the last Adam, when he had fallen asleep, God brought forth the Church. These

ideas are, at best, fanciful. John mentions the blood and water for other reasons entirely. The first reason is to counter the false teachings (specifically Gnosticism and Docetism), already arising by mid-first century, that claimed that Jesus did not have a real body and was some form of a phantasm or ghost. Other claims would also begin circulating that Jesus didn't really die (the 'swoon theory'). John wanted to make sure that his readers knew that Jesus had a real human body (1 Jn 1.1) and that he had truly died. We must not miss the point that the Roman soldiers were satisfied that Jesus was really dead. Without a real death there cannot be payment for sin (Jer 31.30; Ezk 18.20), and without a real death there cannot be a real resurrection. Without a real resurrection we are without eternal hope (1 Cor 15.12-19).

Proof – The second reason John relays the precise information about what happened after the death of Jesus is to reinforce his own eyewitness account. John was likely the only disciple who was near enough to the cross to see what had actually happened; so what he reports is not second-hand. He gives us this detail so that we can be sure that he was present at the crucifixion and that his testimony is credible. His claim is that since he provides accurate details about the crucifixion, other details that he reports about the life of Jesus are also accurate. So, when he tells us about the miracles that Jesus performed, about his teaching, or about the resurrection, we are to believe that he is telling the truth and giving an accurate record of what happened. John wants his readers to believe what he says so that they will believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be—the God-man, the Christ. We believe all kinds of things reported by others and accept them as fact. For example, for most of us living in North America, we have to accept the word of others that a place called New Zealand actually exists in the south Pacific. John's record about the life, death and resurrection, of Jesus is at least as accurate as any account we have about the land of the Kiwis.

Prophecy – The third reason why John gives the details about the post-death events at Golgotha is to demonstrate that the Scriptures were fulfilled. John is the only Gospel writer who records Jesus' discourse in the upper room the previous night. Jesus taught that the coming events—

his betrayal and departure—were according to God’s plan. John reinforces this by showing that even the small details of the crucifixion were under God’s providential control—such as the soldiers gambling for Jesus’ clothes (Jn 19.24), that his bones were not broken, and his side was pierced. God shows his sovereignty over every detail in the lives of his creatures—Roman soldiers who had no interest in acknowledging the true God were constrained by his hand to fulfill exactly what he had planned. Regardless of what plans men devise, the will of the Lord stands supreme and overrules them all (Prov 19.21).

Jesus’ Body Prepared and Laid to Rest [December 14]
(Jerusalem and Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.57-61; Mk 15.42-47; Lk 23.50-55; Jn 19.38-42)

Servants – We live in an age when the idea that God rules providentially has been pushed far from conscience consideration. It is easy to forget that God controls *every* event that happens, especially with governments regulating more of the economy and personal behavior (e.g., requiring bike helmets, outlawing particular types of clothing, or dictating the amount of salt we may consume); with the availability of health, auto, mortgage, and unemployment insurance; and with the claim that science will solve every problem from genetic disorders to climate change. The account of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus preparing Jesus’ body for burial and laying it to rest is a strong reminder that God is in control. The appearance of these two men speaks of:

- *Piety* – Joseph and Nicodemus were righteous men who were looking for the coming of the Messiah and lived lives consistent with their belief.
- *Preparation* – Both were members of the Sanhedrin and knew of the plot of the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus but did not agree with it (Lk 23.51; Jn 7.45-53), because their understanding of who Jesus was being shaped by the Holy Spirit. It is possible that after Nicodemus had his first encounter with Jesus (Jn 3.1-14) he and Joseph started to study the Scriptures together and discovered that Jesus was the Messiah and the Lamb of God who would be crucified (Jn 3.14). They would likely have determined that Jesus would die when the

Passover lambs were being killed (i.e., at 3:00 pm) and thus they were prepared for his death.

- *Privacy* – They had both been secret disciples of Jesus because they were members of the Council and feared the Jews. They had not, until this point, placed their faith explicitly in Jesus as the Messiah.
- *Publicity* – Jesus’ disciples supported him publicly while he was alive, but at his arrest became fearful and were absent at his death. In contrast, Joseph and Nicodemus became open professors of Jesus on seeing his death. It is belief in the *death* of Jesus in our place that is a unique feature of Christianity and a key determining factor for true faith.
- *Prosperity* – Both men were wealthy. Just as a rich woman had anointed Jesus’ body with expensive perfume in preparation for his burial, so God planned that the burial of his body would be conducted with respect. God prepared the wealth of the world to be used to honour his Son, the King.
- *Purpose* – They did not decide at the last minute to bury Jesus. They had planned it (including buying supplies) and were ready to put their plan, and God’s plan, into action. If it were not for their preparation, the body of Jesus would likely have been thrown into the Hinnom Valley (or Gehenna)—a symbol for Hell—the refuse dump for the city. God had purposed that these two men would care lovingly for their Lord’s body.

Supplication – Nicodemus likely stood guard over the body of Jesus while Joseph went to Pilate to ask for the release of it. Joseph’s action took courage since he was not a relative, who might have normally been expected to seek a proper burial; he might have been viewed as a co-conspirator in the treason that Jesus was charged with; and he was making open profession, which the Sanhedrin would hear about, of being aligned with Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. The confirmation of death, obtained from the Roman centurion, is important since it supports the truth that Jesus had truly died.

Supplies – Joseph and Nicodemus brought the supplies they had previously purchased to the place of crucifixion—a large quantity of oil

and spices and clean linen cloths. We are told that Jesus was buried in accord with Jewish customs. His body would have been washed and then wrapped with strips of linen, with the oils and spices interspersed between the layers of cloth. The reference to strips of cloth in one account (Jn 19.40) does not contradict the reference to a large cloth, or shroud in another (Mt 27.59). It is likely that after the final strip of linen was warped around his body, the entire body was warped in a larger piece of cloth. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the Shroud of Turin is a legitimate artifact of the burial of Jesus. By preparing Jesus' body for burial, Joseph and Nicodemus would have become ceremonially unclean (Num 19.11) and would not have been able to eat the Passover. However, they knew that tending to the true Passover Lamb was of far greater importance than any ceremonial ritual. Their behavior is in sharp contrast to that of the Jewish leaders who were concerned about getting the bodies removed from the crosses as quickly as possible so that there would not be a ceremonial defilement of the land, but who had only hatred for Jesus.

Sepulcher – Joseph had prepared a new tomb, cut into the rock, in a garden beside the place of crucifixion, so they carried the body there, placed the body on a shelf in the tomb, and rolled a stone disk into place to cover the entrance. Only these two men attended the proceedings. Two women also observed where the body of Jesus was laid. While men often wonder if anyone will attend their funerals, the funeral of Jesus was a desolate event. Yet, in God's providence he was placed in a tomb that was owned by a rich man and was in a graveyard, to fulfill Scripture (Is 53.9). His body was placed in a tomb that death had not previously polluted, setting the stage for the coming glory of the resurrection. His burial was the last step of his suffering and humiliation, and is part of the Gospel truth—he was buried (1 Cor 15.4).

Grave Watchers [December 15]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 27.61-65; Mk 15.47; Lk 23.55-56)

Sitting – Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (the mother of Joses) had travelled with the disciples from Galilee. They were at the foot of the

cross, until they were told by the guards to move away. Then they followed Joseph and Nicodemus as they carried Jesus' body to the garden tomb at Golgotha. They sat nearby so that they would know where he was laid and then they left to spend the rest of the afternoon preparing spices and perfumes for anointing his body, that they planned to bring to the tomb on Sunday morning (after the Saturday Sabbath). Jesus' disciples were nowhere to be seen. After some of them had watched the crucifixion they left Golgotha in their despondency. Only these two men and two women are mentioned as having laid the body of Jesus to rest. We need to have the dedication exhibited by these two women who loved Jesus so much that they followed him to the end, even to the grave.

Sabbath – Most people in the Church today claim that there is no command in the NT that reiterates the fourth Commandment—to keep the Sabbath Day holy. They claim that Sabbath-keeping (resting from legitimate commercial and recreational activities of the other six days of the week) is a ceremonial ritual that no longer applies under the NT. We cannot consider today all of the arguments for why this view is incorrect, but will note that the principle of Sabbath-keeping, originated with God's resting from his work of creation (Gen 2.3); it was *not* introduced by Moses as part of the sacrificial system. The Sabbath-keeping principle is an ordinance that God instituted at the time of creation and therefore applies to all men, throughout all time, just like the ordinance of marriage. Beside the example of Jesus, who kept the Sabbath holy, there is in fact a reiteration of the Sabbath-keeping command in the NT. It is found in this account (Lk 23.56). Luke apparently wrote to a Gentile (Theophilus) and he mentions that the women rested “on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.” If the Sabbath-keeping principle had ended with the death of Jesus, it is unlikely that Luke, writing over 20 years after the events, would have mentioned their ‘obedience to the commandment’, but rather would have said something like, ‘in conformity with Jewish custom’ (see, Jn 2.6; Jn 19.40). The women rested as a memorial of creation and to anticipate the Sabbath of rest that would be supplied by the Messiah. We believe that the Sabbath-keeping principle continues to apply today. We keep the Sabbath now, on the first

day of the week—the Lord’s Day (Rev 1.10)—as a memorial of the glorious resurrection of Jesus, and to anticipate the eternal Sabbath we will enter at our own resurrection.

Scheme – Meanwhile, the chief priests and Pharisees requested a meeting with Pilate to ask him to secure the tomb where Jesus was laid. This meeting had the following elements of scheming to prevent the resurrection:

- *Desecration* – The Jews desecrated the Sabbath by meeting with Pilate and asking that he station soldiers at the tomb. Men find Sabbath-keeping important only when it is convenient for achieving their own goals.
- *Desperation* – The leaders truly feared the resurrection of Jesus. They had heard Jesus predict that he would rise again after three days, and had seen how he was able to bring Lazarus back to life and that the people had believed in him (Jn 12.11). They didn’t doubt that he could work such a miracle; they just were not prepared to attribute his work to God. This is a sad commentary on the state of the disciples. They had forgotten Jesus’ words, or doubted them, while his enemies remembered and believed them. The resurrection is a terror to all of Jesus’ enemies for they know that it speaks of a judgment day that is coming.
- *Denial* – The fact that they blasphemously called Jesus a deceiver, and yet took his words about resurrection seriously, indicates the confusion in their minds. They are no different from men, in general, who deny the existence of God or the reality of Jesus, and yet behave as if they live in a rational universe. They do not see the stupidity of their position—it is impossible to have matter, meaning, or morality without assuming the existence of a Creator.
- *Deception* – They fabricated a reason to hide their fear of the resurrection and told Pilate that Jesus’ disciples might come and steal his body and spread a rumour that he had been raised from the dead. This was the same story that they later concocted in an attempt to suppress the truth of the resurrection (Mt 28.13). They predicted that such a story would lead men astray. Sadly their words have come true, since many Jews, to this day, continue to believe their story and

reject Jesus as the Messiah.

Secured – Pilate consented to their request and they posted a guard and made the entrance secure with a seal (a cord and wax impressed with a signet). The sepulchre was cut out of solid rock with only one way in, which was sealed and guarded. If someone tampered with the entrance the authorities would have known. Hell and earth did its utmost to stop the resurrection, just as Herod had attempted to kill Jesus when he slaughtered the children of Bethlehem and Satan had tried to tempt Jesus to give up his mission. However, it was God who arranged matters so that the Jewish leaders and the Roman government unwittingly made it impossible for the empty tomb to be attributed to any other cause than the resurrection-miracle (e.g., Jesus had fainted and later walked out or that the disciples stole his body). God challenges men (Ps 2.4-6): “Conceive your schemes and plots you fools! Nothing can stop my Son from reigning and from saving his people!”

Resurrection

The Resurrection [December 16]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.1-4; Mk 16.1-4; Lk 24.1-2; Jn 20.1)

Affectionate Service – Faithful women had followed Jesus from Galilee to serve him. Some of them walked with him as he left the city to go to the place of crucifixion, were present at the foot of the cross, and followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the sepulchre. They had witnessed the preparation of Jesus’ body for burial, but felt that it was not sufficient or had been done in a hasty manner. So, early on Sunday morning before sunrise, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome purchased aromatic spices which they planned to use to anoint Jesus’ body. Their service for Jesus is commendable. However, it does display a mistaken understanding. They clearly thought that Jesus was still dead, and did not anticipate the resurrection. In retrospect it seems remarkable that they did not understand his teaching about his pending resurrection (Mt 16.21; Mt 17.23; Mt 20.19; Mt 26.32). But we must not be too hard on these gracious women. The disciples had received the explicit

instruction from Jesus and they also did not understand his message. This raises two important questions for us: 1) What instruction has Jesus given to us that we continue to misunderstand? 2) Do we underestimate the power of God?

Asked Support – The women had not thought ahead about how they could get into the tomb to provide their service. As they were going along they asked each other who would roll away the stone from the entrance, since it would have been too heavy for them to push. The record of their question is provided for our instruction. What they thought was an impediment vanished when they arrived at the scene and saw the open tomb. Often in our experience we will be concerned about things that God has already addressed. We must learn to leave concerns in his hands and trust that he will work all things for his glory and for our good (Rom 8.28).

Absent Saviour – We are not told when the resurrection occurred. It was sometime early on Sunday morning (1 Cor 15.4) when Jesus raised himself from the dead (Jn 2.19; Jn 10.18), by his own power as God (Acts 2.24; Col 2.12). He was already absent from the tomb when the stone was rolled back from the entrance, since his resurrection body cannot be confined by physical impediments such as rock walls or stone doors (Jn 20.19). We might find it strange that God planned the resurrection to occur without human witnesses who would observe the actual event. However, would more people believe today in the resurrection if we had an eyewitness account from those who had seen a dramatic display of an angel rolling away the stone and the dead body of Jesus coming back to life? The circumstantial evidence of the empty tomb and the eyewitness account of those who saw Jesus alive after he had risen, is the evidence God has provided of the resurrection. And it is sufficient evidence. In fact it is more powerful evidence than a dramatic display, since someone might claim that Jesus wasn't actually dead and revived when the cold air filled the tomb on Sunday morning. Since the tomb was sealed and guards had been posted outside the entrance, there is no way that his body was stolen by his disciples, nor could his body have been taken by the Roman or Jewish authorities since his enemies

would have produced his body. The evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming and anyone who wants to dismiss Christianity must explain the empty tomb, and deny the word of many independent eyewitnesses (1 Cor 15.6) who corroborated that he was alive. One of the most important events in the history of the world was when the body of Jesus began to breathe again and Jesus rose from the dead.

Angelic Sentinel – An earthquake and an angel opened the tomb, not to let Jesus come out but to provide access to the witnesses. The enemies of Christ sent messengers to seal the tomb, thinking they could stop the resurrection. So Christ, in turn, sent his own messenger to unseal the tomb and announce to the world that the resurrection had occurred. The angel took the place of the soldiers who had been posted to guard the tomb, and sat on top of the cover stone in shining white glory and dazzling light—a contrast to the darkness that had enveloped the land at the death of Jesus. God delights in this form of irony, where he can show his enemies the foolishness of their silly attempts to thwart his sovereign power (Ps 2.4).

Astonished Soldiers – The soldiers posted to guard the entrance to the tomb would have been trained to overcome their fears. While they might have been superstitious and were probably concerned about staying in a graveyard at night, the worst they were anticipating was the appearance of the cowardly disciples. What they encountered instead was far more frightening than if the graves had opened and zombie-like bodies had come out. They met the glory of God in a display of brilliance that frightened them so much that their legs gave out and they collapsed, as if dead. They received a foretaste of the terror that will strike the hearts of men (Rev 6.16) when Christ returns in glory to wrap up this age and execute judgement on his enemies.

Access Supplied – When the women arrived in the garden, they looked up the hillside and saw that the large stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. The open entrance to the tomb is not only a witness to the power of God, but a symbol that the way to eternal life has been opened. It declares, “Come and see! There is no longer death in the tomb.

Death has been defeated. Resurrection hope awaits all those who come seeking Christ.”

He Has Risen! [December 17]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.6; Mk 16.6; Lk 24.6)

In our previous meditation we considered the fact of the resurrection; today we will consider the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The world may accept the fact that Jesus was a historical figure and that he died on a cross; but, in general, men do not want to believe that he rose from the dead on the third day. Why is it important for us that he has risen?

- 1) *Proof* – The primary purpose of miracles is to authenticate God’s claim to ultimate sovereignty. The miracle of the resurrection is proof that Jesus is God, with power over death and life (Jn 10.17-18).
- 2) *Prophecy* – The resurrection fulfills the prophecies of the OT and confirms the veracity of Scripture (Ps 16.10; Ps 49.15; Ps 86.13). Since Jesus came out of the grave, the entire Word of God in the Bible can be trusted.
- 3) *Priest* – It is the foundation of Christ’s eternal priesthood. Because he lives forever (Heb 7.24-25) he saves us completely and intercedes for us.
- 4) *Potentate* – His kingship is based on the exaltation achieved through the resurrection (Phil 2.9-11), and all men everywhere are subject to his authority (Mt 28.18).
- 5) *Prophet* – He spoke of his own crucifixion and resurrection, and what he spoke of came true (Mt 17.23; Mt 20.19; Mt 26.32). This demonstrates that he is the great and final Prophet (Dt 18.15; Acts 3.22-23).

- 6) *Power* – Through the resurrection Jesus displayed his power as he disarmed the rulers and authorities of this world (such as Herod, Caiaphas, and Pilate) and Satan and his demon horde in Hell (Col 2.12, 15). He made a public spectacle of them by showing that their foolish attempts to prevent the resurrection were for naught, as he arose from a sealed and guarded tomb. He triumphed over the evil powers, and has assured his Church that it also will triumph over its enemies (Mt 16.18).
- 7) *Punishment* – The resurrection is proof that Jesus is the judge who will hold all men accountable for their actions (Acts 17.31).
- 8) *Payment* – The corollary provides us with a hope that God will vindicate the cause of his people and not leave unpunished the abuses they received (Ps 135.14). Our faith in him will be repaid (Lk 14.14).
- 9) *Pardon* – The basis of our salvation is the payment that Jesus made for our sins on the cross. However, if he had remained under the power of death we would not be saved. He not only had to pay the debt of sin, he had to conquer death. So, the resurrection is part of the foundation of our pardon before the judge of all the earth (Col 2.12-14).
- 10) *Promise* – The resurrection of Jesus assures us of our future resurrection. Because Jesus died and rose again, we have a promise that we also shall one day be raised from the grave (1 Cor 15.20; 1 Thess 4.13-18).
- 11) *Prospect* – It assures us that we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in Heaven (1 Pt 1.3-5). Our eternal destiny, our hope, and our heaven, are based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ because he has gone before us to prepare a place for us (Jn 14.2-3).

- 12) *Provision* – The ability to live a new life—the Christian life—is provided by virtue of the resurrection (Rom 6.4). We cannot live for God through our own strength. It is only as Jesus’ resurrection power works in and through us that we can do his will and live for God’s glory.
- 13) *Pause* – God finished his work of creation and he rested on the Sabbath. Jesus finished his work of re-creation, and he also rested on the Sabbath. With that observance, the 7th-day Sabbath was buried with Christ and the old order ended and a new order began. A new day dawned, the Lord’s Day, which bears witness to the fact that Jesus is alive. We now observe the 1st-day Sabbath, following the example of the Apostles (Jn 20.19, 26; Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16.2), as we remember the resurrection and look forward to the eternal Sabbath.
- 14) *Praise* – The resurrection gives us access to the marriage supper of the Lamb and thus is the root of our eternal praise of his name (Rev 19.6-8).
- 15) *Proclamation* – It is a motivation for preaching the Gospel of Jesus, which is to be carried throughout the world (Acts 4.2; Acts 17.18; Acts 24.15).

The most important things that we must believe include: God exists and he is the sovereign creator and lawgiver; Jesus is the God-man, he died for our sins and rose again on the third day. The resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection our faith is in vain (1 Cor 15.14).

The Women Visit the Empty Tomb [December 18] (Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.5-8; Mk 16.5-8; Lk 24.3-8; Jn 20.1-2)

Missing – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had purchased spices with which to anoint Jesus’ body. So, along with some other women (Lk 24.10), they went on Sunday morning to the tomb but did not find the body of Jesus there. It appears that Mary Magdalene

arrived ahead of the others. She looked into the tomb and was surprised to see that it was empty. She did not remain at the tomb to find out what had happened, but instead ran to tell the disciples that someone had moved Jesus' body. The other women stayed at the tomb perplexed over the missing body.

Messengers – While they were wondering where Jesus' body had been taken, two angels in human form suddenly appeared and stood beside them. Their surprise must have been incredible. If it hadn't been for the bright appearance of the angels, the women likely would have fainted. The brightness helped them to see, in the shadows of the dark tomb, that there was nothing physical that could scare them (such as a corpse); and to understand that something extraordinary must have happened. All of Heaven was rejoicing at what Jesus had done in saving his people by dying as their saviour, and then conquering death through the resurrection. These two angels were given the privilege of announcing to the women that Jesus had risen from the grave. The presence of the sinless angels gave the woman an assurance that they were not at the wrong tomb, that the body of Jesus had not been stolen from the tomb, and that the resurrection had really happened.

Ministering – The women bowed their faces to the ground, probably not because they were worshiping (incorrectly; Rev 22.9) the angels, but because their knees were trembling so much and because they couldn't look at the brightness of the angels. So, the angels responded, as they usually did when they were sent to God's people, with the words of encouragement: "Don't be afraid." Then they reassured the women by letting them know that they also understood why they were present—looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. The mention of Jesus' name would have brought comfort to the women in the same way that we feel more comfortable when we first meet a stranger and he uses a common acquaintance as a reference point. Notice also that the angels confirmed that Jesus had been crucified. The death of Jesus was not a mirage. He had been truly dead, and his absence from the tomb was the result of a miracle.

Message – One of the angels sat down on the rock ledge where the body of Jesus had been placed. He then asked the women to come into the tomb and to look at the place where Jesus had lain—confirming that the person who had been crucified and died, and had been buried, was the same one who had risen. The direction to enter the tomb was given to the women so that they would not only hear the confirmation of the resurrection from the angels but also see with their eyes that the tomb really was empty. The angel also gently rebuked them for looking for the living among the dead. They had forgotten that Jesus had predicted his resurrection on the third day, and they had come to the graveyard expecting to find the body of Jesus still in the tomb. The angel's rebuke should make us wonder how often we hear the word of God and later discover that we weren't really listening. The angel then told the women to go and report to the disciples, and in particular to Peter, that Jesus had risen and that he would go ahead of them into Galilee where he would meet with them. The disciples were to be told the news first, before the resurrection was made known in Jerusalem. Jesus was confirming his love for his disciples, since he knew that they had been devastated by the crucifixion and believed that the Kingdom of God had not arrived and that the one whom they thought was the Messiah had turned out not to be. Jesus sent a special word of encouragement to Peter to assure him that he had been forgiven of his betrayal. We should marvel that the Creator and Lord of the universe cares so much for his people that he singles them out for special reassurance.

Memory – The angel then asked the women to remember the specific words that they had heard from Jesus while he was teaching in Galilee. Jesus had taught, more than once (Mt 16.21; Mt 17.22-23; Mt 20.17-19), that he had to be delivered up to be crucified, and would rise again. On being reminded of these words, the women recalled what Jesus' taught. Do we have similar poor memories about what Jesus has said in his word? Is it because we choose to ignore what he has said so that we can indulge our mistaken beliefs and practices? Or, is it because we have let the events of this world so discourage us that our minds have become darkened to the truth that Jesus continually cares for us? If we are more

diligent in remembering his words we will be better able to understand the outworking of his providence in our lives.

Maelstrom – The angel indicated that he had completed his commission, so the women, in turbulent confusion, ran from the tomb to go tell the disciples what had happened. We read of their mixed emotions—fear mingled with joy. Their fear may have been the result of seeing the angels, but it could also have been a fear of the Jewish and Roman authorities who were going to be very angry that their ploys to prevent the resurrection had failed—this may be implied by the statement that they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. Our reaction to the news that “He has risen,” should be a bold joy.

Peter and John Visit the Empty Tomb [December 19] (Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Lk 24.9-12; Jn 20.2-10)

Concern – Mary Magdalene had left the tomb before the other women were informed by the angels that Jesus had risen from the grave, and was alive. So, she reported to the disciples her concern that the body of Jesus had been taken from the tomb and moved. She refers to an abstract ‘they’ who had moved the body, possibly thinking of the caretakers of the garden (Jn 20.15) or the Jewish leaders or Roman authorities. Mary loved Jesus and believed in him, but her understanding of his teaching and the fullness of what he had to accomplish was temporarily darkened; she did not expect the resurrection.

Commission – Afterward, the other women, obedient to the commission that the angel had given them to tell the disciples what had happened, arrived at the place where the eleven disciples, and others, were assembled (possibly in the upper room, which may have been in Mark’s home).

Critical – The disciples did not believe the report about the resurrection, because the women’s words seemed to them like nonsense. There are likely multiple reasons why the disciples, and the others, did not believe:

- *Cultural* – The testimony of women in ancient Middle-Eastern cultures, including among the Jews, was not considered to be trustworthy.
- *Canard* – They viewed the report of the women as a fabrication, thinking that the idea that Jesus could be raised from the dead was impossible.
- *Careless* – They forgot that Jesus had raised three people from the dead (including Lazarus who had been dead for three days).

Unbelievers today reject the account of the resurrection for essentially the same reasons. They despise Christians and give no credence to their witness, accept the ‘scientific’ opinion about the impossibility of miracles as true, and choose to ignore or forget the witness to Jesus of the sign-miracles in the NT.

Challenge – Peter and John were not entirely dismissive of what the women said, and decided to go see for themselves if there was any factual basis to what they were reporting. It is likely that their reason for going to the tomb was not to confirm the truthfulness of their words, but rather to challenge it. However, that they both ran to the tomb does display a curiosity and also courage. They could have encountered the guards posted at the tomb and been handed over to the authorities as troublemakers who came to the tomb to remove the body of Jesus. We can apply their example to the dissemination of the Gospel today. Even if a person looks into the truth of the resurrection for the wrong reason (to challenge it), it is better to begin, and follow through on the enquiry, than to just dismiss out of hand the possibility that Jesus really did rise from the dead. There have been a number of prominent individuals (including a lawyer and a journalist) who set out to challenge the resurrection and, on examining the facts, became convinced that it really did happen.

Confirmation – Peter and John saw that the tomb was empty, as the women had reported. They saw also that the strips of linen that had been used to wrap Jesus’ body, with the interspersed oils and spices, were lying on the shelf where his body had been placed and that the burial cloth (a face covering) was folded nearby. The circumstantial evidence confirmed the resurrection. No grave robber would have taken the body

and left behind the linen; and anyone who wanted to make people believe that a resurrection had occurred would not have thought to leave the linen behind—compare the resurrection of Lazarus who came out the grave still wrapped in the linen cloths (Jn 11.44). The presence of linen strips left behind, indicated that Jesus had a real body, but of a different kind—a spiritual body (1 Cor 15.44)—that was not subject to the same physical constraints as our natural bodies (Jn 20.26) and that his resurrection body had passed through the burial cloths. The folded burial cloth also speaks of order and deliberation, not of rapid thievery. This eyewitness account confirms the reality of the resurrection.

Confidence – John looked at the linen cloths (Jn 20.5) from the entrance of the tomb, before he entered it. Peter entered the tomb first and saw (looked closely; Jn 20.6) at the evidence and wasn't yet fully convinced. Then John went into the tomb behind Peter and saw (understood; Jn 20.8) what had happened and believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was the first of the disciples to believe this reality. Nevertheless, he believed without a full comprehension (Jn 20.9).

Confusion – They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead, but their faith was beginning to increase. This is the way God often works with people as he draws them into fuller belief based on comprehension. Augustine said, “Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand.” (*Tractate 29* on John 7.14-18; para. 6). There are many things in the Christian faith that we will not understand (even partially) in our current state (and possibly, never), such as the nature of the Trinity, how Jesus can be both God and man, what life is, the origin of evil, and how God can decree evil without being the author of sin. We must be humble and accept the fact that we cannot explain many things. Instead we must accept the eyewitness account of John and Peter who saw the empty tomb and the burial cloths that were left behind. We must accept their word, as the word of God, and believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

Post Resurrection Appearances

Appearance to Mary Magdalene and the Other Women

[December 20]

(Golgotha, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.9; Mk 16.9; Jn 20.11-17a)

Troubled – Mary had not stayed at the tomb with the other women who had encountered the angels, but had run to tell the disciples that the body of Jesus had been removed from the tomb. She must have then returned to the garden alone to determine what had been done with Jesus' body. She came to the tomb in tears and saw the two angels who had spoken with the other women, seated inside the tomb on the ledge where Jesus' body had been placed. They asked her why she was crying. Her reply was the same as the message that she had taken to the disciples—someone had removed Jesus' body and she didn't know where it had been taken. Her reply shows:

- *Loving Concern* – She undoubtedly wanted to be sure that Jesus' body had been properly prepared for the grave—Joseph and Nicodemus had previously been pressed for time because the Sabbath was approaching.
- *Lacking Comprehension* – Her response shows that she misunderstood the words of Jesus about his death and resurrection, but *not* a weak faith.

Many believers today love Jesus and have faith in him but, like Mary, have not listened carefully to what he teaches in his Word and do not comprehend the importance of his commandments. Thankfully, Jesus is patient with us all; as he was patient with Mary.

Transformed – The angels must have looked beyond where she stood, as Jesus approached the tomb—some, as early as Chrysostom, suggest that they made a motion of respect, such as a bow. She turned to see what they were looking at and assumed that the person who approached was the gardener. He asked her similar questions as the angels had, and she gave the same answer and asked where he had moved Jesus' body. Why Mary did not recognize Jesus is not clear. The garden may still have been covered in early morning shadows, her tears may have clouded her vision, Jesus may no longer have had a beard, or she was so unprepared to meet the risen Jesus that she was confused by his presence. Some even

suggest that Jesus temporarily clouded her understanding so as to be unrecognizable. However, it is likely that Mary knew Jesus too well to be confused by a superficial change. It seems, rather, that the glorified body of Jesus appeared significantly different, so as not to be immediately recognizable by even those who knew him well (compare Lk 24.16; Jn 21.4). Her not recognizing him led to the greatest revelation of self-disclosure since Joseph, as a type of Christ, had informed his brothers of his being in their presence (Gen 45.1-3).

Tribute – The very first person who saw the resurrected Lord was Mary Magdalene, not his mother or one of the disciples. This is a tribute to her as a person and to her great love for Jesus. Next, Jesus appeared to the other women, before he appeared to any of the disciples. The women were the last to leave the area of the crucifixion, followed Joseph and Nicodemus when they buried Jesus, and were the first to go to the tomb on the resurrection morning. Jesus honoured them all for their devotion to him. This account teaches of:

- *Humility* – All the members of God’s family are equal before God, he is not a respecter of persons. There is no reason for us to think more highly of one believer above another, even if he holds an official position.
- *Honour* – Honour before Christ is not based on position but on service. The Lord says, “Those who honour me I will honour.” (1 Sam 2.30)
- *Historicity* – The account’s historicity is evident. No male writer, at the time the Gospels were composed, would have invented a story in which a woman was the first to witness a significant event like the resurrection.

Teacher – It was when Jesus called her by her name that she realized who it was who was standing in front of her. The fact he knew her name indicated that he was not an unknown gardener—even the angels had not addressed her by name. Also, as he called her name she recognized his voice, a voice that she had heard for about three years, and knew for certain who he was. This is a direct application of the words that Jesus had spoken about six months before in Jerusalem (Jn 10.3). This reminds

us that Jesus, as God, knows each of his cherished elect personally, and by name. We can rest in the assurance that Jesus knows us and loves us, as he did Mary. She responded to her name and called him *Rabboni*—a form of the Aramaic word for ‘teacher’—that may imply something like ‘master’. When Jesus calls us we also must respond with respect and worship him as the risen Lord Christ.

Transition – She clung to him, as did the other women whom he met later, as they were on the road going into Jerusalem. He told them not to cling to him, *not* because his body could not be touched by human hands (Mt 28.9; Lk 24.39; Jn 20.27), but rather because he did not want them to think that he could remain indefinitely on earth. He was only to remain for a few weeks and then to ascend into Heaven, where he remains until the appointed time of his final return on the Day of Judgement. Now that Jesus has gone into Heaven, we must not ‘cling’ to him either. Some of the ways that people in the Church today cling to the physical presence of Jesus is by representing him in earthly signs and shadows—for example, by creating and venerating a painting or sculpture; or re-introducing the temporary forms of ceremonial worship associated with the typical sacrifices of the OT, such as incense and musical instruments. NT worship is to be realized primarily by spiritual forms (Jn 4.24), and only with physical forms authorized by him (e.g., baptism).

Go and Tell! [December 21]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.10; Mk 16.10-11; Jn 20.17b-18)

Reassurance – When Jesus met the women who were returning from the graveside to the city, he greeted them with these words of comfort, “Do not be afraid.” God, directly or through Jesus or angels, directs these words to his people over sixty times in the Bible (e.g., Gen 15.1; Jn 14.27). We are not told the source of their fear; but noted previously that it could have been from having seen the angels, concern over what the Jewish and Roman authorities might do on hearing of the resurrection, or in this instance from seeing Jesus himself in resurrected form. Regardless of the source of their fear, Jesus told them that it was unnecessary and unwarranted. We who believe in Jesus have a fuller revelation than these

women had, and have no reason to fear God or man. We can be reassured by three unassailable facts: 1) God reigns, 2) Jesus has been raised from the dead, and 3) he loves us and will care for us forever.

Relationship – Jesus shows the continuing depth of his love for his people with the words that follow, when he instructed the women to go and tell his brothers that he was alive. Whether he meant his half-brothers or the disciples is not clear. He may have had in mind, primarily, his immediate brothers (the sons of Mary) since they did not believe he was the Messiah during his years of ministry (Jn 7.5), but he knew that they would come to believe in him when they heard of the resurrection (Acts 1.14), and was eager that they hear the news. Even if his words have that particular application, they also have a broader application to the disciples and to all who are elected to believe in him (Mk 3.34-35). In his instructions to Mary Magdalene he gave additional information about our relationship to God. While we are brothers and sisters of Jesus, it is clear from his words that we have a different relationship to God as Father, than Jesus does. He says ‘my Father’ and ‘my God’, and ‘your Father’ and ‘your God’. Jesus is both God and the eternal Son, whereas we are children of God by virtue of being his creatures (Acts 17.29) and through adoption into his spiritual household. Regardless of the exact meaning of these words, we know that we are part of the household of God and that we have the privilege of calling God our Father now (Mt 6.9), and forever.

Return – Jesus told the women (as the angels had also; Mt 28.7) to tell the disciples to go into Galilee where they would meet with him. The reason they were to return to Galilee isn’t explained to the group of women; however Jesus had told the disciples that they would meet him in Galilee after he was raised from the dead (Mt 26.32). When Jesus spoke with Mary Magdalene, shortly before his meeting with the other women, he told her to relay a message that he was going up to the Father. The two messages appear to be connected. It may be that Jesus wanted to return to the place where he had first called the disciples and to give them their final instruction there, before he went into Heaven. This last instruction was given to them beside the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21.1-13),

where he had once taught them from a boat; and also on a mountain where he commissioned them to take the Gospel into the world (Mt 28.16-20). His direction that they return to Galilee may have been more than just a natural outcome of the Passover having ended, and rather may have been a symbolic return to the point of origin of their discipleship.

Report – Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the resurrection news, and told them that she had seen the risen Lord. Imagine her excitement as she brought this news to the disciples who were devastated by recent events and were still mourning and weeping. She must have been thrilled to bring them the message of hope. We also have seen the Lord, and this should fill us with the same great desire that Mary had to share the report with others.

Reluctance – But, imagine how she felt when they did not believe her. What reasons would they have given for not believing her word? Would they have told her that she was just an uneducated, ignorant woman? Would they have reminded her that, as a woman in Jewish society, her testimony could not be relied upon? Would they have referred to Satan's having fooled Eve? Would they have told her that her passionate love for Jesus made her mad? Or would they have told her that resurrections were not possible (in spite of have having witnessed three!)? We must empathize with poor Mary as we see her insisting that she is reporting Gospel Truth, but being ridiculed and belittled for it. The situation is not much different for those who proclaim the resurrection today.

Resurrection – When Paul was in Athens he announced that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Acts 17.31) and some of the members of the assembled court mocked him. This is the response of most people today when they hear about the resurrection. The miracle of the resurrection is an objection against Christ and Christianity, for all materialists of our day; even for those who claim to be theists from other religions, but are also materialists since they believe only in the inventions of their overactive imaginations. But why, in a universe which they claim is totally the result of chance, should they consider a resurrection to be impossible? If the universe and life, according to them, can come into

existence merely by chance, then a resurrection is credible. The problem of the resurrection is not really a question of its possibility, but with its implications. If Jesus has been raised from the dead, they know that this is proof that Jesus is God (Acts 17.29) and that he is Lord. This is what they do not *want* to believe. But we must declare the truth—Jesus is risen!

Report of the Guards [December 22] (Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.11-15)

Guards – While Jesus was meeting with the women and telling them to go and take the news about his resurrection to the disciples, the guards who had been at the tomb went to the chief priests to tell them the same thing. Notice that the account says that they told the chief priests ‘*everything* that had happened.’ They would have reported about the earthquake, the appearance of the bright angels, the stone being rolled back, and the empty tomb. They had seen a miracle and yet they didn’t believe in Jesus as the Son of God. It is clear from this example that the purpose of miracles is not to convince or to convert unbelievers (Lk 16.31), but to validate the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah. Even seeing the most amazing miracle that ever occurred would not convince them, without the converting work of the Holy Spirit.

Guile – Satan initiated his ‘damage’ control efforts, organizing quickly to counter the truth. Through his henchmen, the Jewish chief priests, he plotted to lead many astray. Satan’s pawns were as anxious as he was to cover up the miracle, and conspired to devise a false explanation for the empty tomb. They told the soldiers to lie about what had happened and to claim that they had fallen asleep and that the disciples of Jesus had come during the night and stolen his body. It is difficult to think that the leaders in what was purportedly God’s church, would stoop to such evil. We might expect this from leaders in false religions—they have no qualms about encouraging members of their ‘faiths’ to use deceit and duplicity and mayhem and murder in their attempts to silence the Christian voice. However, we know from history that man’s heart is desperately wicked and that, at times, public displays of evil pollute even

the true Church. Some (like Dawkins) might conclude that all religions are evil, or claim that Christianity is a beautiful idea that might work in theory but not in practice. It is not that the Gospel is a failure or even that saved people are (Rom 8.31-39). Rather, the actions of the chief priests teach us not to depend on men, but on God. The Church and the Gospel advance, not because of human gifts or skills, but because of God's grace. Failures in the Church arise primarily because we think that our programs (teaching ministries, worship teams, counselling sessions, conferences, evangelism campaigns, or political scheming) will do the job and we forget that our life in Christ must be based on daily Word and worship.

Gratification – For a soldier to sleep while on duty was dereliction of duty and would likely have been punishable by death at that time (Acts 12.19). So, the chief priests offered to gratify the governor (Pilate) and keep the soldiers out of trouble if their 'failure' reached his ears. A single lie leads to other lies and to other sinful behaviour. There was no limit to the extent that the chief priests were willing to go to execute their evil plan.

Graft – They also oiled the wheels of the cart they were riding into Hell by offering the soldiers a large sum of money. Most people, including many Christians, believe that money is the answer to all of man's ails—money will end world hunger, provide education and health care, and buy prosperity; especially if it passes through government coffers. Reality check! Just ask many of the winners of large lottery prizes and they will give you a different perspective as you hear how their life is worse off after winning. Be careful not to be beguiled and think that you would handle riches better than they did, if only you had the chance. Money cannot buy character and it will not purify hearts; it can only corrupt souls. The soldiers likely drank and gambled away their gains and squandered eternity. Jesus asks truly, what good it does for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul (Mt 16.26).

Guilt – The soldiers took the money, and the assurances of the high priest for protection, and circulated the report as instructed. They cannot

blame the Jewish leaders with the often-used retort of a subordinate, “But he told me to do it.” They were happy to be paid off and were complicit in the crime. Before God, they are guilty of perpetrating a great fraud, and will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment and into eternity.

Gibberish – At the time the Gospel of Matthew was written (about 30 years after the resurrection), the report that Jesus’ body was stolen by the disciples while the guards slept, was still being circulated among the Jews. This story continued to be the line of the Jews for centuries (reported by both Justin and Eusebius). Jews today have not given up the essence of this myth—when pressed for an explanation of the empty tomb, if they don’t resort to calling the NT a lie, they refer to legends which deny the resurrection, such as that a gardener (named Judas) stole Jesus’ body. The Talmud has a blasphemous legend about Jesus sojourning in Hell and the son of Titus’ sister conjuring him up, as the worst enemy of Judaism (see, the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906, in the sections on the ‘Trial and Death of Jesus’ and the ‘Resurrection’). The logic of this explanation is faulty. If the soldiers were sleeping, how did they know that the body was stolen? It is easier, however, for people to swallow a lie than to believe truth. To the contrary, the account of the guards provides further evidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead, since they were eyewitnesses of what happened and they were complicit in a plot to cover up the evidence. Anyone who examines the evidence recorded in the Gospels cannot honestly deny that Jesus was indeed dead and rose from the dead.

Appearance on the Road to Emmaus [December 23] (Outside Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mk 16.12; Lk 24.13-32)

Reminiscence – How often have you heard someone say that the past was better than the present? In contrast, how often do you hear someone say that he expects the future to be better than the past, or present? Rarely, I suspect. Cleopas and his companion were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection and were contemplating the past as they discussed the life and death of Jesus. While it was a good topic they were considering, they had forgotten that

Jesus had promised his resurrection. Most people today are like these two disciples. They dwell on the past and think about how good it was, and have little hope for the future. While we should think about what Jesus did in the past, we must not dwell in the past—either in the 1st-century AD; or in some hypothetical idyllic time when the economy was better, people were kind to one another, Christianity was respected, and crime rates were low. Our hope is not to be in any decade or age of this world, past, present or future, but in the general resurrection and in the final establishment of the eternal glorious kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Regret – They had a great regret that things had not worked out as they had hoped. Their discouragement arose from their false expectations. They had believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they had their own ideas about how the kingdom of the Messiah was to be realized—ushering in a golden age for Israel and removing the boot of Rome. Things had not worked out as they had hoped, but God the Father had more glorious plans for the kingdom of his Son. As they were walking in the Valley of Disappointment, the Son of Hope came and joined them, but they did not recognize him—likely because his outward form had changed substantially with the provision of a glorified body, and their despondency dulled their minds against hope. In his exalted state, Jesus came to comfort them. This is the way with Jesus—he comes to his people where they are, when they need him. He asked a probing question, to lead them to clarify in their minds what their problem was.

Recollection – Cleopas responded to Jesus, asking him if he was unaware of the significant events that had occurred two days before in Jerusalem. Jesus patiently asked him to expand on what he was speaking of, again to help the disciples understand where their ideas were faulty. At this, Cleopas declared Jesus to be a prophet, and recounted the events of his trial and crucifixion. He then revealed the error in their thinking—they had hoped that Jesus, as the prophet, was the one who was going to redeem Israel; but they didn't realize how amazing the redemption would actually be. Cleopas and his companion must have reflected, for the rest of their lives, on the irony of his having told Jesus about his death and of their paltry expectations about his kingdom, when the resurrected

Redeemer was standing in front of him. I suspect that many Christians are like Cleopas. They pour out their disappointment to God when their petty hopes aren't realized; yet God has far better plans for them.

Report – Cleopas continued his account by telling Jesus of the report brought by the women—of the empty tomb and the angels, and the confirmation by the disciples. The more Cleopas said, the more he indicted himself. His real problem was an unwillingness to believe the evidence for the resurrection—the promises of Jesus; the empty tomb; and the words of the angel, “He has risen.” Today we have more evidence than Cleopas had, since we have the eyewitness accounts of the post-resurrection appearances, such as this one on the road to Emmaus. Disbelief in the resurrection is not due to a lack of evidence, but to a lack of willingness to believe that Jesus is God.

Rebuke – Jesus rebuked them for unbelief. Believers in Jesus are scorned as ignoramuses by the professed atheists and ‘open-minded’ of our day. And yet, not to believe in Jesus and his resurrection is the most foolish thing any person can do. But Jesus did not just dismiss them and let them perish in their unbelief. Rather, he opened the truth to them by taking them to his word of revelation—the Bible. We should note that he used the OT writings to reveal his work to them. He likely started with the promise in the Garden of Eden of the coming Redeemer and reflected on how Isaiah and the Psalms recount in detail the sufferings of the Saviour. They had read the OT prophecies looking for temporal health and wealth, but Jesus took them to the source of salvation. What a Bible study that must have been!

Request – When they reached Emmaus Jesus would have left them and gone on, if they had not invited him to join them for the dinner. He was testing them to see if they had an interest in learning more of the Gospel. But they urged him strongly to stay with them. We learn from their example to should show simple hospitality to strangers (Heb 13.2). Also, a spiritual principle is reinforced by their request for him to stay—when we have learned from the word of Jesus we will desire to have fellowship with Jesus, the Word.

Recognition – When he was at dinner with them he took the lead in giving thanks for the meal and then began to distribute food to them. This was not a re-enactment of the supper in the upper room. Nevertheless, his authoritative actions made them recognize him and he disappeared from their sight. Their response was amazement at how the word they had heard on the road had warmed their hearts. If we have recognized Jesus as the resurrected Lord, we also will find that our hearts are warmed by faithful preaching of the Gospel.

Jesus Appears to Ten of the Apostles [December 24]
(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mk 16.13; Lk 24.33-43; Jn 20.19-23; 1 Cor 15.5a)

Assembled – When something significant happens—such as a stock market collapse or a natural disaster—people assemble to share the news. It was the same with the disciples. As the news of the resurrection spread among them they came together, likely to the same room in which they had eaten the last supper with Jesus. The two travellers returning from Emmaus on the evening of Resurrection-Sunday reported to the assembly that they had seen the risen Lord. They heard that Jesus had also appeared to Simon privately. By this point, Jesus had appeared four times—to Mary, a group of women, Peter, and the two on the road. Yet among the Apostles and other disciples there were some who doubted and did not yet believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. If we have met with the living Christ we also should want to share our experience with others; but we also should expect scepticism from many.

Appearance – While they were sharing the news, Jesus appeared in their midst. Even though the doors were locked Jesus was able to enter the room. He performed a miracle to transport himself into the room; but we are likely told about his sudden appearance in the locked room, not because it was a miracle, but to show us that his body now has a different form. While Jesus does have a physical body (as shown by the subsequent events in this meeting with the disciples) it appears that his body is different and is no longer bound by the physical laws that we

currently operate under. John notes that Jesus' appearance was on the evening of the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday). It is significant that it was on this day, and on the same day a week later, that he appeared to the assembly since it established a new pattern for the Church. Since then, the first day of the week has been the day on which the Church assembles to remember and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

Assurance – It is reported that when he appeared, the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost. Ghosts do not exist, yet every culture perpetuates a superstitious fear of them; so the disciples' reaction is not surprising. Jesus knew that his sudden appearance among them would startle them so he set about reassuring them that he really was present with them:

- *Comfort* – His intention in coming to them was to bring them peace. This is consistent with his purpose for coming to earth (Lk 2.14). It is God's purpose that all those who believe in his Son should have peace—peace with God (Rom 5.1) and peace from God (Phil 4.6-7). Because of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection we can experience this peace.
- *Challenge* – He gently rebuked them for their fear; asking why they were afraid. When we experience fear in our lives, we should always ask, 'Why?' If we are believers in Jesus and living for his glory, we will invariably find that the reasons for our fears are unfounded. We do not need to fear God since we have Jesus as our mediator and friend, and we do not need to fear men because we have the Holy Spirit as our protector.
- *Confirmation* – He confirmed that the person they were looking at was the same one whom they had seen a few days earlier. He specifically directed them to look at the wounds in his hands and feet to confirm that they were the result of his being hung on the cross.
- *Contact* – He went even further to assure them of the physical reality before them. He invited them to experience his presence with their sense of touch. What a privilege he gave them—the ruler of the universe, the holy one, the glorified one, allowed these cowardly and sin-stained men to place their hands on him, because he loved them.

Jesus will, forever, bear the deep marks of the wounds of the crucifixion to remind the Father and us of his payment for our sins. When we reach Heaven we will see those wounds as he hugs us and welcomes us home.

Amazement – Even though Jesus gave them permission to touch his body to confirm that he was truly alive, they still could not overcome their doubts because of their joy and amazement. So he asked them if they had any food that he might eat, and they provided him with a piece of broiled fish. This seems like a strange thing to do in the midst of revealing himself to them. Some have suggested that there is a symbolical meaning behind his eating fish, however it is more likely that he ate food (any that they had on hand) so that he could demonstrate further that he was not a phantasm. Peter was struck by this evidence and that of a later incident (Jn 21.12-13), and makes reference to Jesus' act of eating in one of his sermons (Acts 10.41).

Appointment – Jesus then appointed the disciples for mission with:

- *Peace* – He blessed them with peace. The Church was given this blessing to help us overcome our fear of dead men as we serve the living God.
- *Promotion* – He promoted them to be his, and the Father's, deputies. We should live in the knowledge that Christians represent God to the world.
- *Power* – He breathed on them and filled them with the Holy Spirit. Adam became a living being when God breathed life into him (Gen 2.7). We become renewed creatures when Jesus breathes the Spirit into us.
- *Pardon* – He sent them with the Gospel of forgiveness. The Apostles had particular discernment for denouncing or forgiving sins—e.g., Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) and Elymas (Acts 13.10). The Church today continues to live out a spirit of forgiveness and to declare that forgiveness of sin is available in Jesus Christ to all who believe in him as the risen Lord.

Doubting Thomas [December 25]

(Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Mk 16.14; Jn 20.24-29; 1 Cor 15.5b)

Agnosticism – It is fashionable today for a person to proclaim that he is an agnostic. The extreme form of agnosticism deals with whether or not we *can* know anything for certain, and claims that we cannot. The more common form of agnosticism is that displayed by Thomas, in which a person displays a sceptical approach to *how* we know, and claims that he will not believe unless convinced by empirical evidence—“I will not believe unless I see and touch.” This sceptical approach to questions of knowledge is subjective and unprincipled. Men today, influenced by philosophies of the ‘Enlightenment’, have arbitrarily ruled out any non-material causation and thus claim to be agnostics when matters of God, creation, and spirits are under consideration, but accept the word of others (e.g., about anthropogenic global warming, the origin of species, or the age of the earth) when they have no experimental means of verifying their beliefs. It is good to be sceptical about many claims (e.g., high-growth investment schemes, miracle cures for cancer, diet pills, and government solutions to poverty), especially when they appear as spam in our electronic mail boxes. However, it is not a sign of wisdom to be sceptical about the claims of God, as presented in the Bible. It is, rather, a symptom of utter foolishness to question God, and the height of hubris to challenge him to prove himself to meet our standards for testing evidence, as Thomas did. Part of Thomas’ problem arose from his not being present with the disciples and he missed the appearance of Jesus. This reminds us that it is important for us to be often with the assembled believers on the Lord’s Day, to meet with Jesus and to share in the encouraging words of life.

Assurance – Jesus appeared to the assembled disciples a week later, on the first day of the week. As we noted in our previous meditation, this is a clear endorsement that the NT Church is to assemble for worship on Sunday. He came into their midst in the same way as previously and gave them the same greeting of peace. He then condescended to meet the challenge that Thomas had expressed to assure him that he really had risen from the dead and that he had a real, living, glorified body. No one had seen Jesus for a week so no one could have relayed Thomas’ words of incredulity to him. Jesus however quotes the exact words Thomas had

used, and offers Thomas the opportunity to test empirically his claim to be the same person who had died on the cross. That Jesus had heard the words expressed by Thomas the week before is sufficient evidence that he is the all-knowing God and should have been enough to bring Thomas to his knees in faith and repentance.

Absolute – Jesus command Thomas to, “Stop doubting and believe.” Another way to put it could be, “Do not become an unbeliever but a believer.” Jesus warned Thomas not to progress into a hardened unbelief—not believing in Jesus’ position in the Godhead, his office as the Messiah, and his completed substitutionary work on the cross. Unbelief is evil (Heb 3.12) and dangerous because it is:

- *Haughty* – Unbelief places our thoughts above God’s word and witness; it makes us proclaim proudly that we are the final arbiters of truth.
- *Hardened* – Unbelief is not a sign of open-mindedness but of stubborn closed-mindedness.
- *Hopeless* – Unbelief leaves us graceless and faithless. Without grace and faith we can have nothing more than existential materialism which leaves us empty and without hope.
- *Harmful* – Unbelief is the wheels on the wagon that is Hell-bound.

For these reasons, and others, Jesus rebuked Thomas for his incredulity and commanded him to believe.

Acknowledgement – The weight of the evidence of having Jesus standing in front of him convinced Thomas of the truth that Jesus had in fact been raised from the grave, and he acknowledged this truth in front of the assembly. However, his confession goes beyond mere acceptance that Jesus had come back from the dead—he had seen three others brought back to life during the ministry of Jesus. He realized that the testimonies that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah (Jn 1.34, 49; Jn 5.25; Jn 6.69; Jn 9.35; Jn 11.27) were demonstrably true, and he confessed Jesus as, “My Lord and my God!” With Thomas, each one of us must say ‘my’ with respect to Jesus. We must believe that Jesus is God and worship him as God. He is not a created god, or a man made into a god; but *the* God—the God-man. Jesus is *Lord* and *God*, Master

and King. He is the Sovereign Creator—the infinite, eternal, holy, and all knowing God.

Acceptance – Jesus ends his encounter with Thomas by accepting his sight-based faith to be true. But he extols and blesses the virtue of sightless faith—but *not* an unreasonable or unfounded faith. You and I cannot see Jesus in the flesh today, to look at his cross-inflicted wounds; nor can we observe his miracles and hear his teaching. We have to believe in Jesus based on the account given by the eyewitness of his life, death and resurrection, such as John. All believers in Jesus since his ascension into Heaven have had only this evidence. However, even if we had sign-miracles performed among us, or Jesus still walked the roads of the Middle East, that does not mean that men would believe in him, any more than they did at the time of his ministry on earth. Rather, the Holy Spirit takes the evidence provided in the Gospels and uses it as the means to bring us to belief: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” (Rom 10.17)

A New Beginning by the Sea of Galilee [December 26] (Sea of Galilee, Spring 33 AD. Jn 21.1-14)

Forward Now – John appears to conclude his Gospel when he gives his reason for writing his account (Jn 20.30-31). Some suggest that he didn’t want to leave his readers hanging as to what had happened to Peter, so added this chapter as an afterthought. However, John is a disciplined and precise writer and would not have forgotten to include this section until after he had written a conclusion to his Gospel. Rather, it appears that his objective is to conclude the account of Jesus’ ministry, through his resurrection, and then to indicate that a new era of the *Story of Salvation* has begun. Chapter 21 is a new beginning. There is in this chapter a return to Galilee, a re-calling of the disciples, and a re-instatement of Peter. John’s point is that the Gospel did not end with the resurrection, but *began* with it. From this point and onward the Gospel is going to go forward with power throughout the world.

Fishing Night – The disciples had been instructed to return to Galilee by the angel who appeared to the women at the empty tomb, who had relayed the angel's message. So, the disciples were waiting for further instructions from Jesus. They knew that they had a new commission (Jn 20.23) but did not yet know how they were to carry it out. While they waited, they undertook, as appropriate, their former businesses. Those who were fishermen—seven in total—went out at night, as was their custom. This uncertainty on their part teaches us that we cannot dictate a schedule to God and that we have to learn to wait for his direction. While we wait, we should be productive (Eph 5.16).

Finding Nothing – They were unsuccessful and caught nothing. At dawn Jesus appeared (a third time to a group of disciples) on the shore about 100 metres from their boat. Jesus asked them if they had caught anything. At that distance they would not have recognized him, especially in the early morning light. Jesus called them friends (more accurately, children), so they probably assumed that it was an older man, interested in buying some of their catch. We may be able to apply this encounter in a spiritual context by noting that Jesus came to them when they were disappointed at their failure. Jesus cares for us also, and will send his comfort and support when we are most in need.

Full Net – He told them to try again to catch some fish, from the other side of the boat, and they caught such a large quantity that they had difficulty bringing them to shore. We must be careful not to allegorize this account. The explicit details of the account teach us about:

- *Memory* – John is reporting what actually occurred in the life of Jesus; the reference to the number of large fish and the tearing of the net is the kind of historical detail we expect from an accurate eyewitness' memory.
- *Miracle* – Jesus is in total control of the natural realm and the faith of the disciples would be encouraged whenever they remembered this event.
- *Master* – Jesus has such power and authority that the disciples obeyed him even when they didn't know who he was.

- *Mercy* – Jesus provides for the needs of his people with abundance, especially when they are obedient to his commands.

However, we also need to see the spiritual significance of what happened. At one point, early in his ministry, Jesus called the disciples to follow him and told them that they would become fishers of men (Mt 4.19). Jesus was now reminding them that he had called them, as evangelists, to preach the Gospel. The large catch of fish was a symbol of the more important catch, of the vast multitude of mankind which would be saved through their ministry (e.g., Acts 2.41) and that of the Church as the centuries would pass.

Familiar Name – On seeing the net filled with the large number of fish, John realized that a miracle had been performed and that the person on the shore was Jesus, whom he called ‘Lord’. Without their realizing it, Jesus had been present with them. Even though Jesus is physically in Heaven he is present with us in power and Spirit (Jn 14.16). We need to learn to wait patiently, as the disciples had to learn during the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension, for Jesus to make his presence known in our lives in different ways, and especially as we wait for his final appearance at the end of time. Peter was apparently so eager to see Jesus that he jumped into the water and waded to shore while the other disciples brought the boat to shore, hauling the net full of fish. At this point Peter had not been publicly reinstated for his denial of Jesus. But Jesus had met with him privately (Lk 24.34; 1 Cor 15.5) and Peter knew that he had been forgiven. No longer would he say to Jesus “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Lk 5.8) Instead, knowing the power of forgiven sin—even of the most grievous kind—he would look for every opportunity to be with Jesus. Do we know of our sins being totally paid for? Do we have the same kind of passion to be with Jesus?

Food Nearby – Jesus had kindled a fire and prepared some bread and fish, but he also asked them to bring some of fish that they had caught and to have breakfast with him. He knew that they would be tired, cold, and hungry and was concerned to meet their needs. Jesus cares for our temporal and physical needs in the same way. Why is it that we don’t trust him as we should? He is, after all, the creator of the universe and

cares for us as his friends, brothers, and children (Mt 6.32). And, more importantly, this meal beside the lake reminds us that Jesus has prepared a great feast for us in Heaven (Rev 19.9).

Jesus Publicly Reinstates Peter [December 27]
(Sea of Galilee, Spring 33 AD. Jn 21.15-23)

Meal – This account does not deal with Peter being forgiven for denying Jesus, but rather with his public reinstatement to the apostolic office. Jesus had met with Peter privately (Luke 24.34; 1 Cor 15.5) and had forgiven him. However, the other disciples would not have known this, nor necessarily accepted Peter's word. Throughout the history of the Church divisions (e.g., the Donatist Schism of the 4th century) have arisen over whether or not sinners who repent can be reinstated to Church offices. Jesus wanted to ensure that in Peter's case it would be clear that he had been forgiven and that he still held his apostolic office. Jesus first invited the disciples to a meal and then he reinstated Peter. A meal was often associated with covenant making (Gen 26.30; Gen 31.44-54; Lk 22.20) or appointing someone to an office (1 Ki 1.9-11; 1 Chron 29.22)—today we still hear of coronation or inauguration dinners, and meals are part of marriage covenant ceremonies. Jesus, in effect, sealed Peter's re-appointment with a fellowship meal.

Motivation – Some people believe that since Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus, in turn, had to ask Peter three times if he was committed to him. If this is the case, it is not because Jesus was testing Peter, but rather to show that each of Peter's denials were countered with a profession of love for the Lord. However, it may be that the three-fold repetition of the question about Peter's love for the Lord, and subsequent assignment of duties by Jesus, is to reinforce the completeness of the act of reinstatement. It is also often pointed out that Jesus uses one word for love (*agapao*) in the first two questions he asks Peter, and that Peter replies with a different word (*phileo*). It is possible that there is no substantial difference between the two words Jesus uses, and uses them as synonyms without intending any distinction. John, elsewhere, uses the words interchangeably—for example, compare John 3.16 (*agapao*) with

John 16.27 (*phileo*), and John 3.35 (*agapao*) with John 5.20 (*phileo*); we certainly cannot say that the Father's love for us or for the Son is any more or less depending on the particular Greek word that John uses to describe it. What we should focus on instead is that Jesus is reinforcing the fact that Peter is to love him more than he loves the other disciples (note: some interpret this as 'more than the other disciples loved Jesus', but that is probably not the meaning since Peter could not know the hearts of his fellow disciples). Jesus was reminding Peter that our love for God, and Jesus as God, must be greater than our love for anything in this world (Mt 10.37; Mt 22.37-38). It was during this reinstatement ceremony that Peter realized that, until then, he had been trying to set an agenda for the Lord—how the Kingdom should be established (e.g., as an earthly rule that would overthrow Rome, in which he would have a prominent role). From this point on, Peter would be focused on serving the Lord, as he had not done during the preceding three years. Most of us in the Church in NA today are like Peter was until that day; we just play a game with our faith and commitment to the Lord, and do not take the advancement of his Kingdom, or eternal realities, anywhere near seriously enough.

Mission – In response to each of Peter's statements of commitment, Jesus gives Peter a mission. We should not try to find distinctions between the three ways that Jesus directs Peter in his responsibility—they all mean the same thing: to care for Jesus' sheep—i.e., believers. Some conclude from this interchange that Peter is given the most important role in the developing NT Church. This is an invalid inference which does not take into consideration the context. Peter is singled out because Jesus is ensuring that the other disciples will know that he has been forgiven. Sheep are, by nature, prone to wander and they need the guidance of a shepherd. Jesus, who is the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd (Jn 10.11; Heb 13.20-21; 1 Pt 5.4) committed the care of his flock to Peter, to *all* the Apostles, and to every assistant shepherd (Pastor/Elder) who has held office in the Church since the Apostle's day.

Martyr – There are two primary aspects to the work of the Church—caring for the sheep, protecting them from wolves; and increasing the

size of the flock. The second task is accomplished through the witness to the truth that Jesus is Lord and Saviour. The Greek word that is translated as ‘witness’ in English, is *martyria*, from which we get our word ‘martyr’. For many in the early Church, and for many throughout Church history, bearing witness to Christ became synonymous with giving up one’s life to pagan executioners. Peter not only cared for the flock entrusted to him, but also became part of the great evangelistic force that took the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus told Peter that after he had given a full life of service, even his death would witness to the glory of God. Peter would not flinch again. He was prepared to die for Jesus—and he did, according to history, by crucifixion like his Lord.

Meddler – The others might have tried to second-guess Peter’s commitment, so Jesus silenced them by personally directing Peter in his duties. However, Peter had to learn, like the rest, not to be a prying busybody or to make faulty inferences. Jesus told Peter the direction of his life’s work for the Kingdom, but Peter seeing John following wanted to know what would become of John. Jesus silenced him, saying that John’s future belonged to God and was none of Peter’s business. Each of us needs to learn to focus on our duties for Christ and to leave the assignment of work to other Christians in God’s hands. Our task is to follow Jesus not to worry about what others are doing for Christ.

Re-commissioning the Disciples [December 28] **(A mountain in Galilee, Spring 33 AD. Mt 28.16-20; Mk 16.15-18)**

Adoration – Jesus met with the disciples in Galilee, probably on the same mountain where he had delivered the *Sermon on the Mount*, thus completing a re-enactment of his original calling of the disciples. Now he commissions them to their new role as the founders of the NT Church and as ambassadors to carry the news of his Kingdom into the world. When he appeared to them, they worshiped him. Even though some still doubted that he had been raised from the dead, they joined with their brothers in worship. If we have any doubts about God’s nature or providential dealings, the way to overcome our questions is not by absenting ourselves from the assembly to think them through on our

own, but rather by joining others in the worship of Jesus.

Authority – Within the Trinity it was agreed that Jesus would become the physical representation of God to mankind. All authority is his because he is God, but also all authority (except, of course, over the other members of the Godhead; 1 Cor 15.27) has been granted to him as the God-man and mediator between God and man. When Jesus says *all*, he means ALL! Thus, the entire created realm, including every molecule and galaxy, every person on earth, every angel, and Satan and every demon, are under his authority.

Ambassadors – His authority is applied in many ways by the ambassadors he appointed to represent him while he is not physically on earth—beginning with the Apostles and continuing with the entire Church, including us. We are not to be spectators or cheerleaders of the paid workers in the Church, but co-workers and active participants. Four of our collective responsibilities are to:

- 1) *Preach* – The Church is to preach the good news to all creation, showing that Jesus came to save all mankind, not just his own Jewish people. The imperative in this verse (in the Greek) is ‘make disciples’. The ‘going’ is assumed and required in order to make disciples. We are not to sit in our comfortable pews, but to carry the Gospel to the world (Jn 4.42).
- 2) *Disciple* – The Church is to disciple the nations (from *ethne*). Jesus does not say that we are to make disciples *from* the nations but that the nations are to be made into disciples. The various ethnic groups of this earth are to become followers of Jesus Christ. This is a foreign concept in modern thought, which is built on the post-Enlightenment idea that the individual is the basic unit of social and political life. In contrast, God deals with people as covenant groups—families and nations; and expects the nations to honour him. We are given a command, but also encouragement, in the imperative, since it implies that, ultimately, the entire world belongs to Jesus. God’s mission is to undo the scattering of peoples that occurred at Babel (Gen 11.9) by drawing them into one kingdom, and to heal the nations in his glorious new kingdom (Rev 21.1-22.5).

- 3) *Baptize* – The Church has been delegated authority to admit members into the visible Church (as constituted in local assemblies), through the inauguration rite of baptism, which is to be administered in the name of the Divine Trinity. Baptism is not a saving ordinance but a confirming ordinance. As a seal of the covenant of grace, baptism marks a visible difference between those who belong to the Church and those who are only of this world; and signifies regeneration, remission of sins, and a willingness to walk in the way of obedience.
- 4) *Teach* – The Church is to teach the nations that they are required to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. God's Law, as contained in the Bible, must be the standard for behaviour in all nations. The authority of Jesus extends to all rulers and legislatures and they are expected to obey him (Ps 2.10-12) and to enact laws that are consistent with God's Law. This means that governments are to enforce the Ten Commandments, and to prohibit evils such as abortion, homosexual practices, same-sex marriage, and commercial activities on the Lord's Day. This view is despised today, even in the Church, but it is what Jesus teaches.

Apostolic – The ambassadors of the Kingdom are validated by signs. At the time of the Apostles the signs included exorcism of demons, speaking in previously unlearned foreign languages, being preserved from dangerous animals and substances, and healing the sick. Whether these apostolic gifts continue into our day is debatable; since the revelation of Christ is complete in the NT, and also the Gospel message has been fully authenticated. Modern claims about the continuing presence of these supernatural gifts often ignore the fact that miracles are not intended primarily for the benefit of believers or as tool of conversion (Lk 16.31), but to authenticate God's messengers (Lk 7.22-23). Today the ambassadors of Christ are validated by their consistent adherence to the truths presented in the Bible and through the miracle of conversions from Satan's kingdom to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Availability – The Church is blessed with a promise. In this meeting with the disciples, Jesus used a covenantal model that included an

introduction, found in the King's declaration of authority; a statement of the covenant duties and stipulations; and a promise of blessing for obedience in his constant and continual presence. Jesus says, not that "I *will* be with you" but "I *am* with you". He is declaring himself to be the eternal I AM, and assuring us that we have Immanuel ("God with us") present with us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, until he returns physically again to earth at the end of time.

An Appearance to the Disciples [December 29] (Jerusalem, Spring 33 AD. Lk 24.44-49; Acts 1.3-8; 1 Cor 15.6-7)

Proofs – After re-commissioning the Apostles, Jesus appeared to many (over 500!) of his disciples, over forty days; providing convincing proofs that he was alive. His purpose in doing this appears to have been to:

- 1) *Prevent* – Jesus ensured that a sufficient number of people saw him alive so that no one could ever, honestly, claim that the resurrection had not taken place. The early disciples were not the subject of self-deception or mass hallucinations. Anyone who examines the evidence with a desire to find the truth will discover that there can be no doubt that Jesus died and was raised from the grave. The Church exists today only because Jesus is risen and is alive.
- 2) *Prepare* – The disciples and, in particular, the Apostles still required instruction about Jesus' purpose for coming into the world and about what their role was to be in the new-covenant Church.

Privileged – In spite of what had happened—Jesus' death and resurrection—the disciples were still looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom of Israel on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Jesus informed them that some information about the future is privileged, and kept in the councils of Heaven. It is enough that we know for certain our final destiny—Heaven or Hell—depending on whether or not we have received Christ. We do not need to know *how* God plans to unfold the remainder of history or when he will bring it to a conclusion. We need to trust that he does know what he is doing and stay focused on our duty of service for him.

Prophecy – Rather than concerning ourselves with God’s plans for the future of the Kingdom, we need to direct our attention to what God has revealed about his purposes. This revelation is found in the Bible. We should notice that Jesus pointed the disciples to the Old Testament (the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms are the three divisions of the OT). Many people in the Church today claim that they are NT Christians and largely ignore the OT; other than reading the more exciting historical accounts, meditating on selected Psalms for comfort, or misinterpreting the eschatological prophecies. For example, they claim that none of the laws in the OT are normative for Christians or for civil governments today, and that the Psalms don’t speak about Jesus and must be replaced by mere human compositions. Jesus pointed the disciples to the OT so that they would see that it speaks about him. The OT teaches us about Jesus and how to live as Christians (2 Tim 3.15-17).

Preparation – In order to prepare them for their ministry he taught them from the OT about his work of redemption—about his death and resurrection. He opened their minds so that they would no longer be caught up in the fanciful Jewish interpretations about the person and role of the Messiah but would see that all the messianic prophecies were fulfilled in him. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, continues to teach his Church in the same way today. A classic conundrum in philosophical thought is how we know that truth is true. For example, how do we know that the Bible is true and other religious documents such as the *Qur’an* and *Book of Mormon* are not the word of God? No test can be devised by human minds to make this determination definitive. The only way that we can ultimately know that truth is true is because the Holy Spirit, through direct personal revelation, tells us that it is. We know that the Bible is true because God opens our minds so that we can understand the Scriptures.

Power – On one occasion he told them that he was going to be sending the Holy Spirit to them, whom he had promised them in the discourse in the upper room on the night of his betrayal. He told them to remain in Jerusalem until the promised gift was delivered. The Holy Spirit would be given to them with visible signs and they would be baptized with an

extraordinary power. The fulfillment of this prediction occurred on the Day of Pentecost (50 days after the resurrection) and the evidence of the power with which they were to be endowed would be manifested in the remarkable change that would occur in them—they would no longer be timid, but fiercely brave in the face of Jewish, Roman, and pagan opposition; no longer confused about the coming Kingdom, but clearly focused on its spiritual nature; no longer wandering and wondering, but going out to gossip the Gospel.

Preaching – With great power comes great responsibility (Lk 12.48). They were sent to preach throughout the entire world. Until this point, the Gospel had been largely confined to a Jewish audience. Now it was time to fulfill the promise given to Abraham that he would be the spiritual father of many nations. What they were to preach is the same thing that the Church is to preach today—the good news that there is a solution to the problem of sin and a future of hope available to mankind. Jesus told them to preach:

- 1) *Repentance* – Men have sinned against God’s Law and must confess to God that they have broken his Law. If they make this confession they will be forgiven of their sins.
- 2) *Resurrection* – However, confession of sins alone is not sufficient for salvation. The disciples were to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus so that everyone will place his faith in Jesus who paid the debt of our sin through his death on the cross.

Anyone who repents of his sin and believes in Jesus will be saved and have eternal life (Jn 3.16).

The Ascension [December 30]

(A Hill near Bethany, Spring 33 AD. Mk 16.19-20; Lk 24.50-53; Acts 1.9-11)

Consecration – Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection so that he could reassure them that he was alive, instruct them about the nature of his redemptive work (why he had to suffer and die), and teach them about the true nature of the Kingdom. Their doubts, confusion, and misunderstanding were lifted during the forty days between the

resurrection and the ascension, and they were now prepared to face new challenges. It was therefore time for Jesus to depart permanently. So, he assembled them on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1.12), near Bethany, and blessed them. We might think of a blessing as a perfunctory word, like ‘God bless you’, or a brief prayer that indicates that the church service is finally over. However, blessings in the Bible are viewed as a means of dispensing grace. When the patriarchs (e.g., Abraham or Jacob) blessed their children and grandchildren, they prophesied and expected that the blessings would come to fruition. When God gave Moses the blessing for the priests (Num 6.22-27) he was making his presence known to his people, and when Paul pronounced blessings at the end of his epistles he expected God to encourage and empower the NT churches. So it was, when Jesus blessed the disciples, he transferred to them a measure of his authority and power and consecrated them in their role as his ambassadors to the world of lost sinners.

Conclusion – While he was blessing them, he departed from the earth on a cloud, was hidden from their sight, and was taken into Heaven. This brought to a conclusion his earthly ministry. Why did he have to leave? Why couldn’t he have remained forever on the earth as the risen-Lord? There are a number of reasons why he had to depart for Heaven, including to: receive glory and honour (Dan 7.13-14); send the Holy Spirit (Jn 16.7), and prepare a place for his people (Jn 14.2). Jesus did not just leave this earth—as if he had died again—he left to go to another place where he has a new role.

Conqueror – On arriving in Heaven, Jesus received the praise of heaven (Rev 3.21; Rev 5.12), was exalted to his earned and rightful place (Phil 2.9-11), and sat down at the right hand of God (Mk 16.19). In the OT economy there were no chairs in the Tabernacle or Temple. The priests could not sit down since they had to show respect for God by standing in his presence, and they could never rest since their work of atonement was always incomplete. In contrast, Jesus as the God-man can rightfully sit down in the presence of God, and can sit because his work of redemption is complete. He is seated as a priest-king, in the order of Melchizedek, on a throne. From this throne he now governs with total

authority (Mt 28.18); ministers on behalf of his people, interceding with the Father to pardon our sins and accept our worship through the merit of his sacrifice (Heb 8.1-6); and prepares to judge from the eternal record books.

Coming – It is a fact beyond all contestation that Jesus will return to this earth in a glorified physical form, accompanied by a myriad of angels. Two angels confirmed this truth after Jesus' ascension and the Apostles reiterate it (1 Thess 4.16; 2 Pt 3.3-13; Rev 22.12). He will not return, as some suppose, to the Mount of Olives to establish an earthly kingdom for a thousand years, headquartered in Jerusalem; but will come to raise all the dead, to judge the nations, to dispense the final rewards—some will face eternal damnation with physical torment in Hell and some will be blessed with eternal happiness in Paradise—and to renovate the created heavens and earth as the eternal abode of all believers. While we wait for his return we are to be about our business for the Kingdom, which consists primarily of two aspects: worship and work.

Celebration – God alone is to be worshiped (Mt 4.10), and since Jesus is God he is to be worshiped. Men praise celebrities and heroes but begrudge the holy and good God the worship he deserves, because they turn good and evil upside down. The disciples got their priorities right, and worshiped Jesus. They engaged in an act of worship. Many people in the Church have come to the wrong understanding of worship, claiming that worship is anything we want to offer to God, as long as it is done with right attitude. This belief is the result of a vain imagination, and has introduced all manner of idolatry into the Church. Worship consists of specific acts (e.g., prayer, singing Psalms) which Jesus and the Apostles have designated. Anything else, even if done for the glory of God, is not *worship*. The disciples probably worshiped Jesus by falling on their knees in prayer and praise. Their worship resulted from having received the blessing from him and having their minds opened to the truth about his ministry and kingdom. When we understand what Jesus has done for us, we also should respond with true worship in great joy and praise.

Continuation – One phase in the redemption of mankind had come to an

end, and another was beginning. Although Jesus was no longer going to be physically present on the earth, his spiritual presence would be made visible through his ambassadors. The disciples were the first trickle of the great river that would bring the waters of life to the world beyond Palestine and the Jews. They went out preaching, accompanied by signs that confirmed their message. The Gospel continues to be preached everywhere and God confirms the truth of it through changed lives. While we await Jesus' return to wrap up this space-time realm, all of us in his Church take the message of hope to all mankind. We go forward through the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

That You May Know and Believe [December 31]
(Judea, mid first century AD. Lk 1.1-4; Jn 20.30-31; Jn 21.24-25)

Content – True faith is not a vague feeling that things will somehow work out. It is based on fact. For Christians, faith is belief in the facts about the life of Jesus and trust in the person of Jesus. The content of our faith is derived primarily from the word of God, recorded in the Bible. The object of our faith is Jesus, whose life and teachings we have considered in our preceding 364 meditations. John tells us that there was a great quantity of material that could have been written down about the life of Jesus. However, the Gospel writers were selective in what they recorded. For example, John mentions seven miracles, whereas in total the four Gospels refer to over thirty miracles. Each Gospel writer had a specific purpose in his selection of material and included only what would help to accomplish his goals. Even though everything that Jesus did or said is worthy of our consideration, the Holy Spirit guided the selection of what was recorded to ensure that the Gospels contain no more, and no less, than what is required to convince and convict the reader. The Gospels were not written to entertain us but to proclaim the truth about Jesus as the saviour of the world. God says only what needs to be said. So, we are to cherish the word that he has seen fit to reveal to us.

Credibility – The Gospels are based on credible, contemporary, eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. These accounts were written

down within a few decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus by those who actually saw what he did and heard what he taught (Matthew and John), or were based on information entrusted to faithful recorders (Mark and Luke) by the immediate eyewitnesses. The Gospels are not the product of centuries of evolving teaching in the post-apostolic church, but the direct account of what actually happened in Palestine, about 2,000 years ago.

Citation – The Gospel writers prepared their content from information that was known to them personally or from the firsthand accounts that were made available to them from eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that, to a degree, they also used previously written material and incorporated it into their accounts. For example, it is possible that Matthew copied portions of his account from Mark's Gospel, or that both used a previously written source that no longer exists. Luke, in particular, refers to other accounts that he had available to him. However, as he tells us, he checked that anything he incorporated into his Gospel was exactly what had occurred and what was believed by other Christians to be the truth. The writers' use of copied material, combined with their original content, provides us with the written records that we have available today. These four Gospel accounts are highly attested for their accuracy. No other ancient documents can compare in terms of the degree of certainty we have as to their reliability. We praise God that he prepared, and preserved, this testimony to his Son in written form shortly after the events occurred, so that every generation since Jesus has had access to the complete record.

Care – The Gospels were written with great care from Spirit-refined memory (Jn 14.26) or careful research (Lk 1.3) and each author wove his selected material into a narrative which has a unique structure. Yet, while each Gospel is largely independent of the others, their unique records complement, corroborate, and complete the other accounts. In the harmony of the four Gospels, God has given us a composite account of the life of his Son on earth that, as we have seen, contains no contradictions. The Gospel writers took such care because they believed sincerely that they were handling the word of life which must be

communicated to the world. In composing their Gospel accounts, the writers had two primary goals:

- **Certainty** – First, the Gospels were written so that all people could come to know for certain what had transpired. Our faith is based on knowledge of the truth and not on an uninformed grasping in a fathomless void. While Luke wrote to improve the knowledge of his primary reader, Theophilus, the others wrote to provide introductory knowledge to Jewish or Gentile audiences who were ignorant about the Christ. The primary means of presenting Gospel truth is through preaching, but preaching must be focused on explaining the written word of God to the hearers. Also, the written word is used directly by the Holy Spirit to lead people to the knowledge of Jesus. God intended that the written word would serve as the basis for belief—that we would know what we believe and why we believe it, and be able to give a reason for our hope.
- **Confession** – Second, the Gospels were written so that all people could come to believe in Jesus Christ as the only saviour of the world. The Gospels are intended to be read by unbelievers as well as by believers in Jesus. They provide what everyone needs to know about the amazing work of redemption, and lead a person to confess that Jesus is the God-man, the Sovereign Lord, and our only Saviour from Satan's dominion and the power of sin. For those who have been saved, the word in the Gospels establishes and sustains our faith, directs our lives in the way of obedience, and focuses our attention on the glory that awaits us in Heaven. It is, therefore, the duty of all mankind to read the Gospels—to know Jesus, believe in Jesus, live in Jesus, and walk for Jesus.

Our journey through the life of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, is now complete. I pray that it has been a blessing to your soul. Amen!

Index of Scripture Passages

01 Genesis

ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 14, 120, 184, 478
ch. 1, v. 1-3, pg., 16, 20, 71
ch. 1, v. 1-31, pg., 71, 287, 366
ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 72
ch. 1, v. 3, 6,, pg., 76
ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 18, 292, 357
ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 42, 72
ch. 1, v. 21, 24, pg., 112
ch. 1, v. 26, 27, pg., 723
ch. 1, v. 26, pg., 606, 718, 723
ch. 1, v. 27, pg., 18, 268, 635
ch. 1, v. 28, pg., 588, 636, 689
ch. 1, v. 31, pg., 17, 437
ch. 2, v. 1-25, pg., 287
ch. 2, v. 3, pg., 868
ch. 2, v. 7, pg., 18, 183, 185, 268, 307, 893
ch. 2, v. 17, pg., 623
ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 636, 637, 689, 772
ch. 2, v. 24, pg., 635, 689
ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 664
ch. 3, v. 3, pg., 423
ch. 3, v. 4, 5, pg., 415
ch. 3, v. 9, pg., 369, 651
ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 502
ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 34, 59, 62, 454, 480, 490, 527, 626, 753
ch. 3, v. 17-18, pg., 566
ch. 3, v. 18, pg., 840
ch. 3, v. 24, pg., 70, 860
ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 797
ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 549
ch. 5, v. 24, pg., 114

ch. 6, v. 3, pg., 152
ch. 6, v. 5, pg., 240, 473, 504, 506
ch. 8, v. 21, pg., 473
ch. 9, v. 1, pg., 588
ch. 9, v. 4, pg., 423, 750
ch. 10, v. 24, pg., 35
ch. 11, v. 9, pg., 902
ch. 11, v. 12, 13, pg., 35
ch. 12, v. 1-9, pg., 506
ch. 12, v. 3, pg., 35
ch. 12, v. 6-7, pg., 213
ch. 14, v. 18, pg., 403
ch. 15, v. 1, pg., 56, 408, 883
ch. 15, v. 6, 8, pg., 296
ch. 15, v. 6, pg., 296, 506
ch. 15, v. 8, pg., 58
ch. 15, v. 17, pg., 70
ch. 17, v. 1-14, pg., 88
ch. 17, v. 3, 4, pg., 435
ch. 17, v. 4, pg., 626, 653
ch. 17, v. 4-7, pg., 653
ch. 17, v. 5, pg., 60
ch. 18, v. 14, pg., 55
ch. 18, v. 18, pg., 144
ch. 18, v. 25, pg., 804
ch. 18, v. 26, pg., 183
ch. 20, v. 6, pg., 511
ch. 21, v. 8-21, pg., 505
ch. 22, v. 1-19, pg., 506
ch. 22, v. 1-24, pg., 82
ch. 22, v. 8, pg., 749
ch. 22, v. 13, pg., 510
ch. 22, v. 18, pg., 33
ch. 25, v. 22, pg., 30
ch. 26, v. 30, pg., 899
ch. 27, v. 1-46, pg., 638

ch. 28, v. 12, pg., 95
ch. 28, v. 14, pg., 95
ch. 31, v. 44-54, pg., 899
ch. 32, v. 22-32, pg., 88
ch. 33, v. 20, pg., 214
ch. 35, v. 1-4, pg., 214
ch. 45, v. 1-3, pg., 882
ch. 47, v. 9, pg., 212, 483
ch. 48-49, pg., 638
ch. 49, v. 10, pg., 59, 750, 840
ch. 49, v. 10-11, pg., 750
ch. 49, v. 11, pg., 98
ch. 49, v. 11-12, pg., 98
ch. 50, v. 20, pg., 840

02 Exodus

ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 18, 70
ch. 3, v. 6, pg., 688
ch. 3, v. 12, pg., 58, 102
ch. 3, v. 13-15, pg., 408
ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 18, 184, 185
ch. 6, v. 6-7, pg., 749
ch. 9, v. 12, pg., 427
ch. 12, v. 15, pg., 343, 729
ch. 12, v. 15-20, pg., 729
ch. 13, v. 21, pg., 70
ch. 16, v. 3-5, pg., 416
ch. 16, v. 6-8, pg., 416
ch. 16, v. 17, 18, pg., 404
ch. 16-17, pg., 198
ch. 18, v. 14, pg., 821
ch. 18, v. 17-26, pg., 198
ch. 18, v. 25, pg., 403
ch. 19, v. 3, pg., 199
ch. 19, v. 6, pg., 212
ch. 19, v. 19, pg., 76
ch. 20, v. 3, pg., 15
ch. 20, v. 5, pg., 511
ch. 20, v. 7, pg., 88, 104, 244,

259

ch. 20, v. 8-11, pg., 431, 572,
589, 606
ch. 20, v. 10, pg., 291
ch. 20, v. 11, pg., 478
ch. 20, v. 12, pg., 431
ch. 20, v. 13, pg., 237
ch. 21, v. 6, pg., 580
ch. 21, v. 12, pg., 111
ch. 21, v. 23-25, pg., 246
ch. 21, v. 32, pg., 733, 735
ch. 22, v. 1, pg., 652
ch. 22, v. 5, pg., 111
ch. 22, v. 8, pg., 580
ch. 22, v. 21, pg., 249
ch. 25, v. 40, pg., 251
ch. 30, v. 12-16, pg., 666
ch. 30, v. 13, pg., 467, 703
ch. 30, v. 13-15, pg., 467
ch. 33, v. 7, pg., 460
ch. 33, v. 19, 22, pg., 408
ch. 34, v. 7, pg., 36
ch. 34, v. 18, pg., 827
ch. 34, v. 21, pg., 189
ch. 34, v. 29, pg., 20, 219, 459
ch. 34, v. 29-35, pg., 20, 219
ch. 35, v. 29, pg., 703

03 Leviticus

ch. 3, v. 17, pg., 423, 750
ch. 5, v. 2, pg., 165
ch. 5, v. 7, pg., 703
ch. 7, v. 26-27, pg., 750
ch. 9, v. 22, pg., 638
ch. 10, v. 1-3, pg., 252
ch. 11, v. 7, pg., 359
ch. 12, v. 3, pg., 60, 487
ch. 13, v. 45-46, pg., 165
ch. 14, v. 1-32, pg., 627
ch. 14, v. 4, 6, pg., 840
ch. 14, v. 10, 24, pg., 83

ch. 14, v. 22, pg., 666
ch. 15, v. 19-33, pg., 368
ch. 15, v. 25-27, pg., 364
ch. 16, v. 29, pg., 173, 263
ch. 16, v. 29-31, pg., 173
ch. 17, v. 10-14, pg., 423, 750
ch. 18, v. 1-30, pg., 226
ch. 18, v. 5, pg., 530
ch. 18, v. 6-17, pg., 241
ch. 18-20, pg., 611
ch. 19, v. 2, pg., 250
ch. 19, v. 10, pg., 249
ch. 19, v. 15, pg., 269
ch. 19, v. 17, pg., 615
ch. 19, v. 18, pg., 248, 288,
530, 691, 754
ch. 19, v. 23-24, pg., 569
ch. 20, v. 6, 27, pg., 323
ch. 20, v. 10, pg., 242, 496
ch. 20, v. 11, 17, 20, 21, pg.,
241
ch. 21, v. 10, 11, pg., 364
ch. 22, v. 21, pg., 703
ch. 23, v. 27, pg., 173, 263
ch. 23, v. 27-32, pg., 173
ch. 23, v. 35-36, 39-43, pg.,
477
ch. 23, v. 36, pg., 492
ch. 23, v. 40, pg., 659
ch. 24, v. 16, pg., 579, 842
ch. 24, v. 20, 21, pg., 246
ch. 24, v. 23, pg., 846
ch. 25, v. 8-55, pg., 151
ch. 25, v. 43, pg., 291
ch. 26, v. 42, pg., 63
ch. 27, v. 30, pg., 703

04 Numbers

ch. 4, v. 47, pg., 54
ch. 5, v. 11-31, pg., 242

ch. 6, v. 1-12, pg., 56
ch. 6, v. 22-27, pg., 638, 907
ch. 8, v. 7, pg., 65
ch. 11, v. 6, pg., 416
ch. 11, v. 22, pg., 403
ch. 12, v. 7, pg., 234
ch. 12, v. 9-15, pg., 368
ch. 13, v. 33, pg., 343
ch. 15, v. 32-36, pg., 180
ch. 15, v. 37-41, pg., 368, 411
ch. 15, v. 39, 40, pg., 368
ch. 19, v. 11, pg., 364, 867
ch. 19, v. 13, pg., 294
ch. 21, v. 4-9, pg., 119
ch. 23, v. 19, pg., 833
ch. 24, v. 17, pg., 42
ch. 29, v. 7, pg., 263
ch. 30, v. 1, 2, pg., 245
ch. 35, v. 30-31, pg., 237

05 Deuteronomy

ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 403
ch. 1, v. 16-17, pg., 495
ch. 4, v. 33, 36, pg., 76
ch. 5, v. 22, pg., 30, 236
ch. 6, v. 1-3, pg., 55
ch. 6, v. 4, pg., 15, 690
ch. 6, v. 4-9, pg., 690
ch. 6, v. 5, pg., 288, 530
ch. 6, v. 13, pg., 184
ch. 6, v. 16, pg., 268
ch. 7, v. 1-2, pg., 433
ch. 7, v. 1-3, pg., 36
ch. 7, v. 9, pg., 359
ch. 8, v. 1-5, pg., 79
ch. 8, v. 11-18, pg., 606
ch. 9, v. 15, pg., 382
ch. 11, v. 26-30, pg., 214
ch. 11, v. 29, pg., 214
ch. 14, v. 28-29, pg., 253

ch. 15, v. 7-10, pg., 248
ch. 15, v. 7-11, pg., 254
ch. 15, v. 9, pg., 643
ch. 16, v. 16, pg., 99
ch. 17, v. 6, pg., 242, 365, 497,
817
ch. 17, v. 7, pg., 497
ch. 17, v. 14-15, pg., 685
ch. 17, v. 16, pg., 116
ch. 18, v. 15, 18, pg., 80, 415,
493
ch. 18, v. 15, pg., 80, 108, 188,
289, 294, 405, 415, 493, 662,
873
ch. 18, v. 18, pg., 139, 370
ch. 19, v. 15, pg., 116, 187,
459, 475, 499, 817
ch. 21, v. 18-21, pg., 605
ch. 21, v. 22-23, pg., 863
ch. 21, v. 23, pg., 223, 828
ch. 22, v. 8, pg., 226, 228
ch. 22, v. 12, pg., 368, 411
ch. 22, v. 22, pg., 242
ch. 22, v. 23-24, pg., 27
ch. 23, v. 3, pg., 36
ch. 23, v. 18, pg., 825
ch. 23, v. 25, pg., 189
ch. 24, v. 1, pg., 241
ch. 24, v. 1-4, pg., 635
ch. 24, v. 10-13, pg., 248
ch. 24, v. 16, pg., 423
ch. 24, v. 19-22, pg., 254
ch. 25, v. 5-10, pg., 687
ch. 27, v. 1-4, pg., 214
ch. 27-29, pg., 381
ch. 28, v. 1-68, pg., 200
ch. 28, v. 3-14, pg., 207
ch. 28, v. 29, pg., 446
ch. 30, v. 20, pg., 183, 185

ch. 31, v. 6, pg., 785
06 Joshua
ch. 8, v. 1, pg., 408
ch. 8, v. 30-35, pg., 381
ch. 8, v. 32, pg., 214
ch. 8, v. 34-35, pg., 214
ch. 10, v. 12-14, pg., 357, 665
ch. 17, v. 16, pg., 627
ch. 21, v. 10, 11, pg., 29
ch. 22, v. 6, pg., 638
ch. 24, v. 1, pg., 214
ch. 24, v. 15, 19, 20, pg., 266
ch. 24, v. 32, pg., 214

07 Judges
ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 75
ch. 5, v. 1-31, pg., 34
ch. 6, v. 33, pg., 627
ch. 6, v. 34, pg., 75
ch. 6, v. 36, pg., 58
ch. 11, v. 1-2, pg., 373
ch. 11, v. 29, pg., 75
ch. 14, v. 6, 19, pg., 75
ch. 20, v. 26, pg., 263

08 Ruth
ch. 2, v. 2, pg., 254
09 1 Samuel
ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 470
ch. 2, v. 30, pg., 882
ch. 2, v. 36, pg., 254
ch. 7, v. 6, pg., 173, 176
ch. 15, v. 21-23, pg., 371
ch. 15, v. 22, pg., 667
ch. 16, v. 13, pg., 75
ch. 17, v. 34-35, 37, pg., 522
ch. 18, v. 9, pg., 643
ch. 25, v. 41, pg., 740

10 2 Samuel
ch. 7, v. 16, pg., 493
ch. 9, v. 13, pg., 403

ch. 12, v. 1-14, pg., 327

ch. 12, v. 22, pg., 263

ch. 14, v. 1-11, pg., 327

ch. 15, v. 23, pg., 808

ch. 23, v. 1-2, pg., 693

ch. 24, v. 16, pg., 70

11 1 Kings

ch. 1, v. 9-11, pg., 899

ch. 2, v. 10, pg., 618

ch. 3, v. 9, 10, pg., 277

ch. 8, v. 55, pg., 30

ch. 9, v. 3, pg., 55

ch. 10, v. 1-13, pg., 541

ch. 11, v. 36, pg., 36

ch. 17, v. 14, pg., 416

ch. 17, v. 17-24, pg., 294

ch. 17, v. 21, pg., 687

ch. 18, v. 21, pg., 266, 315

ch. 18, v. 26-29, pg., 323

ch. 19, v. 1-9, pg., 57

ch. 19, v. 11, pg., 408, 442

ch. 19, v. 11-12, pg., 442

ch. 20, v. 35-40, pg., 327

ch. 22, v. 17, pg., 376

12 2 Kings

ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 537

ch. 1, v. 8, pg., 65

ch. 1, v. 9-12, pg., 481

ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 114

ch. 4, v. 29-31, pg., 368

ch. 4, v. 42-44, pg., 404

ch. 5, v. 1-14, pg., 165, 628

ch. 8, v. 19, pg., 36

ch. 11, v. 1-3, pg., 791

ch. 13, v. 20, 21, pg., 368

ch. 20, v. 8, pg., 58

13 1 Chronicles

ch. 29, v. 22, pg., 899

14 2 Chronicles

ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 860

ch. 5, v. 14, pg., 70

ch. 24, v. 20-21, pg., 549

ch. 25, v. 16, pg., 274

ch. 26, v. 19, pg., 627

ch. 29, v. 27-28, pg., 806

15 Ezra

ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 136

ch. 8, v. 21-23, pg., 263

16 Nehemiah

ch. 1, v. 4, pg., 263

ch. 5, v. 17, pg., 403

ch. 9, v. 1, 2, pg., 263

ch. 9, v. 1, pg., 173

ch. 10, v. 32, pg., 467

ch. 13, v. 4, 10, pg., 668

ch. 13, v. 15-22, pg., 180

17 Esther

ch. 4, v. 16, pg., 173, 263

ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 594

ch. 6, v. 14, pg., 594, 682

18 Job

ch. 1, v. 6-12, pg., 612

ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 623

ch. 2, v. 6, pg., 623

ch. 9, v. 8, 11, pg., 408

ch. 10, v. 12, pg., 183, 186

ch. 14, v. 16, 17, pg., 262

ch. 19, v. 26, pg., 687

ch. 33, v. 4, pg., 183, 186

ch. 40, v. 15-24, pg., 117

ch. 41, v. 1-34, pg., 117

19 Psalms

127, 637

ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 543, 819

ch. 2, v. 1, 2, pg., 850

ch. 2, v. 1-12, pg., 568, 681

ch. 2, v. 2, 8, 9, pg., 573

ch. 2, v. 2, pg., 573, 625, 684

- ch. 2, v. 4, pg., 840, 870, 872
- ch. 2, v. 4-6, pg., 870
- ch. 2, v. 6, 7, pg., 660
- ch. 2, v. 7, 8, pg., 77
- ch. 2, v. 7-12, pg., 407
- ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 840
- ch. 2, v. 10-12, pg., 903
- ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 295
- ch. 2, v. 12, pg., 841
- ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 355
- ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 355
- ch. 5, v. 4, pg., 241
- ch. 7, v. 17, pg., 303
- ch. 8, v. 1, 3, pg., 117
- ch. 8, v. 2, pg., 662
- ch. 10, v. 17, pg., 633
- ch. 14, v. 1, pg., 554, 640
- ch. 14, v. 1-7, pg., 562
- ch. 16, v. 10, pg., 873
- ch. 16, v. 11, pg., 126
- ch. 18, v. 49, pg., 807
- ch. 19, v. 1, 2, 4, pg., 21
- ch. 19, v. 1, pg., 187
- ch. 19, v. 1-14, pg., 562
- ch. 19, v. 1-6, pg., 117
- ch. 19, v. 8, pg., 18
- ch. 19, v. 14, pg., 287
- ch. 20, v. 5, pg., 603
- ch. 21, v. 6, pg., 126
- ch. 22, v. 1, pg., 858
- ch. 22, v. 1-31, pg., 746
- ch. 23, v. 1, 2, pg., 403
- ch. 23, v. 1-4, pg., 521
- ch. 23, v. 2, pg., 536
- ch. 23, v. 4, pg., 63
- ch. 23, v. 5, pg., 732
- ch. 24, v. 3, 4, pg., 258
- ch. 25, v. 8, 9, pg., 340
- ch. 25, v. 8, pg., 340, 512
- ch. 25, v. 9, pg., 307
- ch. 27, v. 2, pg., 422
- ch. 31, v. 6, pg., 250
- ch. 32, v. 1, pg., 477
- ch. 32, v. 5, pg., 241
- ch. 33, v. 6, 9, pg., 294
- ch. 34, v. 15, pg., 256, 633
- ch. 34, v. 20, pg., 828
- ch. 35, v. 9, pg., 603
- ch. 35, v. 13, pg., 263
- ch. 35, v. 19, pg., 543
- ch. 36, v. 9, pg., 18, 186
- ch. 37, v. 21, 25, pg., 255
- ch. 37, v. 25, pg., 268
- ch. 38, v. 11, pg., 857
- ch. 40, v. 6-8, pg., 213
- ch. 40, v. 7, pg., 295
- ch. 41, v. 9, pg., 730, 743, 746
- ch. 42, v. 11, pg., 257
- ch. 43, v. 3, pg., 18
- ch. 43, v. 5, pg., 257
- ch. 45, v. 1-17, pg., 721
- ch. 45, v. 6, pg., 322, 840
- ch. 47, v. 8, pg., 357
- ch. 49, v. 15, pg., 873
- ch. 50, v. 10, pg., 606
- ch. 51, v. 7, 10, pg., 368
- ch. 51, v. 9, pg., 262
- ch. 51, v. 10, pg., 241
- ch. 51, v. 11, pg., 492
- ch. 51, v. 15-17, pg., 667
- ch. 53, v. 1-3, pg., 796
- ch. 56, v. 13, pg., 18
- ch. 63, v. 11, pg., 470
- ch. 66, v. 18, pg., 238
- ch. 69, v. 3, 21, pg., 858
- ch. 69, v. 5-12, pg., 263
- ch. 69, v. 9, pg., 100
- ch. 69, v. 21, pg., 846, 848

- ch. 69, v. 28, pg., 527
ch. 72, v. 17, pg., 671
ch. 74, v. 12-14, pg., 357
ch. 75, v. 7-8, pg., 646
ch. 76, v. 4, pg., 18
ch. 78, v. 2, pg., 345
ch. 78, v. 19, 20, pg., 403
ch. 80, v. 1-19, pg., 773
ch. 80, v. 8-11, pg., 344
ch. 80, v. 8-16, pg., 679
ch. 82, v. 6, pg., 579
ch. 84, v. 10, pg., 470
ch. 86, v. 7, pg., 633
ch. 86, v. 13, pg., 873
ch. 89, v. 8-9, pg., 356
ch. 89, v. 15, pg., 18
ch. 89, v. 35-36, pg., 693
ch. 90, v. 1, 2, pg., 18
ch. 90, v. 2, pg., 14
ch. 91, v. 1-16, pg., 63
ch. 91, v. 11, pg., 810
ch. 91, v. 13, pg., 527
ch. 92, v. 10, pg., 62
ch. 94, v. 1, pg., 250
ch. 94, v. 2, pg., 183
ch. 96, v. 2, pg., 31
ch. 97, v. 2, 3, pg., 714
ch. 98, v. 1-2, pg., 601
ch. 98, v. 8, 9, pg., 30
ch. 98, v. 9, pg., 491, 559
ch. 103, v. 1-22, pg., 629
ch. 103, v. 3, 12, pg., 477
ch. 103, v. 12, pg., 262
ch. 103, v. 19, pg., 258
ch. 104, v. 2, pg., 18, 460
ch. 106, v. 8-9, pg., 356
ch. 107, v. 8, pg., 629
ch. 107, v. 23-30, pg., 356
ch. 109, v. 4-13, pg., 800
ch. 109, v. 10, pg., 254
ch. 110, v. 1, pg., 31, 64, 212, 289, 294, 693
ch. 110, v. 1-4, pg., 212
ch. 110, v. 4, pg., 289, 671
ch. 113, v. 9, pg., 312
ch. 114, v. 6, pg., 30
ch. 115, v. 3, pg., 258
ch. 115, v. 4-8, pg., 154
ch. 116, v. 12-14, pg., 806
ch. 116, v. 12-19, pg., 807
ch. 118, v. 17-18, pg., 807
ch. 118, v. 22-23, pg., 681
ch. 118, v. 25-26, pg., 660
ch. 118, v. 26, pg., 295
ch. 118, v. 27, pg., 18
ch. 119, v. 68, pg., 512
ch. 119, v. 105, pg., 18
ch. 119, v. 160, pg., 234
ch. 121, v. 1-8, pg., 801
ch. 122, v. 1, pg., 649
ch. 122, v. 1-9, pg., 283
ch. 132, v. 11, pg., 660
ch. 132, v. 17, pg., 62
ch. 133, v. 2, pg., 840
ch. 135, v. 14, pg., 874
ch. 136, v. 1-26, pg., 257
ch. 139, v. 21, pg., 250
ch. 141, v. 2, pg., 55, 252, 260
ch. 141, v. 5, pg., 274, 615
ch. 145, v. 17, pg., 179
ch. 146, v. 8, pg., 571
ch. 149, v. 1-2, pg., 662
- 20 Proverbs**
ch. 3, v. 24, pg., 355
ch. 5, v. 15-23, pg., 636
ch. 8, v. 22-36, pg., 17
ch. 8, v. 23, pg., 14
ch. 11, v. 24, 25, pg., 255

ch. 14, v. 21, pg., 253, 612
 ch. 15, v. 8, pg., 238, 667
 ch. 15, v. 8-9, pg., 238
 ch. 15, v. 29, pg., 633
 ch. 16, v. 18, pg., 591
 ch. 16, v. 33, pg., 293
 ch. 17, v. 24, pg., 543
 ch. 18, v. 21, pg., 319
 ch. 19, v. 17, pg., 255, 612
 ch. 19, v. 21, pg., 865
 ch. 21, v. 4, pg., 543
 ch. 21, v. 13, pg., 612
 ch. 23, v. 4, 5, pg., 413
 ch. 23, v. 23, pg., 349
 ch. 25, v. 12, pg., 274
 ch. 26, v. 4, pg., 159
 ch. 26, v. 5, pg., 434, 580
 ch. 27, v. 5, pg., 615
 ch. 28, v. 27, pg., 255, 612
 ch. 30, v. 4, pg., 119
 ch. 31, v. 10-31, pg., 312

21 Ecclesiastes

ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 541
 ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 348
 ch. 1, v. 8-10, pg., 311
 ch. 4, v. 9, 10, pg., 378
 ch. 4, v. 9, pg., 378, 737
 ch. 5, v. 4-6, pg., 399
 ch. 7, v. 9, pg., 238
 ch. 10, v. 20, pg., 550

23 Isaiah

ch. 1, v. 10-17, pg., 260
 ch. 1, v. 11, pg., 667
 ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 285
 ch. 1, v. 15-17, pg., 281
 ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 293, 532
 ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 840
 ch. 2, v. 4, pg., 481
 ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 612

ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 717
 ch. 5, v. 1-7, pg., 568, 679, 773
 ch. 5, v. 7, pg., 826
 ch. 5, v. 20, pg., 839
 ch. 6, v. 2, pg., 56
 ch. 6, v. 3, pg., 277, 429
 ch. 6, v. 9, 10, pg., 331
 ch. 7, v. 11, pg., 58
 ch. 7, v. 14, pg., 28, 102, 295, 408
 ch. 9, v. 1, pg., 45, 53, 153, 169, 300, 493, 834
 ch. 9, v. 2, pg., 18
 ch. 9, v. 6, 7, pg., 322
 ch. 9, v. 6-7, pg., 212
 ch. 9, v. 7, pg., 671, 693
 ch. 11, v. 1, pg., 46, 493, 693
 ch. 13, v. 10, pg., 714
 ch. 14, v. 12-13, pg., 117
 ch. 17, v. 12, pg., 355, 358
 ch. 19, v. 1, pg., 714
 ch. 21, v. 1-17, pg., 300
 ch. 23, v. 1-18, pg., 300
 ch. 25, v. 6, pg., 213, 292, 404, 682
 ch. 28, v. 16, pg., 286, 452
 ch. 29, v. 13, pg., 182, 252, 432
 ch. 29, v. 18, pg., 296, 372, 446, 516
 ch. 29, v. 18-19, pg., 296
 ch. 29, v. 23, pg., 429
 ch. 34, v. 4, 5, pg., 714
 ch. 35, v. 5, pg., 164, 296, 516
 ch. 35, v. 5-6, pg., 296
 ch. 35, v. 6, pg., 30, 372, 437
 ch. 35, v. 8, pg., 368, 760
 ch. 35, v. 56-6, pg., 164
 ch. 37, v. 13, pg., 537

ch. 40, v. 3, 4, pg., 63
 ch. 40, v. 3-5, pg., 65
 ch. 40, v. 5, pg., 66
 ch. 40, v. 11, pg., 639
 ch. 40, v. 25, pg., 429
 ch. 40, v. 31, pg., 502
 ch. 41, v. 10, 13, 14, pg., 408
 ch. 42, v. 1, pg., 77
 ch. 42, v. 1-4, pg., 194
 ch. 42, v. 6, 7, pg., 154, 446
 ch. 42, v. 7, pg., 516
 ch. 42, v. 18, pg., 372
 ch. 43, v. 1, 2, pg., 408
 ch. 43, v. 8, pg., 372
 ch. 43, v. 10, pg., 384
 ch. 44, v. 3, pg., 639
 ch. 45, v. 17, pg., 126
 ch. 49, v. 6, pg., 154, 626
 ch. 50, v. 6, pg., 818
 ch. 51, v. 4, pg., 765
 ch. 51, v. 11, pg., 126
 ch. 51, v. 17-23, pg., 646
 ch. 52, v. 1, pg., 368
 ch. 52, v. 1-12, pg., 212
 ch. 52, v. 14, pg., 841
 ch. 52, v. 15, pg., 65
 ch. 53, v. 1, pg., 72
 ch. 53, v. 1-12, pg., 213, 746
 ch. 53, v. 3, pg., 622
 ch. 53, v. 4, 11, pg., 454
 ch. 53, v. 4, pg., 161, 454
 ch. 53, v. 5, 6, pg., 161
 ch. 53, v. 5, pg., 161, 750, 842
 ch. 53, v. 6, pg., 82, 600
 ch. 53, v. 7, pg., 82
 ch. 53, v. 8, pg., 625
 ch. 53, v. 9, pg., 867
 ch. 53, v. 12, pg., 846, 847
 ch. 54, v. 1-17, pg., 212

ch. 54, v. 5, pg., 130
 ch. 54, v. 13, pg., 639
 ch. 55, v. 1, pg., 349, 594
 ch. 55, v. 1-7, pg., 277
 ch. 55, v. 2, pg., 413
 ch. 55, v. 8, 9, pg., 179, 849
 ch. 55, v. 8-11, pg., 90
 ch. 55, v. 8-9, pg., 442
 ch. 56, v. 1-8, pg., 144
 ch. 56, v. 7, pg., 669
 ch. 58, v. 4, 5, pg., 264
 ch. 58, v. 6, 7, pg., 253
 ch. 58, v. 6-14, pg., 264
 ch. 58, v. 9, pg., 633
 ch. 58, v. 13-14, pg., 181
 ch. 60, v. 3, pg., 42, 765
 ch. 61, v. 1, 2, pg., 150
 ch. 61, v. 1, pg., 296
 ch. 61, v. 10, pg., 684
 ch. 62, v. 4, 5, pg., 130
 ch. 63, v. 12, pg., 357
 ch. 64, v. 6, pg., 206
 ch. 65, v. 4, pg., 359
 ch. 65, v. 5, pg., 308
 ch. 65, v. 17-25, pg., 208, 212
 ch. 66, v. 2-4, pg., 260
 ch. 66, v. 3, pg., 275

24 Jeremiah

ch. 2, v. 1-37, pg., 320
 ch. 2, v. 13, pg., 138
 ch. 2, v. 21, pg., 773
 ch. 3, v. 6-25, pg., 320
 ch. 3, v. 20, pg., 130
 ch. 4, v. 31, pg., 659
 ch. 6, v. 9, pg., 773
 ch. 7, v. 4, pg., 257
 ch. 8, v. 13, pg., 664
 ch. 9, v. 17, pg., 363
 ch. 11, v. 19, pg., 82

- ch. 11, v. 20, pg., 400
- ch. 17, v. 9, pg., 432
- ch. 17, v. 13, pg., 138
- ch. 17, v. 21-27, pg., 180
- ch. 19, v. 1-13, pg., 826
- ch. 23, v. 9-39, pg., 519
- ch. 30, v. 17, pg., 164
- ch. 31, v. 30, pg., 864
- ch. 31, v. 31-34, pg., 111, 750
- ch. 31, v. 31-37, pg., 28
- ch. 31, v. 33, 34, pg., 66
- ch. 32, v. 6-9, pg., 826
- ch. 33, v. 6, pg., 164

26 Ezekiel

- ch. 1, v. 4, pg., 70
- ch. 1, v. 25, 28, pg., 76
- ch. 2, v. 1, 2, pg., 76
- ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 76, 414
- ch. 15, v. 1-8, pg., 773
- ch. 16, v. 8, pg., 130
- ch. 17, v. 5-10, pg., 773
- ch. 17, v. 22, 23, pg., 344
- ch. 18, v. 4, pg., 454
- ch. 18, v. 20, pg., 423, 864
- ch. 18, v. 21-23, pg., 678
- ch. 18, v. 32, pg., 804
- ch. 19, v. 10-14, pg., 773
- ch. 27, v. 1-36, pg., 300
- ch. 32, v. 7, pg., 714
- ch. 34, v. 1-10, pg., 519
- ch. 34, v. 11, pg., 91
- ch. 34, v. 15, 23, pg., 403
- ch. 34, v. 23, pg., 370
- ch. 36, v. 26-27, pg., 111
- ch. 37, v. 1-14, pg., 624, 687
- ch. 47, v. 1-11, pg., 492

27 Daniel

- ch. 2, v. 21, pg., 686
- ch. 2, v. 34, 35, pg., 65

- ch. 2, v. 34, pg., 65, 706
- ch. 2, v. 37-38, pg., 686
- ch. 2, v. 44, pg., 322, 829, 852
- ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 212
- ch. 4, v. 12, pg., 344
- ch. 4, v. 30, pg., 553
- ch. 4, v. 37, pg., 442
- ch. 6, v. 10, pg., 256
- ch. 7, v. 13, 14, pg., 714
- ch. 7, v. 13, pg., 96, 340, 407, 414, 426, 516, 714, 818, 822, 907
- ch. 7, v. 13-14, pg., 407, 907
- ch. 8, v. 16, pg., 56
- ch. 8, v. 17, pg., 414
- ch. 9, v. 21, pg., 56
- ch. 9, v. 25, pg., 488
- ch. 9, v. 27, pg., 710
- ch. 10, v. 3, pg., 264
- ch. 12, v. 2, pg., 126, 419, 687
- ch. 12, v. 3, pg., 23
- ch. 12, v. 11, pg., 710

28 Hosea

- ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 627
- ch. 2, v. 1-23, pg., 320
- ch. 2, v. 19, 20, pg., 130
- ch. 2, v. 21-23, pg., 627
- ch. 2, v. 23, pg., 340
- ch. 6, v. 6, pg., 172, 190, 193, 260
- ch. 9, v. 10, pg., 664
- ch. 11, v. 1, pg., 43, 46

29 Joel

- ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 263
- ch. 2, v. 28, 29, pg., 626
- ch. 2, v. 28-32, pg., 111

30 Amos

- ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 476
- ch. 3, v. 3, pg., 803

- ch. 5, v. 16, pg., 363
- 33 Micah**
- ch. 5, v. 2, pg., 46, 488, 493
- ch. 6, v. 6-8, pg., 260
- ch. 7, v. 1, pg., 664
- ch. 7, v. 5, pg., 384
- 34 Nahum**
- ch. 2, v. 1-3, pg., 300
- ch. 3, v. 1-19, pg., 300
- 36 Zephaniah**
- ch. 1, v. 14-16, pg., 68
- ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 446
- ch. 3, v. 16, pg., 408
- ch. 3, v. 19, pg., 164
- 38 Zechariah**
- ch. 4, v. 6, pg., 343
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 376
- ch. 7, v. 1-7, pg., 173
- ch. 8, v. 19, pg., 173, 263
- ch. 9, v. 1-8, pg., 659
- ch. 9, v. 9, pg., 659
- ch. 11, v. 1-17, pg., 519
- ch. 11, v. 12, 13, pg., 826
- ch. 13, v. 4, pg., 65
- ch. 13, v. 7, pg., 794
- ch. 13, v. 9, pg., 561
- ch. 14, v. 1, pg., 705
- ch. 14, v. 17, pg., 176
- 39 Malachi**
- ch. 1, v. 9, pg., 56
- ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 243
- ch. 2, v. 16, pg., 243, 636
- ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 57, 63, 65, 488
- ch. 3, v. 8-10, pg., 606
- ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 207, 253
- ch. 3, v. 10-12, pg., 207
- ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 70
- ch. 4, v. 2, pg., 411
- ch. 4, v. 5, 6, pg., 62
- ch. 4, v. 5, pg., 57, 62, 81, 297, 460, 462, 463
- ch. 4, v. 5-6, pg., 57, 460, 463
- 40 Matthew**
- ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 49
- ch. 1, v. 1-17, pg., 34, 49, 200, 493
- ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 35
- ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 35
- ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 713
- ch. 1, v. 18-19, pg., 27
- ch. 1, v. 18-25, pg., 27
- ch. 1, v. 20-21, pg., 27
- ch. 1, v. 21, pg., 31, 40, 61, 287, 310, 378, 380
- ch. 1, v. 22, pg., 28, 223
- ch. 1, v. 22-23, pg., 28
- ch. 1, v. 23, pg., 295, 322, 408
- ch. 1, v. 25, pg., 797
- ch. 2, v. 1-12, pg., 41, 292, 669
- ch. 2, v. 1-4, pg., 263
- ch. 2, v. 1-6, pg., 493
- ch. 2, v. 4, 5, pg., 46
- ch. 2, v. 13-18, pg., 43, 46
- ch. 2, v. 15, 17, 23, pg., 28
- ch. 2, v. 15, pg., 43
- ch. 2, v. 19-23, pg., 45
- ch. 2, v. 22, pg., 654
- ch. 2, v. 23, pg., 493
- ch. 3, v. 1-6, pg., 64
- ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 69
- ch. 3, v. 5, 6, pg., 61
- ch. 3, v. 7, 8, pg., 74
- ch. 3, v. 7-10, pg., 66
- ch. 3, v. 9, 10, pg., 292
- ch. 3, v. 11, pg., 69, 70
- ch. 3, v. 11-12, pg., 69
- ch. 3, v. 13-17, pg., 74

- ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 28, 223, 467
- ch. 3, v. 16-17, pg., 76
- ch. 3, v. 17, pg., 187, 414, 670
- ch. 4, v. 1-11, pg., 77
- ch. 4, v. 4, 7, 10, pg., 235
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 908
- ch. 4, v. 12, pg., 133, 134, 295
- ch. 4, v. 13, pg., 152, 301
- ch. 4, v. 13-16, pg., 152
- ch. 4, v. 14, pg., 28
- ch. 4, v. 15-17, pg., 20
- ch. 4, v. 16, 17, pg., 18
- ch. 4, v. 17, pg., 145
- ch. 4, v. 18, pg., 154, 378
- ch. 4, v. 18-22, pg., 154
- ch. 4, v. 19, pg., 898
- ch. 4, v. 23, pg., 161, 229, 377
- ch. 4, v. 23-25, pg., 161
- ch. 4, v. 25, pg., 193
- ch. 5, v. 1, 2, pg., 288
- ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 219, 377
- ch. 5, v. 1-12, pg., 288
- ch. 5, v. 1-2, pg., 198
- ch. 5, v. 2, pg., 199
- ch. 5, v. 3-10, 20, pg., 280
- ch. 5, v. 3-10, pg., 33, 280, 284
- ch. 5, v. 3-12, pg., 200, 202, 204, 206, 209, 211, 213, 233
- ch. 5, v. 3-8, pg., 32
- ch. 5, v. 3-9, pg., 277
- ch. 5, v. 5, pg., 817
- ch. 5, v. 6, pg., 58, 424
- ch. 5, v. 9-12, pg., 813
- ch. 5, v. 10, 11, pg., 784
- ch. 5, v. 10-12, pg., 32, 216
- ch. 5, v. 11, 17, pg., 289
- ch. 5, v. 13, pg., 200, 201, 218, 220, 277, 288, 473, 598
- ch. 5, v. 13-16, pg., 218, 220, 277, 288
- ch. 5, v. 13-20, pg., 200
- ch. 5, v. 13-7.27, pg., 201
- ch. 5, v. 14-16, pg., 19
- ch. 5, v. 15-16, pg., 542
- ch. 5, v. 17, pg., 28, 199, 222, 224, 225, 227, 232, 234, 235, 246, 277, 280, 287, 288, 289, 467, 611, 628, 765
- ch. 5, v. 17-18, pg., 224, 227, 289
- ch. 5, v. 17-19, pg., 235, 246, 280, 765
- ch. 5, v. 17-20, pg., 199, 234, 287, 288
- ch. 5, v. 17-48, pg., 277, 611
- ch. 5, v. 18, 19, pg., 225
- ch. 5, v. 18, pg., 225, 234, 611
- ch. 5, v. 19, pg., 60, 229, 235, 242, 282, 690
- ch. 5, v. 19-20, pg., 690
- ch. 5, v. 20, 22, pg., 289
- ch. 5, v. 20, pg., 66, 231, 246, 247, 250, 282, 289
- ch. 5, v. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43, pg., 235
- ch. 5, v. 21-22, pg., 825
- ch. 5, v. 21-26, pg., 235, 236
- ch. 5, v. 21-48, pg., 200, 224, 234, 251, 288
- ch. 5, v. 22, 29, pg., 287
- ch. 5, v. 22, pg., 237, 287
- ch. 5, v. 27-30, pg., 66, 235, 239, 496
- ch. 5, v. 29, pg., 825
- ch. 5, v. 31-32, pg., 235, 241
- ch. 5, v. 32, pg., 242
- ch. 5, v. 33-37, pg., 235, 243

- ch. 5, v. 36, 37, pg., 817
ch. 5, v. 38-42, pg., 235, 246
ch. 5, v. 38-48, pg., 291
ch. 5, v. 42, pg., 248
ch. 5, v. 43-48, pg., 248, 596
ch. 5, v. 46, pg., 168
ch. 5-7, pg., 73
ch. 6, v. 1, 5, 16, pg., 253
ch. 6, v. 1-18, pg., 251, 267, 277, 291
ch. 6, v. 1-4, pg., 288, 704
ch. 6, v. 1-7.23, pg., 200
ch. 6, v. 2, 5, 16, pg., 252, 265
ch. 6, v. 2-4, pg., 253
ch. 6, v. 4, 18, pg., 253
ch. 6, v. 4, 6, 18, pg., 265
ch. 6, v. 5, pg., 255, 288, 634
ch. 6, v. 5-15, pg., 255, 288
ch. 6, v. 7, pg., 633
ch. 6, v. 9, pg., 258, 303, 505, 633, 796, 884
ch. 6, v. 9-13, pg., 258, 633
ch. 6, v. 11, pg., 268, 471
ch. 6, v. 12, 14-15, pg., 260, 665
ch. 6, v. 12, pg., 238, 260, 665
ch. 6, v. 13, pg., 63, 247, 755
ch. 6, v. 14, 15, pg., 260
ch. 6, v. 14, pg., 260, 476
ch. 6, v. 16-18, pg., 174, 262, 288
ch. 6, v. 17-18, pg., 264
ch. 6, v. 19, pg., 264, 267, 268, 288, 349, 554
ch. 6, v. 19-21, pg., 349
ch. 6, v. 19-24, pg., 264, 267, 288
ch. 6, v. 20, pg., 33
ch. 6, v. 21, pg., 209
ch. 6, v. 24, pg., 315
ch. 6, v. 25-34, pg., 259, 267, 288, 315, 366, 469, 525
ch. 6, v. 32, pg., 899
ch. 7, v. 1-2, pg., 269
ch. 7, v. 1-5, pg., 231
ch. 7, v. 1-6, pg., 271, 282, 288
ch. 7, v. 2, pg., 281
ch. 7, v. 3-5, pg., 271, 615
ch. 7, v. 6, pg., 274, 281
ch. 7, v. 7, pg., 276, 281, 288, 291, 397
ch. 7, v. 7-11, pg., 276
ch. 7, v. 7-12, pg., 288
ch. 7, v. 7-9, pg., 281
ch. 7, v. 10-11, pg., 281
ch. 7, v. 12, pg., 278
ch. 7, v. 13, 23, pg., 287
ch. 7, v. 13, pg., 281, 287, 289, 428
ch. 7, v. 13-14, pg., 281, 289
ch. 7, v. 15, pg., 68, 283, 289, 341, 372, 430
ch. 7, v. 15-20, pg., 68, 341, 430
ch. 7, v. 15-23, pg., 283, 289
ch. 7, v. 16-20, pg., 290
ch. 7, v. 18, pg., 351
ch. 7, v. 21, pg., 284, 285, 286, 289, 359
ch. 7, v. 21-23, pg., 289, 359
ch. 7, v. 21-24, 26, pg., 289
ch. 7, v. 22, pg., 285, 286, 570
ch. 7, v. 23, pg., 285
ch. 7, v. 24-27, pg., 200, 286, 289
ch. 7, v. 28, pg., 200, 219, 288
ch. 7, v. 28-8.1, pg., 288

- ch. 7, v. 29, pg., 290, 294
- ch. 8, v. 2-4, pg., 164
- ch. 8, v. 2-9.8, pg., 290
- ch. 8, v. 3, pg., 447
- ch. 8, v. 5-13, pg., 152, 290, 293, 301, 620
- ch. 8, v. 11, 12, pg., 57, 67, 324, 443
- ch. 8, v. 12, pg., 292
- ch. 8, v. 14-17, pg., 159
- ch. 8, v. 17, pg., 28, 223
- ch. 8, v. 18, 23-27, pg., 355
- ch. 8, v. 19, pg., 482, 483
- ch. 8, v. 19-22, pg., 482
- ch. 8, v. 20, pg., 340
- ch. 8, v. 23-27, pg., 402
- ch. 8, v. 26, pg., 356
- ch. 8, v. 28-32, pg., 357
- ch. 8, v. 28-34, pg., 322
- ch. 8, v. 29, pg., 284
- ch. 8, v. 33-34, pg., 360
- ch. 9, v. 1-2, pg., 177
- ch. 9, v. 1-8, pg., 166
- ch. 9, v. 2-6, pg., 366
- ch. 9, v. 9, pg., 152, 168
- ch. 9, v. 10-13, pg., 170
- ch. 9, v. 14-17, pg., 173
- ch. 9, v. 18-19, 23-24, pg., 362
- ch. 9, v. 20, pg., 367, 411
- ch. 9, v. 20-22, pg., 367
- ch. 9, v. 25-26, pg., 365
- ch. 9, v. 26, pg., 367
- ch. 9, v. 27-31, pg., 151
- ch. 9, v. 27-34, pg., 370
- ch. 9, v. 32, pg., 322, 436
- ch. 9, v. 32-33, pg., 322
- ch. 9, v. 35, pg., 375, 377
- ch. 9, v. 35-38, pg., 375
- ch. 9, v. 36-38, pg., 377
- ch. 10, v. 1, pg., 377
- ch. 10, v. 1-4, pg., 377
- ch. 10, v. 5-15, pg., 380
- ch. 10, v. 14, pg., 482
- ch. 10, v. 16, pg., 74, 382
- ch. 10, v. 16-23, pg., 382
- ch. 10, v. 19, pg., 388
- ch. 10, v. 24-31, pg., 385
- ch. 10, v. 26-31, pg., 469
- ch. 10, v. 32-39, pg., 387
- ch. 10, v. 34, pg., 481, 661, 812
- ch. 10, v. 34-36, pg., 481
- ch. 10, v. 37, pg., 596, 900
- ch. 10, v. 40-42, pg., 390
- ch. 11, v. 1, pg., 392
- ch. 11, v. 2-15, pg., 295
- ch. 11, v. 2-19, pg., 174
- ch. 11, v. 5, 6, pg., 305
- ch. 11, v. 7-19, pg., 305
- ch. 11, v. 11, pg., 73, 129, 548
- ch. 11, v. 14, pg., 297, 462
- ch. 11, v. 16, pg., 297, 713
- ch. 11, v. 16-19, pg., 297
- ch. 11, v. 18, 19, pg., 302
- ch. 11, v. 20-24, pg., 300, 302, 305
- ch. 11, v. 20-27, pg., 306
- ch. 11, v. 22, pg., 716
- ch. 11, v. 24-27, pg., 302
- ch. 11, v. 25-27, pg., 305
- ch. 11, v. 28, pg., 200, 305, 628, 695
- ch. 11, v. 28-30, pg., 305, 678, 695
- ch. 12, v. 1-8, pg., 188
- ch. 12, v. 3, 5, pg., 235
- ch. 12, v. 8, pg., 340
- ch. 12, v. 9, pg., 189, 191
- ch. 12, v. 9-14, pg., 191

- ch. 12, v. 11, pg., 590
- ch. 12, v. 12, pg., 268
- ch. 12, v. 14, pg., 313, 626
- ch. 12, v. 15, pg., 193, 195
- ch. 12, v. 15-21, pg., 193
- ch. 12, v. 16, 19, pg., 195
- ch. 12, v. 17, pg., 28, 223
- ch. 12, v. 21, pg., 195
- ch. 12, v. 22, pg., 312, 315, 320, 330, 537
- ch. 12, v. 22-29, pg., 312, 315, 537
- ch. 12, v. 22-37, pg., 330
- ch. 12, v. 24, pg., 318, 333, 361
- ch. 12, v. 27, pg., 285, 323
- ch. 12, v. 30, pg., 315, 458
- ch. 12, v. 30-32, pg., 315
- ch. 12, v. 31, pg., 316
- ch. 12, v. 33, pg., 317, 351
- ch. 12, v. 33-37, pg., 317
- ch. 12, v. 37, pg., 317
- ch. 12, v. 38-42, pg., 319, 443
- ch. 12, v. 39, 41, 42, 45, pg., 713
- ch. 12, v. 39, pg., 104, 325, 713
- ch. 12, v. 40, pg., 540, 645
- ch. 12, v. 43-35, pg., 667
- ch. 12, v. 43-45, pg., 322, 326
- ch. 12, v. 46-47, pg., 326
- ch. 12, v. 46-50, pg., 324
- ch. 12, v. 50, pg., 736
- ch. 13, v. 1-3a, pg., 327
- ch. 13, v. 1-52, pg., 311
- ch. 13, v. 3-8, pg., 774
- ch. 13, v. 3b-9, 18-23, pg., 332
- ch. 13, v. 10, pg., 329, 352
- ch. 13, v. 10-17, pg., 329
- ch. 13, v. 11, 12, pg., 330
- ch. 13, v. 12, pg., 331
- ch. 13, v. 14, 15, pg., 331
- ch. 13, v. 14, 35, pg., 28
- ch. 13, v. 16, pg., 331
- ch. 13, v. 17, pg., 331, 461
- ch. 13, v. 19, pg., 332
- ch. 13, v. 24-30, 36-43, pg., 339, 350
- ch. 13, v. 30, pg., 377
- ch. 13, v. 31-33, pg., 342
- ch. 13, v. 33, pg., 343
- ch. 13, v. 34-35, pg., 344
- ch. 13, v. 36, pg., 352
- ch. 13, v. 37-43, pg., 477
- ch. 13, v. 38, pg., 292
- ch. 13, v. 40, pg., 717
- ch. 13, v. 44, pg., 330, 339, 347, 442, 607
- ch. 13, v. 44-46, pg., 339, 347, 442
- ch. 13, v. 47-50, pg., 350
- ch. 13, v. 50, pg., 302
- ch. 13, v. 51-53, pg., 352
- ch. 13, v. 54-58, pg., 372
- ch. 13, v. 55, 56, pg., 29
- ch. 13, v. 58, pg., 371
- ch. 14, v. 1-12, pg., 57
- ch. 14, v. 1-2, pg., 395
- ch. 14, v. 3, 4, pg., 134
- ch. 14, v. 3-12, pg., 397
- ch. 14, v. 13, pg., 400
- ch. 14, v. 13-14, pg., 400
- ch. 14, v. 14, pg., 402
- ch. 14, v. 15-21, pg., 402
- ch. 14, v. 22-23, pg., 405
- ch. 14, v. 24-33, pg., 407
- ch. 14, v. 28, pg., 409
- ch. 14, v. 33, pg., 407
- ch. 14, v. 34-36, pg., 410
- ch. 15, v. 1-20, pg., 430

- ch. 15, v. 7-9, pg., 863
- ch. 15, v. 9, pg., 108
- ch. 15, v. 11, pg., 318
- ch. 15, v. 18, 19, pg., 237, 240, 319
- ch. 15, v. 19, pg., 506
- ch. 15, v. 21-28, pg., 292, 433
- ch. 15, v. 24, pg., 145
- ch. 15, v. 28, pg., 97
- ch. 15, v. 29-31, pg., 435
- ch. 15, v. 31, pg., 437
- ch. 15, v. 32-38, pg., 438
- ch. 15, v. 33, pg., 353
- ch. 15, v. 39-16.4, pg., 440
- ch. 16, v. 4, pg., 58, 713
- ch. 16, v. 5, pg., 406, 443, 838
- ch. 16, v. 5-12, pg., 406, 443
- ch. 16, v. 6, pg., 343
- ch. 16, v. 8, pg., 353
- ch. 16, v. 11, 12, pg., 229
- ch. 16, v. 13, 27, pg., 340
- ch. 16, v. 13-20, pg., 448, 454
- ch. 16, v. 16, pg., 452, 493
- ch. 16, v. 17, pg., 452
- ch. 16, v. 18, 19, pg., 339, 450
- ch. 16, v. 18, pg., 70, 156, 339, 344, 450, 451, 475, 874
- ch. 16, v. 18-19, pg., 70, 451, 475
- ch. 16, v. 19, pg., 350, 382
- ch. 16, v. 21, pg., 453, 645, 870, 877
- ch. 16, v. 21-26, pg., 453
- ch. 16, v. 23, pg., 460
- ch. 16, v. 24, pg., 349, 389
- ch. 16, v. 26, pg., 601, 887
- ch. 16, v. 27, pg., 231, 456
- ch. 16, v. 27-28, pg., 456
- ch. 17, v. 1-8, pg., 458, 459
- ch. 17, v. 2, pg., 342
- ch. 17, v. 5, pg., 670
- ch. 17, v. 9, pg., 459, 461
- ch. 17, v. 9-13, pg., 461
- ch. 17, v. 14-23, pg., 464
- ch. 17, v. 17, pg., 713
- ch. 17, v. 20, pg., 342
- ch. 17, v. 21, pg., 263
- ch. 17, v. 22-23, pg., 645, 877
- ch. 17, v. 23, pg., 870, 873
- ch. 17, v. 24, pg., 301, 466, 703
- ch. 17, v. 24-27, pg., 301, 466
- ch. 18, v. 1, pg., 353
- ch. 18, v. 1-5, pg., 469
- ch. 18, v. 4, pg., 592
- ch. 18, v. 6-14, pg., 472
- ch. 18, v. 10-14, pg., 177
- ch. 18, v. 12-14, pg., 599
- ch. 18, v. 14, pg., 473
- ch. 18, v. 15-20, pg., 382
- ch. 18, v. 15-35, pg., 474
- ch. 18, v. 16, pg., 382, 459, 499
- ch. 18, v. 17, pg., 382
- ch. 18, v. 18, pg., 453
- ch. 18, v. 21, 22, 28-35, pg., 665
- ch. 18, v. 22, pg., 261
- ch. 19, v. 1-12, pg., 635
- ch. 19, v. 3, pg., 241
- ch. 19, v. 4, pg., 235
- ch. 19, v. 6, pg., 243
- ch. 19, v. 8, pg., 243
- ch. 19, v. 9, pg., 242
- ch. 19, v. 13-15, pg., 637
- ch. 19, v. 16-30, pg., 640
- ch. 19, v. 21, pg., 558
- ch. 19, v. 26, pg., 55, 403
- ch. 19, v. 27, pg., 642, 647
- ch. 19, v. 28, pg., 646

- ch. 20, v. 1-15, pg., 266
- ch. 20, v. 1-16, pg., 642, 647
- ch. 20, v. 17-19, pg., 877
- ch. 20, v. 17-28, pg., 645
- ch. 20, v. 19, pg., 870, 873
- ch. 20, v. 26, 27, pg., 69
- ch. 20, v. 26, pg., 69, 740
- ch. 20, v. 29-34, pg., 648
- ch. 20, v. 34, pg., 436
- ch. 21, v. 1-9, pg., 658
- ch. 21, v. 4, pg., 28, 223
- ch. 21, v. 9, pg., 370
- ch. 21, v. 10-11, 14-17, pg., 661
- ch. 21, v. 12-13, pg., 666
- ch. 21, v. 12-17, pg., 100
- ch. 21, v. 14, pg., 662
- ch. 21, v. 16, 42, pg., 235
- ch. 21, v. 18-22, 28-46, pg., 57
- ch. 21, v. 18-22, pg., 57, 663
- ch. 21, v. 19, pg., 839
- ch. 21, v. 23-27, pg., 674, 676
- ch. 21, v. 28-32, pg., 676
- ch. 21, v. 31, pg., 472
- ch. 21, v. 33-46, pg., 67, 679
- ch. 21, v. 43, pg., 136, 443
- ch. 22, v. 1-14, pg., 99, 532, 682
- ch. 22, v. 2-4, pg., 605
- ch. 22, v. 15-22, pg., 684
- ch. 22, v. 21, pg., 827
- ch. 22, v. 23-33, pg., 687
- ch. 22, v. 31, pg., 235
- ch. 22, v. 34-40, pg., 689
- ch. 22, v. 37, pg., 227, 237, 754, 900
- ch. 22, v. 37-38, pg., 900
- ch. 22, v. 37-40, pg., 227, 754
- ch. 22, v. 41-46, pg., 692
- ch. 23, v. 1-12, pg., 694
- ch. 23, v. 1-39, pg., 250
- ch. 23, v. 2, pg., 289
- ch. 23, v. 5, pg., 699
- ch. 23, v. 13, pg., 256, 697
- ch. 23, v. 13-36, pg., 697
- ch. 23, v. 23, pg., 825
- ch. 23, v. 34, pg., 713
- ch. 23, v. 37, pg., 116, 250, 700
- ch. 23, v. 37-39, pg., 700
- ch. 23, v. 38, pg., 57
- ch. 24, v. 1-4, pg., 705
- ch. 24, v. 1-51, pg., 629, 706, 707
- ch. 24, v. 3, pg., 726
- ch. 24, v. 4-14, pg., 707
- ch. 24, v. 15-21, pg., 134
- ch. 24, v. 15-24, pg., 632
- ch. 24, v. 15-28, pg., 710
- ch. 24, v. 16-20, pg., 384
- ch. 24, v. 22, pg., 487
- ch. 24, v. 24, pg., 69
- ch. 24, v. 29-35, pg., 713
- ch. 24, v. 34, pg., 661
- ch. 24, v. 35, pg., 715
- ch. 24, v. 36-44, pg., 713, 715
- ch. 24, v. 39, pg., 717
- ch. 24, v. 45-51, pg., 718
- ch. 25, v. 1-13, pg., 713, 720, 723
- ch. 25, v. 1-30, pg., 346
- ch. 25, v. 14-30, pg., 231, 339, 723
- ch. 25, v. 31-46, pg., 457, 726
- ch. 25, v. 34, pg., 33, 213, 218, 256, 558
- ch. 25, v. 36, pg., 296, 776
- ch. 25, v. 41, pg., 127, 302, 335, 359, 419, 573

- ch. 25, v. 42, pg., 341
- ch. 26, v. 1-5, pg., 728
- ch. 26, v. 6-13, pg., 731
- ch. 26, v. 11, pg., 401, 612
- ch. 26, v. 14-16, pg., 733
- ch. 26, v. 15, pg., 733, 735
- ch. 26, v. 17-19, pg., 736
- ch. 26, v. 20, pg., 744, 745
- ch. 26, v. 20-25, pg., 744
- ch. 26, v. 26, pg., 424, 749
- ch. 26, v. 26-29, pg., 749
- ch. 26, v. 30, pg., 805
- ch. 26, v. 31-35, pg., 754
- ch. 26, v. 32, pg., 870, 873, 884
- ch. 26, v. 33, pg., 810
- ch. 26, v. 34, 41, pg., 194
- ch. 26, v. 34, pg., 194, 819
- ch. 26, v. 35, pg., 814, 862
- ch. 26, v. 36-46, pg., 808
- ch. 26, v. 39, pg., 278
- ch. 26, v. 42, pg., 259, 454
- ch. 26, v. 44, pg., 257
- ch. 26, v. 47-56, pg., 811
- ch. 26, v. 52, pg., 756
- ch. 26, v. 56, pg., 223, 794
- ch. 26, v. 57, 59-68, pg., 816
- ch. 26, v. 58, 69-75, pg., 819
- ch. 26, v. 60, 61, pg., 103
- ch. 26, v. 63-4, pg., 245
- ch. 26, v. 73, pg., 89
- ch. 27, v. 1, pg., 821
- ch. 27, v. 2, 11-14, pg., 826
- ch. 27, v. 3-10, pg., 824
- ch. 27, v. 9, pg., 28, 223, 826
- ch. 27, v. 11, pg., 829
- ch. 27, v. 15-21, pg., 836
- ch. 27, v. 22-30, pg., 841
- ch. 27, v. 26, pg., 291
- ch. 27, v. 27-31a, pg., 839
- ch. 27, v. 31b-34, pg., 844
- ch. 27, v. 32, pg., 248
- ch. 27, v. 35-44, pg., 847
- ch. 27, v. 37, pg., 849
- ch. 27, v. 40, pg., 94, 103
- ch. 27, v. 44, pg., 316
- ch. 27, v. 45-51a, pg., 857
- ch. 27, v. 46, pg., 809
- ch. 27, v. 51, pg., 859, 860
- ch. 27, v. 51-56, pg., 860
- ch. 27, v. 52, 53, pg., 114
- ch. 27, v. 52-53, pg., 758, 830, 854
- ch. 27, v. 55-56, pg., 857
- ch. 27, v. 57-61, pg., 865
- ch. 27, v. 59, pg., 867
- ch. 27, v. 61-65, pg., 867
- ch. 28, v. 1-4, pg., 870
- ch. 28, v. 5-8, pg., 875
- ch. 28, v. 6, pg., 873
- ch. 28, v. 7, pg., 884
- ch. 28, v. 9, pg., 881, 883
- ch. 28, v. 10, pg., 883
- ch. 28, v. 11-15, pg., 886
- ch. 28, v. 13, pg., 869
- ch. 28, v. 16-20, pg., 380, 885, 901
- ch. 28, v. 18, pg., 65, 290, 292, 304, 355, 873, 908
- ch. 28, v. 18-20, pg., 65, 290, 292, 355
- ch. 28, v. 19, 20, pg., 68, 367, 451
- ch. 28, v. 19, pg., 68, 136, 144, 177, 312, 332, 367, 451, 568, 607
- ch. 28, v. 19-20, pg., 177, 607
- ch. 28, v. 20, pg., 174, 263, 284, 306, 408

41 Mark

- ch. 1, v. 1-6, pg., 64
- ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 113
- ch. 1, v. 7-8, pg., 69
- ch. 1, v. 9-11, pg., 74
- ch. 1, v. 10-11, pg., 76
- ch. 1, v. 12-13, pg., 77
- ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 86, 134, 145, 487
- ch. 1, v. 14a, pg., 134
- ch. 1, v. 14b-15, pg., 145
- ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 146
- ch. 1, v. 16-20, pg., 86, 154
- ch. 1, v. 21-28, pg., 157, 357, 363
- ch. 1, v. 22, 27, pg., 110
- ch. 1, v. 22, pg., 110, 674
- ch. 1, v. 29-34, pg., 159, 176, 191
- ch. 1, v. 35-39, pg., 161
- ch. 1, v. 40-45, pg., 164
- ch. 1, v. 44, pg., 362
- ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 152
- ch. 2, v. 1-12, pg., 166, 301
- ch. 2, v. 13-14, pg., 168, 169
- ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 301
- ch. 2, v. 15-17, pg., 170
- ch. 2, v. 18-22, pg., 173
- ch. 2, v. 19, pg., 263
- ch. 2, v. 20, pg., 263
- ch. 2, v. 23-28, pg., 188
- ch. 2, v. 27, pg., 581
- ch. 3, v. 1-6, pg., 191
- ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 191
- ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 639
- ch. 3, v. 7-12, pg., 193, 327
- ch. 3, v. 8, pg., 195
- ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 193
- ch. 3, v. 13-19, pg., 195, 312

- ch. 3, v. 16-19, pg., 378
- ch. 3, v. 20, 31, pg., 326
- ch. 3, v. 20, pg., 312, 315, 326, 328, 537
- ch. 3, v. 20-27, pg., 312, 315, 537
- ch. 3, v. 21, pg., 325
- ch. 3, v. 22, pg., 374
- ch. 3, v. 28, pg., 315, 316
- ch. 3, v. 28-30, pg., 315
- ch. 3, v. 29, pg., 317
- ch. 3, v. 30, pg., 315
- ch. 3, v. 31, 32, pg., 328
- ch. 3, v. 31-35, pg., 324
- ch. 3, v. 34-35, pg., 884
- ch. 4, v. 1, 2, pg., 194
- ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 198
- ch. 4, v. 1-2, pg., 327
- ch. 4, v. 3, 9, 23, pg., 332
- ch. 4, v. 3-20, pg., 337
- ch. 4, v. 3-9, 13-20, pg., 332
- ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 330
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 329, 352
- ch. 4, v. 10-12, pg., 329
- ch. 4, v. 21-25, pg., 334
- ch. 4, v. 26-29, pg., 337, 343
- ch. 4, v. 30-32, pg., 342
- ch. 4, v. 33-34, pg., 344
- ch. 4, v. 35-41, pg., 355, 407
- ch. 4, v. 40, pg., 356
- ch. 4, v. 41, pg., 357, 449
- ch. 5, v. 1-13, pg., 357
- ch. 5, v. 14-20, pg., 360
- ch. 5, v. 20, pg., 362
- ch. 5, v. 21-24, 35-36, pg., 362
- ch. 5, v. 24-34, pg., 367
- ch. 5, v. 34, pg., 151
- ch. 5, v. 37-43, pg., 365
- ch. 5, v. 43, pg., 362, 366

- ch. 6, v. 1-6a, pg., 372
- ch. 6, v. 2, 14-15, pg., 449
- ch. 6, v. 3, pg., 53
- ch. 6, v. 6, pg., 292, 375
- ch. 6, v. 6b, pg., 375
- ch. 6, v. 7, pg., 377, 378, 382, 400
- ch. 6, v. 7-13, 30, pg., 400
- ch. 6, v. 8-11, pg., 380
- ch. 6, v. 12-13, pg., 379, 392
- ch. 6, v. 13, pg., 393, 464
- ch. 6, v. 14-16, pg., 395
- ch. 6, v. 14-29, pg., 463
- ch. 6, v. 17, 18, pg., 134
- ch. 6, v. 17-29, pg., 397
- ch. 6, v. 26, pg., 735
- ch. 6, v. 30-34, pg., 400
- ch. 6, v. 31, pg., 312, 400
- ch. 6, v. 34, pg., 402, 403
- ch. 6, v. 35-44, pg., 402, 437
- ch. 6, v. 39, pg., 403
- ch. 6, v. 41, pg., 404
- ch. 6, v. 45-46, pg., 405
- ch. 6, v. 47-52, pg., 407
- ch. 6, v. 48, pg., 408
- ch. 6, v. 52-56, pg., 410
- ch. 7, v. 1-23, pg., 430
- ch. 7, v. 1-4, pg., 98
- ch. 7, v. 8, pg., 60
- ch. 7, v. 10-13, pg., 326
- ch. 7, v. 24-30, pg., 292, 380, 433
- ch. 7, v. 31-37, pg., 435, 447
- ch. 7, v. 33, pg., 447
- ch. 7, v. 36, pg., 362
- ch. 7, v. 37, pg., 437, 440
- ch. 8, v. 1-9a, pg., 438
- ch. 8, v. 9b-12, pg., 440
- ch. 8, v. 12, pg., 443
- ch. 8, v. 13-21, pg., 443
- ch. 8, v. 22-26, pg., 446
- ch. 8, v. 23, pg., 371
- ch. 8, v. 27-30, pg., 448
- ch. 8, v. 31, pg., 453, 458
- ch. 8, v. 31-37, pg., 453
- ch. 8, v. 34, 35, pg., 458
- ch. 8, v. 38, pg., 456, 457
- ch. 8, v. 38-9.1, pg., 456
- ch. 9, v. 2-8, pg., 459
- ch. 9, v. 9, pg., 459, 461
- ch. 9, v. 9-13, pg., 461
- ch. 9, v. 10, pg., 462
- ch. 9, v. 14-32, pg., 464
- ch. 9, v. 24, pg., 296
- ch. 9, v. 33-37, pg., 469
- ch. 9, v. 35, pg., 198
- ch. 9, v. 36-37, pg., 638
- ch. 9, v. 37, pg., 472
- ch. 9, v. 38-50, pg., 472
- ch. 9, v. 41, pg., 266
- ch. 9, v. 50, pg., 598
- ch. 10, v. 1-12, pg., 635
- ch. 10, v. 13-16, pg., 637
- ch. 10, v. 17-31, pg., 640
- ch. 10, v. 19-20, pg., 237, 239
- ch. 10, v. 21, pg., 266
- ch. 10, v. 27, pg., 356
- ch. 10, v. 32-45, pg., 645
- ch. 10, v. 46-52, pg., 176, 648
- ch. 11, v. 1, pg., 378
- ch. 11, v. 1-10, pg., 658
- ch. 11, v. 2, pg., 658
- ch. 11, v. 11, 15-19, pg., 663
- ch. 11, v. 11, pg., 661, 663
- ch. 11, v. 12-14, 19-25, pg., 663
- ch. 11, v. 13, pg., 664
- ch. 11, v. 15-18, pg., 666

ch. 11, v. 18, pg., 675
 ch. 11, v. 27-33, pg., 674
 ch. 11, v. 32, pg., 72
 ch. 12, v. 1-12, pg., 679
 ch. 12, v. 13-17, pg., 684
 ch. 12, v. 18-27, pg., 687
 ch. 12, v. 27, pg., 688
 ch. 12, v. 28-34, pg., 689
 ch. 12, v. 30, pg., 277, 690
 ch. 12, v. 35-37, pg., 692
 ch. 12, v. 38-40, pg., 694
 ch. 12, v. 41-44, pg., 702
 ch. 13, v. 1-5, pg., 705
 ch. 13, v. 5-13, pg., 707
 ch. 13, v. 14-23, pg., 710
 ch. 13, v. 24-31, pg., 713
 ch. 13, v. 32-33, pg., 715
 ch. 13, v. 34-37, pg., 718
 ch. 14, v. 1-2, pg., 728
 ch. 14, v. 2, pg., 736
 ch. 14, v. 3-9, pg., 731
 ch. 14, v. 10-11, pg., 733, 746
 ch. 14, v. 12-17, pg., 736
 ch. 14, v. 13, pg., 378
 ch. 14, v. 14, pg., 737
 ch. 14, v. 18-21, pg., 744
 ch. 14, v. 21, pg., 734
 ch. 14, v. 22-25, pg., 749
 ch. 14, v. 26, pg., 805
 ch. 14, v. 27-31, pg., 754
 ch. 14, v. 30, pg., 819
 ch. 14, v. 32-42, pg., 808
 ch. 14, v. 43-52, pg., 811
 ch. 14, v. 50, pg., 135, 862
 ch. 14, v. 53, 55-65, pg., 816
 ch. 14, v. 54, 66-72, pg., 819
 ch. 14, v. 56-59, pg., 103
 ch. 15, v. 1a, pg., 821
 ch. 15, v. 1b-5, pg., 826

ch. 15, v. 2, pg., 829
 ch. 15, v. 6-11, pg., 836
 ch. 15, v. 10, pg., 828
 ch. 15, v. 12-19, pg., 841
 ch. 15, v. 16-20a, pg., 839
 ch. 15, v. 20b-23, pg., 844
 ch. 15, v. 24-32, pg., 847
 ch. 15, v. 26, pg., 849
 ch. 15, v. 29, pg., 103
 ch. 15, v. 33-38, pg., 857
 ch. 15, v. 38-41, pg., 860
 ch. 15, v. 39, pg., 847
 ch. 15, v. 40, pg., 855, 857
 ch. 15, v. 40-41, pg., 857
 ch. 15, v. 41, pg., 855
 ch. 15, v. 42-47, pg., 865
 ch. 15, v. 44, pg., 859
 ch. 15, v. 47, pg., 867
 ch. 16, v. 1-4, pg., 870
 ch. 16, v. 5-8, pg., 875
 ch. 16, v. 6, pg., 873
 ch. 16, v. 9, pg., 881
 ch. 16, v. 10-11, pg., 883
 ch. 16, v. 12, pg., 888
 ch. 16, v. 13, pg., 891
 ch. 16, v. 14, pg., 893
 ch. 16, v. 15-18, pg., 901
 ch. 16, v. 17, pg., 323
 ch. 16, v. 19, pg., 906, 907
 ch. 16, v. 19-20, pg., 906
 ch. 16, v. 20, pg., 58

42 Luke

ch. 1, v. 1-4, pg., 909
 ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 59, 199
 ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 910
 ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 49, 59
 ch. 1, v. 5-15, pg., 54, 57
 ch. 1, v. 13, pg., 30, 60
 ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 30, 63

ch. 1, v. 15-17, pg., 63	ch. 2, v. 39, pg., 45
ch. 1, v. 16-17, pg., 463	ch. 2, v. 40, pg., 48
ch. 1, v. 16-25, pg., 57, 462	ch. 2, v. 41-50, pg., 50
ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 65, 81	ch. 2, v. 46, pg., 279
ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 30	ch. 2, v. 51, pg., 52, 97
ch. 1, v. 20, pg., 30, 60	ch. 2, v. 51-52, pg., 52
ch. 1, v. 24, pg., 29	ch. 2, v. 52, pg., 97
ch. 1, v. 26-38, pg., 23, 25	ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 49
ch. 1, v. 28, pg., 28	ch. 3, v. 1-6, pg., 64
ch. 1, v. 31, pg., 850	ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 814
ch. 1, v. 34, pg., 28	ch. 3, v. 3, pg., 61, 85
ch. 1, v. 35, pg., 27, 449	ch. 3, v. 4-6, pg., 49
ch. 1, v. 38, pg., 27, 58	ch. 3, v. 6, pg., 65, 71
ch. 1, v. 39-45, pg., 29	ch. 3, v. 7-14, pg., 66
ch. 1, v. 46-56, pg., 32	ch. 3, v. 9, pg., 319
ch. 1, v. 57-66, pg., 59	ch. 3, v. 11, pg., 68
ch. 1, v. 62, pg., 58	ch. 3, v. 12, 13, pg., 168, 169
ch. 1, v. 67-80, pg., 62	ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 69
ch. 1, v. 76, pg., 61	ch. 3, v. 15-18, pg., 69
ch. 1, v. 79, pg., 525	ch. 3, v. 19-20, pg., 134
ch. 1, v. 80, pg., 49	ch. 3, v. 21, 22, pg., 151
ch. 2, v. 1-3, pg., 49	ch. 3, v. 21, pg., 74, 76, 151,
ch. 2, v. 1-7, pg., 37	534
ch. 2, v. 8-20, pg., 38	ch. 3, v. 21-22, pg., 74, 76
ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 49	ch. 3, v. 23, pg., 28, 34, 35, 52,
ch. 2, v. 13, pg., 59, 603, 661	200
ch. 2, v. 13-14, pg., 603, 661	ch. 3, v. 23-38, pg., 200
ch. 2, v. 14, 29, pg., 525	ch. 3, v. 23a, pg., 52
ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 525, 660, 892	ch. 3, v. 23b-38, pg., 34
ch. 2, v. 17, 18, pg., 61	ch. 3, v. 27, pg., 35
ch. 2, v. 21, pg., 39, 223, 467	ch. 3, v. 35, 36, pg., 35
ch. 2, v. 21-24, pg., 223	ch. 3, v. 38, pg., 49
ch. 2, v. 21-27, pg., 467	ch. 4, v. 1-13, pg., 77
ch. 2, v. 22-38, pg., 47	ch. 4, v. 14a, pg., 134
ch. 2, v. 24, pg., 666	ch. 4, v. 14b-15, pg., 145
ch. 2, v. 25, pg., 212, 860	ch. 4, v. 16-30, pg., 372
ch. 2, v. 31, 32, pg., 65	ch. 4, v. 16-31a, pg., 149
ch. 2, v. 32, pg., 35	ch. 4, v. 23, 31-35, pg., 301
ch. 2, v. 35, pg., 855	ch. 4, v. 31a, pg., 152

- ch. 4, v. 31b-37, pg., 157
- ch. 4, v. 34, pg., 284
- ch. 4, v. 38-41, pg., 159
- ch. 4, v. 39, pg., 436
- ch. 4, v. 40, pg., 363
- ch. 4, v. 42-44, pg., 161
- ch. 5, v. 1-11, pg., 154
- ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 898
- ch. 5, v. 10, pg., 156
- ch. 5, v. 12-16, pg., 164
- ch. 5, v. 16, pg., 534
- ch. 5, v. 17, pg., 166
- ch. 5, v. 17-26, pg., 166
- ch. 5, v. 27-28, pg., 168
- ch. 5, v. 28, pg., 170
- ch. 5, v. 29, pg., 168, 170
- ch. 5, v. 29-32, pg., 170
- ch. 5, v. 33-39, pg., 173
- ch. 6, v. 1-11, pg., 294
- ch. 6, v. 1-5, pg., 188
- ch. 6, v. 6-11, pg., 191
- ch. 6, v. 9, pg., 589
- ch. 6, v. 12, pg., 195, 534
- ch. 6, v. 12-16, pg., 195
- ch. 6, v. 13, pg., 195, 378
- ch. 6, v. 13-16, pg., 378
- ch. 6, v. 16-24, pg., 301
- ch. 6, v. 17, pg., 196, 198
- ch. 6, v. 17-19, pg., 198
- ch. 6, v. 19, pg., 199
- ch. 6, v. 20, pg., 199, 200, 201, 202, 204, 206, 209, 211, 213
- ch. 6, v. 20-22, pg., 202, 204, 206, 209, 211
- ch. 6, v. 20-26, pg., 200, 201, 213
- ch. 6, v. 23, pg., 216
- ch. 6, v. 24-26, pg., 200, 215
- ch. 6, v. 27-31, pg., 246
- ch. 6, v. 27-36, pg., 248
- ch. 6, v. 31, pg., 278
- ch. 6, v. 37, pg., 269, 270, 271
- ch. 6, v. 37-40, pg., 269
- ch. 6, v. 37-42, pg., 271
- ch. 6, v. 39, 40, pg., 271
- ch. 6, v. 41-42, pg., 271
- ch. 6, v. 43-45, pg., 202
- ch. 6, v. 43-46, pg., 283
- ch. 6, v. 47-49, pg., 286
- ch. 6, v. 48, pg., 286, 287
- ch. 7, v. 1, pg., 200
- ch. 7, v. 1-10, pg., 290, 293, 301
- ch. 7, v. 5, pg., 152, 525
- ch. 7, v. 11-17, pg., 293, 295
- ch. 7, v. 12, pg., 123
- ch. 7, v. 18-20, pg., 295
- ch. 7, v. 18-28, pg., 295
- ch. 7, v. 19, pg., 84, 295
- ch. 7, v. 22-23, pg., 903
- ch. 7, v. 24, pg., 65, 295
- ch. 7, v. 24-28, pg., 65
- ch. 7, v. 24-35, pg., 174
- ch. 7, v. 26, pg., 81
- ch. 7, v. 29, pg., 297, 300
- ch. 7, v. 29-35, pg., 297
- ch. 7, v. 36-50, pg., 307
- ch. 7, v. 46, pg., 732
- ch. 7, v. 48, 50, pg., 366
- ch. 7, v. 50, pg., 525
- ch. 8, v. 1-3, pg., 310
- ch. 8, v. 3, pg., 483
- ch. 8, v. 4, pg., 327, 328
- ch. 8, v. 5-15, pg., 337
- ch. 8, v. 5-8, 11-15, pg., 332
- ch. 8, v. 9, 10, pg., 329
- ch. 8, v. 9, pg., 329, 352
- ch. 8, v. 10, pg., 337

- ch. 8, v. 11, pg., 332
- ch. 8, v. 15, pg., 334
- ch. 8, v. 16-18, pg., 334
- ch. 8, v. 18, pg., 337
- ch. 8, v. 19, pg., 324, 325
- ch. 8, v. 19-21, pg., 324
- ch. 8, v. 22-25, pg., 355
- ch. 8, v. 25, pg., 356
- ch. 8, v. 26-33, pg., 357
- ch. 8, v. 34-39, pg., 360
- ch. 8, v. 40-42, 49-50, 52, 53,
pg., 362
- ch. 8, v. 41-56, pg., 293
- ch. 8, v. 42, pg., 123, 367
- ch. 8, v. 42-48, pg., 367
- ch. 8, v. 44, 45, 46, 47, pg.,
364
- ch. 8, v. 45, pg., 369
- ch. 8, v. 48, pg., 525
- ch. 8, v. 51, 54-56, pg., 365
- ch. 9, v. 1, pg., 377, 393
- ch. 9, v. 2-5, pg., 380
- ch. 9, v. 6, 10, pg., 311
- ch. 9, v. 6, pg., 392
- ch. 9, v. 7-9, pg., 395, 400
- ch. 9, v. 9, pg., 585
- ch. 9, v. 10-11, pg., 400
- ch. 9, v. 11, pg., 402
- ch. 9, v. 12-17, pg., 402
- ch. 9, v. 14, pg., 534
- ch. 9, v. 16, pg., 534
- ch. 9, v. 18, pg., 448, 450
- ch. 9, v. 18-21, pg., 448
- ch. 9, v. 22, pg., 453, 657
- ch. 9, v. 22-25, pg., 453
- ch. 9, v. 26-27, pg., 456
- ch. 9, v. 28-29, pg., 534
- ch. 9, v. 28-36a, pg., 459
- ch. 9, v. 31, pg., 66
- ch. 9, v. 36b, pg., 461
- ch. 9, v. 37-45, pg., 464
- ch. 9, v. 38, pg., 123
- ch. 9, v. 46-48, pg., 469
- ch. 9, v. 49, pg., 323, 472
- ch. 9, v. 49-50, pg., 472
- ch. 9, v. 51-56, pg., 479
- ch. 9, v. 56, pg., 482
- ch. 9, v. 57-62, pg., 482, 711
- ch. 9, v. 58, pg., 482
- ch. 9, v. 59, pg., 482
- ch. 9, v. 60, pg., 482
- ch. 9, v. 62, pg., 482
- ch. 10, v. 1, 41, pg., 294
- ch. 10, v. 1, pg., 155, 195
- ch. 10, v. 1-16, pg., 524
- ch. 10, v. 1-17, pg., 311
- ch. 10, v. 10, pg., 302
- ch. 10, v. 12-15, pg., 300, 302
- ch. 10, v. 17-24, pg., 526, 532
- ch. 10, v. 21, pg., 534
- ch. 10, v. 25-37, pg., 529
- ch. 10, v. 26-27, pg., 530
- ch. 10, v. 34, pg., 393
- ch. 10, v. 37, pg., 532
- ch. 10, v. 38-42, pg., 531
- ch. 10, v. 39, pg., 732, 733
- ch. 10, v. 40, pg., 732
- ch. 10, v. 41, pg., 267
- ch. 11, v. 1-13, pg., 534
- ch. 11, v. 2-4, pg., 258
- ch. 11, v. 9-13, pg., 276
- ch. 11, v. 13, pg., 278
- ch. 11, v. 14-28, pg., 537
- ch. 11, v. 29-32, pg., 539
- ch. 11, v. 33-36, pg., 542
- ch. 11, v. 37-48, 52, pg., 544
- ch. 11, v. 39, pg., 294
- ch. 11, v. 46, pg., 80

ch. 11, v. 49-51, 53-54, pg.,
547
ch. 12, v. 1-12, pg., 549
ch. 12, v. 6, pg., 556
ch. 12, v. 10, pg., 786
ch. 12, v. 13-21, pg., 552
ch. 12, v. 22-34, pg., 555
ch. 12, v. 33, pg., 396
ch. 12, v. 35-48, pg., 557
ch. 12, v. 42, pg., 294
ch. 12, v. 48, pg., 906
ch. 12, v. 49-53, pg., 560
ch. 12, v. 51, pg., 525
ch. 12, v. 54-59, pg., 562
ch. 13, v. 1-5, pg., 565, 568
ch. 13, v. 6-9, pg., 324, 568
ch. 13, v. 10-17, pg., 570
ch. 13, v. 10-21, pg., 176
ch. 13, v. 12, pg., 97
ch. 13, v. 15, pg., 294
ch. 13, v. 18-21, pg., 573
ch. 13, v. 22-30, pg., 583
ch. 13, v. 23-24, pg., 283
ch. 13, v. 29, pg., 49, 585, 605,
715
ch. 13, v. 29-30, pg., 585
ch. 13, v. 31-35, pg., 585
ch. 14, v. 1-24, pg., 176, 596
ch. 14, v. 1-6, pg., 588
ch. 14, v. 7-11, pg., 469
ch. 14, v. 7-14, pg., 590
ch. 14, v. 14, pg., 255, 874
ch. 14, v. 15-24, pg., 593
ch. 14, v. 25-35, pg., 596
ch. 14, v. 26, pg., 326
ch. 15, v. 1-10, pg., 604
ch. 15, v. 1-2, pg., 604
ch. 15, v. 1-32, pg., 599
ch. 15, v. 1-7, pg., 598, 601,

602
ch. 15, v. 2, pg., 606
ch. 15, v. 3-7, pg., 473
ch. 15, v. 8-10, pg., 601
ch. 15, v. 10, pg., 678
ch. 15, v. 11-32, pg., 603
ch. 16, v. 1-17.10, pg., 616
ch. 16, v. 1-18, pg., 614
ch. 16, v. 1-9, pg., 606
ch. 16, v. 10-18, pg., 609
ch. 16, v. 13, pg., 315
ch. 16, v. 14, 15, pg., 232
ch. 16, v. 16, pg., 65
ch. 16, v. 19-31, pg., 611
ch. 16, v. 22-23, pg., 854
ch. 16, v. 29-31, pg., 415, 442
ch. 16, v. 31, pg., 148, 886, 903
ch. 17, v. 1-10, pg., 614
ch. 17, v. 3, pg., 261
ch. 17, v. 9, 10, pg., 392
ch. 17, v. 11-19, pg., 178, 627
ch. 17, v. 20-37, pg., 629
ch. 18, v. 1-14, pg., 632
ch. 18, v. 1-8, pg., 434
ch. 18, v. 6, 7, pg., 277
ch. 18, v. 7, pg., 633
ch. 18, v. 12, pg., 173, 263
ch. 18, v. 15-17, pg., 637
ch. 18, v. 17, pg., 651
ch. 18, v. 18-30, pg., 640
ch. 18, v. 22, pg., 531
ch. 18, v. 24-25, pg., 651
ch. 18, v. 27, pg., 651
ch. 18, v. 31-34, pg., 645
ch. 18, v. 32-33, pg., 791
ch. 18, v. 34, pg., 645
ch. 18, v. 35-43, pg., 648
ch. 19, v. 1-10, pg., 650
ch. 19, v. 9, pg., 504

- ch. 19, v. 10, pg., 195
- ch. 19, v. 11-28, pg., 653
- ch. 19, v. 12-27, pg., 339
- ch. 19, v. 14, pg., 851
- ch. 19, v. 29-40, pg., 658
- ch. 19, v. 38, pg., 462, 525, 661
- ch. 19, v. 41-44, pg., 661
- ch. 19, v. 44, pg., 661
- ch. 19, v. 45-48, pg., 666
- ch. 19, v. 47, pg., 626
- ch. 20, v. 1-8, pg., 674
- ch. 20, v. 3-7, pg., 822
- ch. 20, v. 9-19, pg., 679
- ch. 20, v. 20-26, pg., 684
- ch. 20, v. 27-40, pg., 687
- ch. 20, v. 36, pg., 688
- ch. 20, v. 41-44, pg., 692
- ch. 20, v. 45-47, pg., 694
- ch. 21, v. 1-4, pg., 702
- ch. 21, v. 5-8, pg., 705
- ch. 21, v. 8-19, pg., 707
- ch. 21, v. 20-24, pg., 710
- ch. 21, v. 25-33, pg., 713
- ch. 21, v. 34-38, pg., 715
- ch. 21, v. 37, pg., 808
- ch. 22, v. 1-2, pg., 728
- ch. 22, v. 3-6, pg., 733
- ch. 22, v. 7-13, pg., 736
- ch. 22, v. 10-13, pg., 469
- ch. 22, v. 14-20, pg., 749
- ch. 22, v. 20, pg., 899
- ch. 22, v. 21-23, pg., 744
- ch. 22, v. 24-30, pg., 742, 746
- ch. 22, v. 29, 30, pg., 558
- ch. 22, v. 31-32, pg., 821
- ch. 22, v. 31-38, pg., 754
- ch. 22, v. 32, pg., 534
- ch. 22, v. 33, pg., 812
- ch. 22, v. 34, pg., 821
- ch. 22, v. 39-46, pg., 808
- ch. 22, v. 40-44, pg., 534
- ch. 22, v. 41, pg., 534
- ch. 22, v. 47-53, pg., 811
- ch. 22, v. 54a, 63-65, pg., 816
- ch. 22, v. 54b-62, pg., 819
- ch. 22, v. 66-71, pg., 821
- ch. 22, v. 70, pg., 94
- ch. 23, v. 1-5, pg., 826
- ch. 23, v. 3, pg., 829
- ch. 23, v. 6-12, pg., 834
- ch. 23, v. 7, pg., 396
- ch. 23, v. 8-11, pg., 396
- ch. 23, v. 12, pg., 397
- ch. 23, v. 13-19, pg., 836
- ch. 23, v. 15, pg., 836
- ch. 23, v. 20-25, pg., 842
- ch. 23, v. 26-33a, pg., 844
- ch. 23, v. 33b-37, pg., 847
- ch. 23, v. 34, pg., 262, 271, 316, 861
- ch. 23, v. 38, pg., 59, 849
- ch. 23, v. 39-43, pg., 852
- ch. 23, v. 40-43, pg., 316
- ch. 23, v. 43, pg., 613
- ch. 23, v. 44-46, pg., 857
- ch. 23, v. 45, pg., 534, 859, 860
- ch. 23, v. 45b, 47-49, pg., 860
- ch. 23, v. 46, pg., 534, 667
- ch. 23, v. 49, pg., 855
- ch. 23, v. 50-55, pg., 865
- ch. 23, v. 51, pg., 865
- ch. 23, v. 55-56, pg., 867
- ch. 23, v. 56, pg., 868
- ch. 24, v. 1-2, pg., 870
- ch. 24, v. 3-8, pg., 875
- ch. 24, v. 6, pg., 873
- ch. 24, v. 9-12, pg., 878
- ch. 24, v. 10, pg., 875

ch. 24, v. 13-32, pg., 888
 ch. 24, v. 16, pg., 882
 ch. 24, v. 26, pg., 66
 ch. 24, v. 33-43, pg., 891
 ch. 24, v. 34, pg., 898, 899
 ch. 24, v. 39, pg., 883
 ch. 24, v. 44, pg., 533, 807, 904
 ch. 24, v. 44-49, pg., 904
 ch. 24, v. 50, pg., 638, 906
 ch. 24, v. 50-53, pg., 906

43 John

ch. 1, v. 1, 2, pg., 21
 ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 16, 20, 72, 287
 ch. 1, v. 1-2, pg., 14, 73
 ch. 1, v. 1-5, pg., 16, 20, 71,
 304
 ch. 1, v. 3, 4, pg., 16
 ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 366
 ch. 1, v. 4, 5, 7-9, pg., 219
 ch. 1, v. 4, 5, 9, pg., 154
 ch. 1, v. 4, 9, pg., 671
 ch. 1, v. 4, pg., 19, 335
 ch. 1, v. 5, 10, 11, pg., 132
 ch. 1, v. 5, 10, pg., 106
 ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 23, 459
 ch. 1, v. 5a, pg., 19
 ch. 1, v. 5b, pg., 21, 23
 ch. 1, v. 6-18, pg., 71
 ch. 1, v. 7, 29-34, pg., 129
 ch. 1, v. 7-9, pg., 19
 ch. 1, v. 8, 9, pg., 336
 ch. 1, v. 10, pg., 72, 104, 437
 ch. 1, v. 11, pg., 321, 374, 701,
 830
 ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 104, 132
 ch. 1, v. 13, pg., 65
 ch. 1, v. 14, 18, pg., 500
 ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 20, 21, 477,
 500, 797, 833

ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 15
 ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 73, 673
 ch. 1, v. 19-24, pg., 61, 134
 ch. 1, v. 19-28, pg., 80
 ch. 1, v. 29, 36, pg., 729
 ch. 1, v. 29, pg., 21, 81, 84,
 187, 669, 729, 749
 ch. 1, v. 29-34, pg., 84
 ch. 1, v. 31, pg., 75
 ch. 1, v. 34, 49, pg., 895
 ch. 1, v. 35-39, pg., 85
 ch. 1, v. 35-51, pg., 155
 ch. 1, v. 40-42, pg., 87
 ch. 1, v. 41, pg., 156
 ch. 1, v. 43, pg., 89, 521
 ch. 1, v. 43-46, pg., 89
 ch. 1, v. 44, pg., 300, 403
 ch. 1, v. 46, pg., 493, 850
 ch. 1, v. 47, pg., 90, 92
 ch. 1, v. 47-49, pg., 92
 ch. 1, v. 48, pg., 256
 ch. 1, v. 49, pg., 852
 ch. 1, v. 50-51, pg., 94
 ch. 1, v. 51, pg., 97
 ch. 2, v. 1-11, pg., 96, 402
 ch. 2, v. 6, pg., 65, 868
 ch. 2, v. 9, 11, pg., 98
 ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 66
 ch. 2, v. 12-17, pg., 99, 663
 ch. 2, v. 13, pg., 130, 668
 ch. 2, v. 13-17, pg., 668
 ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 101, 381
 ch. 2, v. 18-22, pg., 101
 ch. 2, v. 19, pg., 452, 706, 817,
 849, 871
 ch. 2, v. 21, pg., 817, 849
 ch. 2, v. 23, pg., 103, 132
 ch. 2, v. 23-25, pg., 103
 ch. 3, v. 1-14, pg., 72, 865

- ch. 3, v. 1-2, 10, pg., 108
- ch. 3, v. 1-2a, pg., 106
- ch. 3, v. 3, pg., 60, 65, 72, 505
- ch. 3, v. 3-10, pg., 110, 113
- ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 424
- ch. 3, v. 11, pg., 115, 132
- ch. 3, v. 11-12, pg., 115
- ch. 3, v. 13, pg., 117, 131
- ch. 3, v. 13-15, pg., 117
- ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 828, 865
- ch. 3, v. 15, 16, 36, pg., 19
- ch. 3, v. 15, 16, pg., 19, 133
- ch. 3, v. 15-16, pg., 124
- ch. 3, v. 16, 17, pg., 380
- ch. 3, v. 16, pg., 120, 122, 123,
304, 358, 380, 577, 594, 669,
678, 693, 700, 796, 799, 899,
906
- ch. 3, v. 16-21, pg., 693
- ch. 3, v. 17-21, pg., 126
- ch. 3, v. 18-21, pg., 72, 787
- ch. 3, v. 19, pg., 19, 21, 331,
335, 816
- ch. 3, v. 19-20, pg., 335
- ch. 3, v. 19-21, pg., 19
- ch. 3, v. 22-30, pg., 129
- ch. 3, v. 27-30, pg., 69
- ch. 3, v. 30, pg., 71, 86, 697
- ch. 3, v. 31-36, pg., 131
- ch. 3, v. 35, pg., 900
- ch. 3, v. 36, pg., 674, 760
- ch. 4, v. 1-26, pg., 292
- ch. 4, v. 1-4, pg., 134
- ch. 4, v. 2, pg., 129
- ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 134
- ch. 4, v. 4-42, pg., 195
- ch. 4, v. 5-15, pg., 136
- ch. 4, v. 5-42, pg., 136
- ch. 4, v. 5-6, pg., 214
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 404, 414
- ch. 4, v. 11, pg., 424
- ch. 4, v. 14, 46, pg., 19
- ch. 4, v. 14, pg., 19, 307
- ch. 4, v. 16-26, pg., 138
- ch. 4, v. 20, pg., 214, 480, 628
- ch. 4, v. 20-24, pg., 480, 628
- ch. 4, v. 21, pg., 97, 715
- ch. 4, v. 21-24, pg., 715
- ch. 4, v. 23, pg., 517
- ch. 4, v. 24, pg., 18, 73, 253,
265, 371, 883
- ch. 4, v. 25, pg., 108, 628
- ch. 4, v. 27-38, pg., 140
- ch. 4, v. 31-34, pg., 312
- ch. 4, v. 34, pg., 196
- ch. 4, v. 35-38, pg., 376, 477
- ch. 4, v. 39-42, pg., 143
- ch. 4, v. 41, pg., 624
- ch. 4, v. 42, pg., 358, 669, 902
- ch. 4, v. 43, 45, pg., 145
- ch. 4, v. 43-54, pg., 617
- ch. 4, v. 44, pg., 149, 374
- ch. 4, v. 46-54, pg., 147
- ch. 4, v. 47, 49, pg., 148
- ch. 4, v. 53, pg., 148
- ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 485
- ch. 5, v. 1-9, pg., 175, 191
- ch. 5, v. 10-15, pg., 177
- ch. 5, v. 10-18, pg., 180
- ch. 5, v. 18, pg., 626
- ch. 5, v. 19, pg., 182, 203
- ch. 5, v. 19-30, pg., 182
- ch. 5, v. 20, pg., 900
- ch. 5, v. 21, 24, 26, 39, 40, pg.,
19
- ch. 5, v. 21, pg., 19, 186
- ch. 5, v. 22, pg., 304
- ch. 5, v. 24, 25, pg., 183

- ch. 5, v. 24, pg., 183, 186, 271
- ch. 5, v. 25, 28, 29, pg., 186
- ch. 5, v. 25, pg., 186, 895
- ch. 5, v. 26, pg., 184
- ch. 5, v. 28, 29, pg., 186, 619, 624, 716
- ch. 5, v. 28, pg., 186, 364, 619, 624, 716
- ch. 5, v. 30, pg., 141
- ch. 5, v. 31, pg., 186
- ch. 5, v. 31-47, pg., 186
- ch. 5, v. 34, pg., 187
- ch. 5, v. 36, pg., 196, 500
- ch. 5, v. 36-38, pg., 196
- ch. 5, v. 37, pg., 187
- ch. 5, v. 38, pg., 187
- ch. 5, v. 40, pg., 701
- ch. 5, v. 41, pg., 188
- ch. 5, v. 43, 44, pg., 188
- ch. 5, v. 46, pg., 188
- ch. 5, v. 47, pg., 188
- ch. 6, v. 1-3, pg., 400
- ch. 6, v. 2, pg., 402
- ch. 6, v. 4, pg., 404
- ch. 6, v. 4-13, pg., 402
- ch. 6, v. 5, pg., 403
- ch. 6, v. 6, pg., 403
- ch. 6, v. 14, pg., 108, 405
- ch. 6, v. 14-15, pg., 405
- ch. 6, v. 15, pg., 406, 659, 850
- ch. 6, v. 16-21, pg., 407
- ch. 6, v. 21, pg., 412
- ch. 6, v. 22-29, pg., 412
- ch. 6, v. 27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 53, 54, 63, 68, pg., 19
- ch. 6, v. 30-36, pg., 415
- ch. 6, v. 33, pg., 404, 669
- ch. 6, v. 35, pg., 406, 749
- ch. 6, v. 36, pg., 415
- ch. 6, v. 37, 39, pg., 487
- ch. 6, v. 37, pg., 417, 487, 798
- ch. 6, v. 37-40, pg., 417
- ch. 6, v. 38, pg., 141, 326
- ch. 6, v. 41-51, pg., 420
- ch. 6, v. 44, 65, pg., 594
- ch. 6, v. 46, pg., 73
- ch. 6, v. 52-59, pg., 422
- ch. 6, v. 54, 56, pg., 773
- ch. 6, v. 57-58, pg., 750
- ch. 6, v. 60, pg., 290, 425
- ch. 6, v. 60-65, pg., 425
- ch. 6, v. 62, pg., 427
- ch. 6, v. 66, pg., 145, 290, 427, 478, 748
- ch. 6, v. 66-71, pg., 427, 748
- ch. 6, v. 69, pg., 895
- ch. 7, v. 1, pg., 430
- ch. 7, v. 2-9, pg., 477
- ch. 7, v. 5, pg., 373, 884
- ch. 7, v. 6, 8, 30, pg., 98
- ch. 7, v. 7, pg., 487
- ch. 7, v. 10, pg., 479
- ch. 7, v. 11-24, pg., 485
- ch. 7, v. 14-18, pg., 880
- ch. 7, v. 20, pg., 312
- ch. 7, v. 24, pg., 270
- ch. 7, v. 25-31, pg., 487
- ch. 7, v. 27, pg., 515
- ch. 7, v. 28, 29, pg., 490
- ch. 7, v. 32, 40-52, pg., 493
- ch. 7, v. 32-39, pg., 490
- ch. 7, v. 35, pg., 501
- ch. 7, v. 37, pg., 30, 176
- ch. 7, v. 38, 39, pg., 138
- ch. 7, v. 45-53, pg., 865
- ch. 7, v. 50, pg., 107, 324
- ch. 7, v. 50-52, pg., 107
- ch. 7, v. 52, pg., 493

- ch. 7, v. 53-8.11, pg., 495
- ch. 8, v. 2-11, pg., 472
- ch. 8, v. 3, pg., 23
- ch. 8, v. 7, pg., 271
- ch. 8, v. 12, pg., 19, 21, 336,
417, 498, 521, 669, 671, 746
- ch. 8, v. 12-20, pg., 498
- ch. 8, v. 13-18, pg., 116
- ch. 8, v. 17, pg., 378
- ch. 8, v. 20, pg., 98
- ch. 8, v. 21-30, pg., 501
- ch. 8, v. 24, pg., 693
- ch. 8, v. 31, 32, pg., 773
- ch. 8, v. 31-41, pg., 503
- ch. 8, v. 32, 36, pg., 663
- ch. 8, v. 32-36, pg., 151
- ch. 8, v. 36, pg., 479
- ch. 8, v. 38, pg., 119
- ch. 8, v. 41, 44, pg., 506
- ch. 8, v. 41, 47, pg., 508
- ch. 8, v. 41-47, pg., 506
- ch. 8, v. 42, pg., 506
- ch. 8, v. 43, 47, pg., 506
- ch. 8, v. 44, pg., 340, 502, 507
- ch. 8, v. 45, 46, pg., 508
- ch. 8, v. 45-47, pg., 833
- ch. 8, v. 46, pg., 21, 787
- ch. 8, v. 48, 49, 54, pg., 509
- ch. 8, v. 48, pg., 312, 508, 509
- ch. 8, v. 48-59, pg., 508
- ch. 8, v. 49-50, 54-55, pg., 509
- ch. 8, v. 51-53, pg., 510
- ch. 8, v. 56, pg., 510
- ch. 8, v. 57-59, pg., 510
- ch. 8, v. 58, pg., 84, 185, 408,
799
- ch. 9, v. 1-12, pg., 511, 513,
516
- ch. 9, v. 1-3, pg., 178, 179
- ch. 9, v. 2, 3, pg., 436
- ch. 9, v. 2-3, pg., 436
- ch. 9, v. 3, pg., 218
- ch. 9, v. 4, pg., 141
- ch. 9, v. 5, pg., 19
- ch. 9, v. 6, 7, pg., 371
- ch. 9, v. 13-34, pg., 176, 513
- ch. 9, v. 29, pg., 373
- ch. 9, v. 33, pg., 517
- ch. 9, v. 35, pg., 516, 519, 895
- ch. 9, v. 35-38, pg., 516
- ch. 9, v. 35-41, pg., 516
- ch. 9, v. 38, pg., 407, 517
- ch. 9, v. 39, pg., 151
- ch. 10, v. 1-10, pg., 519
- ch. 10, v. 1-21, pg., 519
- ch. 10, v. 3, pg., 197, 882
- ch. 10, v. 7, 9, 11, 14, pg., 417
- ch. 10, v. 7, 9, pg., 281, 417,
519
- ch. 10, v. 9, pg., 584
- ch. 10, v. 10, 11, 15, 17, 28,
pg., 19
- ch. 10, v. 10, pg., 19, 776
- ch. 10, v. 11, 17-18, pg., 859
- ch. 10, v. 11, pg., 403, 521,
859, 900
- ch. 10, v. 11-21, pg., 521
- ch. 10, v. 16, pg., 380, 669
- ch. 10, v. 17-18, pg., 873
- ch. 10, v. 18, pg., 871
- ch. 10, v. 22-29, pg., 575, 594
- ch. 10, v. 24, pg., 578
- ch. 10, v. 25, 38, pg., 104, 194
- ch. 10, v. 27-30, pg., 773
- ch. 10, v. 28, 29, pg., 578
- ch. 10, v. 28, pg., 510, 555, 578
- ch. 10, v. 30, pg., 578, 770
- ch. 10, v. 30-39, pg., 578

- ch. 10, v. 37, pg., 586
- ch. 10, v. 37-38, pg., 374
- ch. 10, v. 38, pg., 145, 293
- ch. 10, v. 40-42, pg., 580
- ch. 11, v. 1-16, pg., 616
- ch. 11, v. 1-44, pg., 293
- ch. 11, v. 4, pg., 623
- ch. 11, v. 9, 10, pg., 19
- ch. 11, v. 11, pg., 364, 622
- ch. 11, v. 11-14, pg., 364
- ch. 11, v. 17-32, pg., 619
- ch. 11, v. 25, pg., 19, 367, 417, 621
- ch. 11, v. 27, pg., 895
- ch. 11, v. 31, pg., 733
- ch. 11, v. 33-44, pg., 622
- ch. 11, v. 38, pg., 183, 186
- ch. 11, v. 38-53, pg., 613
- ch. 11, v. 39, pg., 619
- ch. 11, v. 40, pg., 415
- ch. 11, v. 41-42, pg., 620
- ch. 11, v. 44, pg., 880
- ch. 11, v. 45-57, pg., 624
- ch. 11, v. 51-52, pg., 669
- ch. 11, v. 54, pg., 580, 627
- ch. 12, v. 1, 9-11, pg., 655
- ch. 12, v. 1, pg., 658, 731
- ch. 12, v. 2-8, pg., 731
- ch. 12, v. 4-6, pg., 734
- ch. 12, v. 11, pg., 869
- ch. 12, v. 12, pg., 658
- ch. 12, v. 12-19, pg., 658
- ch. 12, v. 16, pg., 659
- ch. 12, v. 19, pg., 660
- ch. 12, v. 20, 21, pg., 380
- ch. 12, v. 20, pg., 292
- ch. 12, v. 20-36, pg., 668
- ch. 12, v. 22, pg., 397
- ch. 12, v. 23, 27, pg., 98
- ch. 12, v. 23, 31-33, pg., 367
- ch. 12, v. 25, 50, pg., 19
- ch. 12, v. 26, pg., 521
- ch. 12, v. 32, pg., 119
- ch. 12, v. 35, 36, 46, pg., 19
- ch. 12, v. 35, 46, pg., 19, 21, 746
- ch. 12, v. 35, pg., 19, 21, 23, 746
- ch. 12, v. 37-50, pg., 671
- ch. 12, v. 46, pg., 336, 542, 671
- ch. 12, v. 47, pg., 380
- ch. 12, v. 49, 50, pg., 141
- ch. 13, v. 1, pg., 98
- ch. 13, v. 1-10, pg., 738
- ch. 13, v. 10-20, pg., 741
- ch. 13, v. 12-17, pg., 697
- ch. 13, v. 12-17.26, pg., 739
- ch. 13, v. 13-17, pg., 468
- ch. 13, v. 16, pg., 778
- ch. 13, v. 21-30, pg., 744
- ch. 13, v. 27, pg., 734
- ch. 13, v. 31-38, pg., 752
- ch. 13, v. 35, pg., 431
- ch. 13, v. 37, pg., 814
- ch. 13, v. 38, pg., 754
- ch. 13-17, pg., 761
- ch. 14, v. 1-4, pg., 757
- ch. 14, v. 2, 3, pg., 304
- ch. 14, v. 2, pg., 218, 327, 483, 907
- ch. 14, v. 2-3, pg., 460, 874
- ch. 14, v. 3, pg., 727
- ch. 14, v. 5-11, pg., 759
- ch. 14, v. 6, 13, pg., 19
- ch. 14, v. 6, 17, pg., 769
- ch. 14, v. 6, pg., 15, 19, 21, 115, 221, 281, 374, 417, 489, 524, 540, 584, 769, 780, 833

- ch. 14, v. 7-10, pg., 500
- ch. 14, v. 11, pg., 104, 147, 194
- ch. 14, v. 12-14, pg., 762
- ch. 14, v. 15, pg., 166, 242,
263, 286, 287, 359, 430, 458,
530, 611, 652, 664, 764, 772
- ch. 14, v. 15-21, pg., 263
- ch. 14, v. 15-24, pg., 764
- ch. 14, v. 16, 26, pg., 785
- ch. 14, v. 16, pg., 426, 785, 898
- ch. 14, v. 16-17, pg., 426
- ch. 14, v. 17, pg., 789
- ch. 14, v. 18-19, pg., 753
- ch. 14, v. 25-27, pg., 767
- ch. 14, v. 26, pg., 103, 789, 910
- ch. 14, v. 27, pg., 56, 883
- ch. 14, v. 28-31, pg., 770
- ch. 14, v. 30, pg., 314, 787
- ch. 14, v. 31, pg., 141
- ch. 15, v. 1, pg., 98, 376
- ch. 15, v. 1-8, pg., 772
- ch. 15, v. 9-17, pg., 775
- ch. 15, v. 10, pg., 336
- ch. 15, v. 18-20, pg., 204
- ch. 15, v. 18-25, pg., 777, 783
- ch. 15, v. 20, pg., 579
- ch. 15, v. 25, pg., 223
- ch. 15, v. 26, pg., 132, 768,
780, 785, 789, 833
- ch. 15, v. 26-27, pg., 780
- ch. 16, v. 1-4, pg., 783
- ch. 16, v. 5-11, pg., 785
- ch. 16, v. 7, pg., 907
- ch. 16, v. 8, pg., 110, 306
- ch. 16, v. 8-15, pg., 110
- ch. 16, v. 12-15, pg., 788
- ch. 16, v. 13, pg., 109, 789
- ch. 16, v. 16, pg., 790, 793
- ch. 16, v. 16-24, pg., 790
- ch. 16, v. 23, pg., 276
- ch. 16, v. 25-33, pg., 793
- ch. 16, v. 27, pg., 900
- ch. 16, v. 32, pg., 98
- ch. 16, v. 33, pg., 216
- ch. 17, v. 1, pg., 98
- ch. 17, v. 1-5, pg., 795
- ch. 17, v. 2, 3, pg., 19
- ch. 17, v. 6-12, pg., 798
- ch. 17, v. 12, pg., 732, 803
- ch. 17, v. 13-19, pg., 800
- ch. 17, v. 17, pg., 804
- ch. 17, v. 20-23, pg., 57, 750
- ch. 17, v. 20-26, pg., 803
- ch. 17, v. 21, pg., 143, 799
- ch. 17, v. 24, pg., 854
- ch. 17, v. 26, pg., 804
- ch. 18, v. 1-2, pg., 808
- ch. 18, v. 3-12, pg., 811
- ch. 18, v. 7, 8, pg., 819
- ch. 18, v. 9, pg., 304
- ch. 18, v. 13-24, pg., 813
- ch. 18, v. 17, pg., 819
- ch. 18, v. 22, 23, pg., 261
- ch. 18, v. 24, pg., 816
- ch. 18, v. 25-27, pg., 819
- ch. 18, v. 28-33, 38b, pg., 826
- ch. 18, v. 32, pg., 223
- ch. 18, v. 33-37, pg., 367, 829
- ch. 18, v. 36, pg., 322, 407, 771
- ch. 18, v. 37, pg., 462, 831
- ch. 18, v. 37-38, pg., 831
- ch. 18, v. 39-40, pg., 836
- ch. 19, v. 1-16a, pg., 842
- ch. 19, v. 2-3, pg., 839
- ch. 19, v. 3, pg., 850
- ch. 19, v. 12, 15, pg., 851
- ch. 19, v. 14, pg., 367
- ch. 19, v. 15, pg., 654

ch. 19, v. 16b-17, pg., 844
 ch. 19, v. 17-20, pg., 201
 ch. 19, v. 18-24, pg., 847
 ch. 19, v. 19-22, pg., 849
 ch. 19, v. 24, 28, 36, pg., 223
 ch. 19, v. 24, pg., 223, 865
 ch. 19, v. 25-27, pg., 855
 ch. 19, v. 27, pg., 500
 ch. 19, v. 28, pg., 846, 857
 ch. 19, v. 28-30, pg., 857
 ch. 19, v. 30, pg., 141, 797
 ch. 19, v. 31-37, pg., 862
 ch. 19, v. 38-42, pg., 821, 865
 ch. 19, v. 39, pg., 106
 ch. 19, v. 40, pg., 867, 868
 ch. 20, v. 1, pg., 870
 ch. 20, v. 1-2, pg., 875
 ch. 20, v. 2-10, pg., 878
 ch. 20, v. 5, pg., 880
 ch. 20, v. 6, pg., 880
 ch. 20, v. 8, pg., 880
 ch. 20, v. 9, pg., 223, 880
 ch. 20, v. 11-17a, pg., 881
 ch. 20, v. 15, pg., 878
 ch. 20, v. 17b-18, pg., 883
 ch. 20, v. 19, 26, pg., 875
 ch. 20, v. 19, pg., 871, 875, 891
 ch. 20, v. 19-23, pg., 891
 ch. 20, v. 22, pg., 426, 453
 ch. 20, v. 22-23, pg., 453
 ch. 20, v. 23, pg., 897
 ch. 20, v. 24-29, pg., 893
 ch. 20, v. 25, pg., 411, 619
 ch. 20, v. 26, pg., 880
 ch. 20, v. 27, pg., 883
 ch. 20, v. 28, pg., 184, 578
 ch. 20, v. 29, pg., 58, 104, 147
 ch. 20, v. 30, pg., 103, 896, 909
 ch. 20, v. 30-31, pg., 896, 909

ch. 20, v. 31, pg., 19, 104, 296
 ch. 21, v. 1-13, pg., 884
 ch. 21, v. 1-14, pg., 896
 ch. 21, v. 4, pg., 882
 ch. 21, v. 12-13, pg., 893
 ch. 21, v. 15-23, pg., 899
 ch. 21, v. 19, 22, pg., 521
 ch. 21, v. 24-25, pg., 909

44 Acts

ch. 1, v. 3-8, pg., 904
 ch. 1, v. 4, 5, pg., 138
 ch. 1, v. 5, 8, pg., 492
 ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 70, 492
 ch. 1, v. 6, pg., 383
 ch. 1, v. 8, pg., 136, 394, 492
 ch. 1, v. 9-11, pg., 906
 ch. 1, v. 11, pg., 721, 726
 ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 907
 ch. 1, v. 13-15, pg., 738
 ch. 1, v. 14, 24, pg., 196
 ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 196, 311, 856,
 884
 ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 452
 ch. 1, v. 16, pg., 824
 ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 824, 825
 ch. 1, v. 18-19, pg., 824, 825
 ch. 1, v. 21-22, pg., 75, 155
 ch. 1, v. 21-23, pg., 738, 745
 ch. 1, v. 22, pg., 169
 ch. 2, v. 1-4, pg., 70, 458
 ch. 2, v. 3, pg., 561
 ch. 2, v. 4-11, pg., 153
 ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 453
 ch. 2, v. 17, pg., 626
 ch. 2, v. 19-20, pg., 714
 ch. 2, v. 21, pg., 304
 ch. 2, v. 23, pg., 587, 734, 746,
 824, 828
 ch. 2, v. 24, pg., 871

- ch. 2, v. 32-36, pg., 694
- ch. 2, v. 36, pg., 517
- ch. 2, v. 38, pg., 138, 228
- ch. 2, v. 39, pg., 639
- ch. 2, v. 41, pg., 898
- ch. 2, v. 42, pg., 284
- ch. 3, v. 2-10, pg., 254
- ch. 3, v. 8, pg., 137
- ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 787
- ch. 3, v. 22, pg., 493, 873
- ch. 3, v. 22-23, pg., 873
- ch. 4, v. 2, pg., 366, 875
- ch. 4, v. 4, pg., 624
- ch. 4, v. 12, pg., 194, 283, 305,
308, 374, 517, 524, 546, 584,
761
- ch. 4, v. 13, pg., 547
- ch. 4, v. 19, pg., 386
- ch. 4, v. 27, pg., 828
- ch. 5, v. 1-11, pg., 453, 893
- ch. 5, v. 4, pg., 703, 704
- ch. 5, v. 6, pg., 619
- ch. 5, v. 41, pg., 217
- ch. 6, v. 1, pg., 254
- ch. 6, v. 5-6, pg., 638
- ch. 7, v. 2-50, pg., 201
- ch. 7, v. 52, pg., 824
- ch. 7, v. 54-59, pg., 657
- ch. 7, v. 59, pg., 783
- ch. 7, v. 60, pg., 618
- ch. 8, v. 9-10, pg., 708
- ch. 8, v. 18-20, pg., 381
- ch. 8, v. 21, pg., 453
- ch. 9, v. 2, pg., 761
- ch. 9, v. 15, pg., 683
- ch. 9, v. 40, pg., 379
- ch. 10, v. 2, pg., 291
- ch. 10, v. 4, pg., 255
- ch. 10, v. 9-16, pg., 228
- ch. 10, v. 25, 26, pg., 517
- ch. 10, v. 28, pg., 453
- ch. 10, v. 37-38, pg., 75
- ch. 10, v. 41, pg., 893
- ch. 10, v. 45, pg., 138
- ch. 11, v. 26, pg., 527
- ch. 12, v. 1-2, pg., 646
- ch. 12, v. 5, pg., 356
- ch. 12, v. 6-11, pg., 151
- ch. 12, v. 12, pg., 738
- ch. 12, v. 19, pg., 887
- ch. 13, v. 2, 3, pg., 263
- ch. 13, v. 2, pg., 524
- ch. 13, v. 2-3, pg., 174
- ch. 13, v. 3, pg., 263
- ch. 13, v. 10, pg., 893
- ch. 13, v. 15, pg., 157
- ch. 13, v. 22-23, pg., 694
- ch. 13, v. 46, pg., 274, 683
- ch. 14, v. 15, pg., 517
- ch. 14, v. 17, pg., 250
- ch. 14, v. 22, pg., 216
- ch. 14, v. 23, pg., 174, 263, 524
- ch. 15, v. 13-21, pg., 374
- ch. 15, v. 20, 29, pg., 636
- ch. 15, v. 35, pg., 163
- ch. 15, v. 36-41, pg., 524
- ch. 16, v. 25, pg., 807
- ch. 16, v. 31, pg., 304
- ch. 17, v. 1, pg., 157
- ch. 17, v. 4, pg., 669
- ch. 17, v. 6, pg., 344
- ch. 17, v. 18, pg., 875
- ch. 17, v. 21, pg., 669
- ch. 17, v. 24, pg., 17
- ch. 17, v. 25, pg., 18, 268
- ch. 17, v. 28, pg., 183, 186,
259, 268, 279, 469
- ch. 17, v. 29, pg., 303, 601,

- 884, 886
 ch. 17, v. 30, pg., 336, 779
 ch. 17, v. 30-31, pg., 779
 ch. 17, v. 31, pg., 70, 282, 726, 874, 885
 ch. 18, v. 4, pg., 157
 ch. 18, v. 6, pg., 274, 382, 683
 ch. 19, v. 12, pg., 323, 368
 ch. 19, v. 12-15, pg., 323
 ch. 19, v. 13, pg., 285, 314, 323
 ch. 19, v. 13-16, pg., 285
 ch. 19, v. 21-41, pg., 838
 ch. 20, v. 7, pg., 228, 875
 ch. 20, v. 10, pg., 379
 ch. 22, v. 19, pg., 316
 ch. 22, v. 20, pg., 316
 ch. 23, v. 6, pg., 621
 ch. 23, v. 8, pg., 687
 ch. 23, v. 17-18, pg., 291
 ch. 24, v. 15, pg., 364, 619, 621, 875
 ch. 24, v. 27, pg., 29
 ch. 25, v. 25, pg., 23
 ch. 26, v. 17, 18, pg., 513
 ch. 26, v. 18, pg., 314
 ch. 26, v. 24, pg., 312
 ch. 27, v. 43, pg., 291
 ch. 28, v. 26, 27, pg., 303
- 45 Romans**
 ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 694
 ch. 1, v. 16, pg., 458
 ch. 1, v. 18, 21, pg., 384
 ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 22, 72, 112, 128, 185, 283, 303, 384, 441, 675, 725, 816
 ch. 1, v. 18-20, pg., 303
 ch. 1, v. 18-21, pg., 72
 ch. 1, v. 18-22, pg., 675
 ch. 1, v. 18-23, pg., 112, 185, 441
- 441
 ch. 1, v. 18-32, pg., 127, 154, 562
 ch. 1, v. 19, 20, 32, pg., 398
 ch. 1, v. 19, 20, pg., 21, 22, 398
 ch. 1, v. 19, pg., 21, 22, 398, 640, 680
 ch. 1, v. 19-21, pg., 640
 ch. 1, v. 20, pg., 320, 559
 ch. 1, v. 21, pg., 22, 72, 177, 209, 604, 606, 629
 ch. 1, v. 21-23, pg., 518, 604
 ch. 1, v. 24, 26, 28, pg., 128
 ch. 1, v. 24-32, pg., 605, 676
 ch. 1, v. 27, pg., 135
 ch. 1, v. 28, 29, pg., 22
 ch. 1, v. 28-32, pg., 836
 ch. 1, v. 32, pg., 779
 ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 272
 ch. 2, v. 1-16, pg., 154
 ch. 2, v. 7, pg., 645
 ch. 2, v. 15, pg., 227, 228, 282
 ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 237
 ch. 3, v. 1-2, pg., 682
 ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 507
 ch. 3, v. 9-18, pg., 275
 ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 601
 ch. 3, v. 19, pg., 60, 470, 549, 590, 687
 ch. 3, v. 20, pg., 237
 ch. 3, v. 21-26, pg., 752
 ch. 3, v. 23, pg., 723
 ch. 3, v. 25, 26, pg., 700
 ch. 4, v. 1-4, pg., 644
 ch. 4, v. 11, pg., 504
 ch. 4, v. 12, pg., 653
 ch. 5, v. 1, 2, pg., 218
 ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 892

- ch. 5, v. 2, pg., 793
- ch. 5, v. 6-8, pg., 647
- ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 193, 585, 623,
739, 775, 847
- ch. 5, v. 15, pg., 138
- ch. 5, v. 20, 21, pg., 73
- ch. 6, v. 1, 2, pg., 63
- ch. 6, v. 2, pg., 233
- ch. 6, v. 4, pg., 875
- ch. 6, v. 7, pg., 663
- ch. 6, v. 11, pg., 760
- ch. 6, v. 14, pg., 231
- ch. 6, v. 16-18, pg., 231
- ch. 6, v. 16-22, pg., 266
- ch. 6, v. 23, pg., 454, 577
- ch. 7, v. 4, pg., 241
- ch. 7, v. 12, pg., 429
- ch. 8, v. 1, pg., 271
- ch. 8, v. 4, pg., 227
- ch. 8, v. 7, 8, pg., 280
- ch. 8, v. 17, pg., 727, 777
- ch. 8, v. 18-22, pg., 566
- ch. 8, v. 19-22, pg., 208
- ch. 8, v. 21, pg., 59
- ch. 8, v. 22, pg., 437
- ch. 8, v. 23, pg., 203
- ch. 8, v. 26, pg., 276
- ch. 8, v. 28, pg., 33, 218, 260,
267, 269, 278, 303, 304, 377,
469, 528, 617, 633, 871
- ch. 8, v. 28-30, pg., 377
- ch. 8, v. 28-39, pg., 304
- ch. 8, v. 29, 30, pg., 577
- ch. 8, v. 29-30, pg., 798
- ch. 8, v. 30, pg., 520
- ch. 8, v. 31-39, pg., 452, 887
- ch. 8, v. 35-39, pg., 769
- ch. 8, v. 38, pg., 323
- ch. 9, v. 4-5, pg., 694
- ch. 9, v. 6, pg., 92, 352, 587
- ch. 9, v. 11, pg., 427, 798
- ch. 9, v. 11-13, pg., 427
- ch. 9, v. 14-18, pg., 128
- ch. 9, v. 19-21, pg., 179
- ch. 9, v. 27, 29, pg., 57
- ch. 10, v. 2-4, pg., 414
- ch. 10, v. 5, pg., 530
- ch. 10, v. 9, 10, pg., 369, 388
- ch. 10, v. 9, 13, pg., 304
- ch. 10, v. 9, pg., 201, 284, 304,
369, 388, 452, 458, 672
- ch. 10, v. 9-10, pg., 452
- ch. 10, v. 9-13, pg., 201
- ch. 10, v. 14, 15, pg., 377
- ch. 10, v. 14, pg., 63, 302, 377,
582, 614
- ch. 10, v. 14-15, pg., 63, 302,
614
- ch. 10, v. 16, pg., 674
- ch. 10, v. 17, pg., 896
- ch. 11, v. 1-6, pg., 57, 324
- ch. 11, v. 5, pg., 568, 843
- ch. 11, v. 7, pg., 430
- ch. 11, v. 11, pg., 144
- ch. 11, v. 25, pg., 351
- ch. 11, v. 26, pg., 321
- ch. 12, v. 1, pg., 393
- ch. 12, v. 2, pg., 778
- ch. 12, v. 6, pg., 724
- ch. 12, v. 13, pg., 381, 593
- ch. 12, v. 17-21, pg., 247, 271
- ch. 12, v. 19, pg., 270, 400
- ch. 12, v. 20, pg., 439
- ch. 13, v. 1-4, pg., 246, 247
- ch. 13, v. 1-7, pg., 482, 568,
686, 839
- ch. 13, v. 3-5, pg., 700
- ch. 13, v. 4, pg., 269

ch. 13, v. 10, pg., 691
 ch. 13, v. 14, pg., 241
 ch. 14, v. 10-12, pg., 607
 ch. 14, v. 13, pg., 614
 ch. 15, v. 9, pg., 807
 ch. 16, v. 25, pg., 347

46 1 Corinthians

ch. 1, v. 3-7, pg., 213
 ch. 1, v. 18-21, pg., 377
 ch. 1, v. 18-31, pg., 573
 ch. 1, v. 19, 20, pg., 300
 ch. 1, v. 20, 21, 28, pg., 303
 ch. 1, v. 20, pg., 303, 537
 ch. 1, v. 21, pg., 302, 614
 ch. 1, v. 22, pg., 101, 381, 415
 ch. 1, v. 23, pg., 426
 ch. 1, v. 24, 30, pg., 322
 ch. 1, v. 26, pg., 303, 305, 583,

595

ch. 1, v. 26-27, pg., 583
 ch. 1, v. 26-29, pg., 595
 ch. 1, v. 27, pg., 55, 311, 373
 ch. 2, v. 7, pg., 14, 347
 ch. 2, v. 8, pg., 771
 ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 218, 594, 655
 ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 507
 ch. 3, v. 11, pg., 286, 339, 452
 ch. 3, v. 11-15, pg., 339
 ch. 3, v. 21-23, pg., 197
 ch. 4, v. 5, pg., 335
 ch. 4, v. 11, pg., 383
 ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 228, 636
 ch. 5, v. 1-5, pg., 476
 ch. 5, v. 7, pg., 82, 749
 ch. 5, v. 9, 10, pg., 384
 ch. 5, v. 12-6.5, pg., 269
 ch. 6, v. 1-11, pg., 248
 ch. 6, v. 2, pg., 749
 ch. 6, v. 7, pg., 262

ch. 6, v. 9, 10, pg., 491
 ch. 6, v. 11, pg., 677
 ch. 6, v. 18-20, pg., 241
 ch. 7, v. 1, pg., 160
 ch. 7, v. 8, 39, pg., 242
 ch. 7, v. 10-15, pg., 242
 ch. 7, v. 15, pg., 389
 ch. 7, v. 19, pg., 227
 ch. 7, v. 29, pg., 419, 457, 490
 ch. 7, v. 32-34, pg., 637
 ch. 7, v. 39, pg., 55
 ch. 9, v. 5, pg., 160
 ch. 9, v. 9, 13-14, pg., 228
 ch. 9, v. 14, pg., 381
 ch. 10, v. 2, pg., 287
 ch. 10, v. 12, pg., 735, 795
 ch. 10, v. 13, pg., 260, 384
 ch. 10, v. 31, pg., 252
 ch. 11, v. 1, pg., 719
 ch. 11, v. 15, pg., 732
 ch. 11, v. 23, pg., 347, 749
 ch. 11, v. 23-26, pg., 749
 ch. 11, v. 25, pg., 201
 ch. 12, v. 1-31, pg., 493, 724
 ch. 13, v. 4-6, pg., 615
 ch. 13, v. 4-7, pg., 271, 274
 ch. 13, v. 5, pg., 262
 ch. 13, v. 8-10, pg., 285
 ch. 14, v. 34, pg., 521
 ch. 15, v. 4, pg., 867, 871
 ch. 15, v. 5, pg., 898, 899
 ch. 15, v. 5a, pg., 891
 ch. 15, v. 5b, pg., 893
 ch. 15, v. 6, pg., 872, 904
 ch. 15, v. 6-7, pg., 904
 ch. 15, v. 12-19, pg., 864
 ch. 15, v. 13, 14, pg., 366
 ch. 15, v. 13-19, pg., 561
 ch. 15, v. 14, pg., 875

- ch. 15, v. 17-19, pg., 621
- ch. 15, v. 19, pg., 445
- ch. 15, v. 20, pg., 874
- ch. 15, v. 23, 24, pg., 722
- ch. 15, v. 24, pg., 771
- ch. 15, v. 25, 26, pg., 453
- ch. 15, v. 25-28, pg., 16
- ch. 15, v. 27, pg., 132, 902
- ch. 15, v. 27-28, pg., 132
- ch. 15, v. 35-49, pg., 114, 133, 621
- ch. 15, v. 42-49, pg., 688
- ch. 15, v. 42-58, pg., 366
- ch. 15, v. 43, pg., 555
- ch. 15, v. 44, pg., 861, 880
- ch. 15, v. 47, pg., 119
- ch. 15, v. 49, pg., 342
- ch. 15, v. 51, pg., 618
- ch. 15, v. 54, 55, pg., 63
- ch. 15, v. 55, pg., 623
- ch. 15, v. 57, pg., 549
- ch. 16, v. 2, pg., 253, 606, 875
- ch. 16, v. 2-3, pg., 704
- ch. 16, v. 22, pg., 382

47 2 Corinthians

- ch. 1, v. 3-4, pg., 219
- ch. 1, v. 23, pg., 245
- ch. 3, v. 14-15, pg., 374
- ch. 4, v. 6, pg., 372
- ch. 4, v. 7, pg., 607
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 218
- ch. 4, v. 17, 18, pg., 217
- ch. 4, v. 17, pg., 217, 526
- ch. 4, v. 18, pg., 266
- ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 366
- ch. 5, v. 1-8, pg., 859
- ch. 5, v. 6, 8, pg., 621
- ch. 5, v. 10, pg., 607
- ch. 5, v. 21, pg., 74, 670, 809,

846, 857

- ch. 6, v. 2, pg., 594
- ch. 6, v. 14, pg., 55, 228, 229, 384
- ch. 6, v. 14-16, pg., 384
- ch. 6, v. 14-18, pg., 229
- ch. 6, v. 16, pg., 587
- ch. 9, v. 6-12, pg., 705
- ch. 9, v. 6-9, pg., 606
- ch. 9, v. 7, pg., 593
- ch. 10, v. 3-5, pg., 812
- ch. 11, v. 1-33, pg., 379
- ch. 11, v. 2, pg., 130
- ch. 12, v. 3, pg., 854
- ch. 12, v. 8-9, pg., 525
- ch. 12, v. 10, pg., 379
- ch. 12, v. 12, pg., 379, 381, 393
- ch. 13, v. 1, pg., 228, 459
- ch. 13, v. 14, pg., 15

48 Galatians

- ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 347
- ch. 1, v. 11-17, pg., 379
- ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 379, 452
- ch. 3, v. 7, 29, pg., 504
- ch. 3, v. 7, pg., 292, 504, 653
- ch. 3, v. 13, pg., 223, 670, 787, 809
- ch. 3, v. 28, pg., 136, 523
- ch. 4, v. 4, pg., 223, 293, 467
- ch. 4, v. 7, pg., 777
- ch. 5, v. 1, pg., 663
- ch. 5, v. 8-9, pg., 343
- ch. 5, v. 11, pg., 228
- ch. 5, v. 19-26, pg., 68
- ch. 5, v. 22, 23, pg., 248, 284
- ch. 5, v. 22, pg., 248, 271, 284, 570, 664, 679, 775
- ch. 5, v. 22-23, pg., 664
- ch. 5, v. 22-24, pg., 679

- ch. 5, v. 22-25, pg., 271, 570
- ch. 5, v. 24, pg., 241
- ch. 6, v. 1, pg., 273, 615
- ch. 6, v. 16, pg., 197, 292, 324, 378, 587

49 Ephesians

- ch. 1, v. 4-14, pg., 275
- ch. 1, v. 4-5, 11, pg., 798
- ch. 1, v. 5, 11, pg., 798
- ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 303, 798
- ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 266
- ch. 1, v. 20, pg., 694
- ch. 1, v. 21, pg., 358
- ch. 1, v. 22, pg., 532
- ch. 2, v. 1, 2, pg., 314
- ch. 2, v. 2, pg., 340
- ch. 2, v. 8, 9, pg., 414, 577
- ch. 2, v. 8, pg., 262, 317, 340, 371, 414, 571, 577, 606, 644
- ch. 2, v. 8-10, pg., 262, 571, 606, 644
- ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 317, 755
- ch. 2, v. 10, pg., 63, 317, 393
- ch. 2, v. 11-22, pg., 626
- ch. 2, v. 12, pg., 374, 445, 776
- ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 632
- ch. 2, v. 19-20, pg., 196
- ch. 2, v. 20, pg., 378, 379, 451, 452
- ch. 3, v. 7, pg., 138
- ch. 3, v. 9, pg., 347
- ch. 3, v. 12, pg., 632
- ch. 3, v. 18, pg., 23
- ch. 3, v. 20, pg., 267, 344
- ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 484
- ch. 4, v. 2, 15, pg., 615
- ch. 4, v. 2, pg., 592
- ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 57, 750
- ch. 4, v. 11, 12, pg., 377

- ch. 4, v. 12, pg., 393
- ch. 4, v. 29, pg., 351
- ch. 4, v. 30, pg., 622
- ch. 4, v. 32, pg., 262
- ch. 5, v. 3-5, pg., 351
- ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 19
- ch. 5, v. 15-17, pg., 606
- ch. 5, v. 16, pg., 897
- ch. 5, v. 25-28, pg., 243
- ch. 5, v. 25-33, pg., 596, 637
- ch. 5, v. 26, 27, pg., 547
- ch. 5, v. 32, pg., 130
- ch. 6, v. 6, pg., 616
- ch. 6, v. 10-17, pg., 543
- ch. 6, v. 10-18, pg., 560, 647
- ch. 6, v. 17, pg., 79
- ch. 6, v. 18, pg., 543, 633

50 Philippians

- ch. 1, v. 9, pg., 570
- ch. 1, v. 20-23, pg., 859
- ch. 1, v. 23, pg., 218, 555, 621, 854
- ch. 1, v. 29, pg., 217
- ch. 2, v. 1-8, pg., 592
- ch. 2, v. 3, 4, pg., 86
- ch. 2, v. 3, pg., 86, 592
- ch. 2, v. 5-8, pg., 73
- ch. 2, v. 6, pg., 468, 471, 578, 739, 770, 840
- ch. 2, v. 6-11, pg., 739, 794
- ch. 2, v. 6-8, pg., 468, 471, 840
- ch. 2, v. 8-10, pg., 454
- ch. 2, v. 8-11, pg., 459
- ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 132, 694, 702, 798, 852, 873, 907
- ch. 2, v. 9-11, pg., 132, 702, 798, 852, 873, 907
- ch. 2, v. 10, 11, pg., 94, 292,

518, 781
ch. 2, v. 10, pg., 94, 158, 292,
309, 363, 409, 461, 518, 781,
841
ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 517, 660
ch. 2, v. 12, pg., 205
ch. 2, v. 15, pg., 23, 547
ch. 3, v. 5, 6, pg., 232
ch. 3, v. 6, pg., 316, 783
ch. 3, v. 7-11, pg., 349
ch. 3, v. 8, pg., 801
ch. 3, v. 11, pg., 366
ch. 3, v. 12-14, pg., 251
ch. 4, v. 6, 7, pg., 269
ch. 4, v. 6-7, pg., 892
ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 240, 315
ch. 4, v. 16-19, pg., 381

51 Colossians

ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 33
ch. 1, v. 6, pg., 332, 570
ch. 1, v. 10, pg., 570
ch. 1, v. 12, pg., 303
ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 14, 20, 287,
370, 429, 500, 523, 574, 662,
673, 799
ch. 1, v. 15-17, pg., 370
ch. 1, v. 15-20, pg., 14
ch. 1, v. 16, 17, pg., 16
ch. 1, v. 16, pg., 16, 103, 287,
289, 292, 760, 780
ch. 1, v. 16-17, pg., 780
ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 469
ch. 1, v. 18, pg., 132
ch. 1, v. 19, pg., 73
ch. 1, v. 26, pg., 347
ch. 2, v. 8, pg., 445
ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 304, 578
ch. 2, v. 12, 15, pg., 874
ch. 2, v. 12, pg., 871, 874

ch. 2, v. 12-14, pg., 874
ch. 2, v. 15, pg., 323, 358
ch. 2, v. 16, 17, pg., 20
ch. 2, v. 16-17, pg., 228
ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 66, 366, 805
ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 233, 241
ch. 3, v. 13, 14, pg., 260
ch. 3, v. 13, pg., 260, 776
ch. 3, v. 16, pg., 277
ch. 3, v. 19, pg., 637
ch. 3, v. 22-24, pg., 534
ch. 3, v. 23, pg., 327
ch. 4, v. 5, pg., 315
ch. 4, v. 6, pg., 319

52 1 Thessalonians

ch. 2, v. 4, pg., 653
ch. 2, v. 7, pg., 615
ch. 2, v. 14-16, pg., 57, 324
ch. 2, v. 15, 16, pg., 548
ch. 4, v. 13-17, pg., 576
ch. 4, v. 13-18, pg., 618, 758,
874
ch. 4, v. 14, 17, pg., 364
ch. 4, v. 16, pg., 294, 366, 559,
624, 721, 726, 908
ch. 4, v. 17, pg., 558, 711
ch. 4, v. 18, pg., 759
ch. 5, v. 1-3, pg., 713
ch. 5, v. 2, pg., 716
ch. 5, v. 11, pg., 776
ch. 5, v. 12, 13, pg., 453, 696
ch. 5, v. 17, pg., 633, 795
ch. 5, v. 23, pg., 277, 638

53 2 Thessalonians

ch. 1, v. 7-10, pg., 341
ch. 1, v. 10, pg., 716
ch. 2, v. 8-11, pg., 285
ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 254, 267

54 1 Timothy

ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 691
 ch. 1, v. 8-11, pg., 227, 496
 ch. 1, v. 11, pg., 653
 ch. 1, v. 13, pg., 316, 786
 ch. 1, v. 15, 16, pg., 275, 316
 ch. 1, v. 15, pg., 275, 316, 348,
 380
 ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 73
 ch. 2, v. 1-3, pg., 686
 ch. 2, v. 4, pg., 700
 ch. 2, v. 5, pg., 71, 761
 ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 521
 ch. 3, v. 1-12, pg., 197
 ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 273, 593, 647
 ch. 3, v. 2-3, pg., 647
 ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 389
 ch. 3, v. 16, pg., 201
 ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 324
 ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 160
 ch. 4, v. 13, pg., 163
 ch. 5, v. 3, 8, pg., 389
 ch. 5, v. 3-9, pg., 254
 ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 254, 261
 ch. 5, v. 10, 14, pg., 312
 ch. 5, v. 10, pg., 312, 593
 ch. 5, v. 17, pg., 163, 198, 378,
 381, 453, 525, 696
 ch. 5, v. 17-18, pg., 381, 525
 ch. 5, v. 17-21, pg., 198
 ch. 5, v. 18, pg., 228
 ch. 5, v. 20, pg., 615
 ch. 5, v. 22, pg., 105, 196, 378
 ch. 6, v. 10, pg., 553, 610, 732
 ch. 6, v. 15, 16, pg., 18
 ch. 6, v. 15, pg., 18, 681
 ch. 6, v. 16, pg., 73, 460
 ch. 6, v. 17-19, pg., 266, 609
 ch. 6, v. 18, pg., 555
 ch. 6, v. 20, pg., 653

55 2 Timothy

ch. 1, v. 8, pg., 458, 814
 ch. 2, v. 2, pg., 378
 ch. 2, v. 12, pg., 655
 ch. 3, v. 12, pg., 204, 216, 784
 ch. 3, v. 15-17, pg., 905
 ch. 3, v. 16, 17, pg., 225, 765
 ch. 3, v. 16, pg., 225, 230, 354,
 765, 833
 ch. 4, v. 2, pg., 776
 ch. 4, v. 3, pg., 284
 ch. 4, v. 7-8, pg., 390
 ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 33, 213
 ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 735

56 Titus

ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 378, 524
 ch. 1, v. 6, pg., 378, 521
 ch. 1, v. 6-9, pg., 378
 ch. 1, v. 7, pg., 381
 ch. 1, v. 8, pg., 593
 ch. 1, v. 9, pg., 284
 ch. 2, v. 2, pg., 263
 ch. 2, v. 3, pg., 776
 ch. 2, v. 4-5, pg., 312
 ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 73
 ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 647
 ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 414

58 Hebrews

ch. 1, v. 1, 2, pg., 300, 304,
 396, 574
 ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 90, 781, 838
 ch. 1, v. 1-3, pg., 287
 ch. 1, v. 1-4, pg., 14
 ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 523, 662, 673
 ch. 2, v. 14, pg., 623
 ch. 2, v. 16, pg., 603
 ch. 2, v. 17-18, pg., 632
 ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 79
 ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 196, 485

- ch. 3, v. 1-6, pg., 73, 200
- ch. 3, v. 3, pg., 416
- ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 17
- ch. 3, v. 12, pg., 895
- ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 212
- ch. 4, v. 12-13, pg., 270
- ch. 4, v. 14, pg., 79, 622, 628, 632, 860
- ch. 4, v. 14-16, pg., 79, 622, 632, 860
- ch. 4, v. 15, pg., 406, 579
- ch. 4, v. 16, pg., 213, 435
- ch. 5, v. 11-14, pg., 447
- ch. 6, v. 4, pg., 138
- ch. 6, v. 16, 17, pg., 245
- ch. 7, v. 1-28, pg., 58
- ch. 7, v. 11, 12, pg., 228
- ch. 7, v. 23, pg., 528
- ch. 7, v. 24-25, pg., 873
- ch. 8, v. 1, pg., 694
- ch. 8, v. 1-13, pg., 58
- ch. 8, v. 1-6, pg., 908
- ch. 8, v. 5, pg., 20
- ch. 9, v. 9, 10, pg., 228
- ch. 9, v. 15, pg., 201
- ch. 9, v. 24-28, pg., 797
- ch. 9, v. 27, pg., 287, 554, 621
- ch. 10, v. 1, pg., 20
- ch. 10, v. 4, pg., 423
- ch. 10, v. 11-18, pg., 797
- ch. 10, v. 19-22, pg., 213, 632, 860
- ch. 10, v. 24-25, pg., 582
- ch. 10, v. 26-31, pg., 374
- ch. 10, v. 27, pg., 561
- ch. 11, v. 6, pg., 255
- ch. 11, v. 8, 9, pg., 674
- ch. 11, v. 8-19, pg., 296
- ch. 11, v. 10, pg., 212
- ch. 11, v. 16, pg., 218
- ch. 11, v. 17, pg., 123
- ch. 11, v. 37, pg., 383
- ch. 12, v. 1, pg., 203
- ch. 12, v. 2, pg., 266, 390
- ch. 12, v. 22, pg., 587
- ch. 12, v. 23, pg., 218
- ch. 12, v. 28, pg., 558, 807
- ch. 13, v. 2, pg., 381, 593, 890
- ch. 13, v. 4, pg., 636
- ch. 13, v. 5, pg., 356, 732
- ch. 13, v. 11-12, pg., 846
- ch. 13, v. 14, pg., 483
- ch. 13, v. 15, pg., 228, 252, 570, 807
- ch. 13, v. 17, pg., 453, 696
- ch. 13, v. 20, pg., 200, 204, 900
- ch. 13, v. 20-21, pg., 900
- 59 James**
- ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 374
- ch. 1, v. 2, pg., 217
- ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 340, 353, 447, 760
- ch. 1, v. 13, pg., 260
- ch. 1, v. 14, pg., 241
- ch. 1, v. 17, pg., 32, 260, 471, 474
- ch. 1, v. 19-20, pg., 238
- ch. 1, v. 22-23, pg., 326
- ch. 1, v. 22-25, pg., 641
- ch. 1, v. 26-27, pg., 571
- ch. 1, v. 27, pg., 254, 530, 532, 776
- ch. 2, v. 1-4, pg., 381, 390
- ch. 2, v. 5, pg., 554
- ch. 2, v. 8, 10, pg., 530
- ch. 2, v. 10, pg., 241, 585, 652, 690
- ch. 2, v. 14-26, pg., 193, 326,

616

- ch. 2, v. 17, pg., 68, 205, 286, 317, 678, 723
- ch. 2, v. 19, pg., 205, 284, 287, 390, 517
- ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 718
- ch. 3, v. 1-12, pg., 246, 315
- ch. 4, v. 4, pg., 266
- ch. 4, v. 11, pg., 270
- ch. 5, v. 4, pg., 228
- ch. 5, v. 14, pg., 378
- ch. 5, v. 16, pg., 776
- ch. 5, v. 19, pg., 570, 615
- ch. 5, v. 19-20, pg., 615

60 1 Peter

- ch. 1, v. 3, pg., 213, 874
- ch. 1, v. 3-5, pg., 874
- ch. 1, v. 4, pg., 266, 327, 758
- ch. 1, v. 15, 16, pg., 250
- ch. 1, v. 19, pg., 82
- ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 451
- ch. 2, v. 4, pg., 379
- ch. 2, v. 9, pg., 64, 777, 841
- ch. 2, v. 11, pg., 302, 483, 579
- ch. 2, v. 11-12, pg., 579
- ch. 2, v. 13, 14, pg., 246, 568
- ch. 2, v. 13-17, pg., 686
- ch. 2, v. 19-25, pg., 816
- ch. 2, v. 20, 21, pg., 389, 784
- ch. 2, v. 22, pg., 223, 429
- ch. 2, v. 24, pg., 233, 809
- ch. 3, v. 1, pg., 637
- ch. 3, v. 13-16, pg., 383
- ch. 3, v. 14, pg., 813
- ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 64, 326, 388
- ch. 4, v. 4, pg., 778
- ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 262
- ch. 4, v. 9, pg., 593, 776
- ch. 4, v. 10, pg., 607, 724

- ch. 4, v. 12-19, pg., 816
- ch. 4, v. 14, 16, pg., 217
- ch. 5, v. 1, 2, pg., 381
- ch. 5, v. 4, pg., 384, 900
- ch. 5, v. 5, pg., 742
- ch. 5, v. 8, 9, pg., 324
- ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 314, 324, 411

61 2 Peter

- ch. 1, v. 16-18, pg., 459
- ch. 1, v. 21, pg., 781
- ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 283, 340, 546
- ch. 2, v. 1-22, pg., 550
- ch. 2, v. 1-3, pg., 372
- ch. 3, v. 3, 4, pg., 559
- ch. 3, v. 3-13, pg., 908
- ch. 3, v. 3-4, pg., 374, 726, 759
- ch. 3, v. 3-7, pg., 457
- ch. 3, v. 7, pg., 70, 561
- ch. 3, v. 8, 9, pg., 457
- ch. 3, v. 9, pg., 528, 700
- ch. 3, v. 10, pg., 713
- ch. 3, v. 13, pg., 113, 208, 213, 483, 573
- ch. 3, v. 15, 16, pg., 379

62 1 John

- ch. 1, v. 1, pg., 864
- ch. 1, v. 5, pg., 21, 335, 499
- ch. 1, v. 6, 8, pg., 21
- ch. 1, v. 7, pg., 21, 204, 741
- ch. 1, v. 7-9, pg., 741
- ch. 1, v. 9, pg., 259
- ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 233, 632, 821
- ch. 2, v. 1-2, pg., 741
- ch. 2, v. 3, pg., 233, 336
- ch. 2, v. 9, 11, pg., 21
- ch. 2, v. 10, pg., 614
- ch. 2, v. 16, pg., 543
- ch. 2, v. 18, pg., 693, 708

- ch. 2, v. 18-23, pg., 693
- ch. 2, v. 22, 23, pg., 458
- ch. 3, v. 2, pg., 342
- ch. 3, v. 4, pg., 227
- ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 21
- ch. 3, v. 10-18, pg., 691
- ch. 3, v. 15, pg., 238
- ch. 4, v. 1, pg., 269, 283, 340
- ch. 4, v. 2, 3, pg., 452
- ch. 4, v. 7-21, pg., 691
- ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 739, 780, 833
- ch. 4, v. 16, pg., 376
- ch. 4, v. 19, pg., 309
- ch. 5, v. 2-3, pg., 227
- ch. 5, v. 4, pg., 549
- ch. 5, v. 6, pg., 109, 116
- ch. 5, v. 6-9, pg., 116
- ch. 5, v. 7, 8, pg., 365
- ch. 5, v. 10-12, pg., 183
- ch. 5, v. 11, pg., 186
- ch. 5, v. 14, pg., 276, 633
- ch. 5, v. 14-15, pg., 633
- 63 2 John**
 - v. 3, pg., 73
 - v. 7, pg., 708
- 64 3 John**
 - v. 5, 6, pg., 381
- 65 Jude**
 - v. 4, pg., 708
 - v. 6, pg., 335
 - v. 7, pg., 341
 - v. 24, pg., 213, 260, 638
- 66 Revelation**
 - ch. 1, v. 6, pg., 841
 - ch. 1, v. 9, pg., 646
 - ch. 1, v. 10, pg., 869
 - ch. 2, v. 1, pg., 95
 - ch. 2, v. 2, 14, pg., 708
 - ch. 2, v. 7, pg., 855, 860
 - ch. 2, v. 17, pg., 89, 520
 - ch. 3, v. 5, pg., 527
 - ch. 3, v. 12, pg., 60, 520
 - ch. 3, v. 18, pg., 349, 448, 554, 555, 558, 684
 - ch. 3, v. 21, pg., 907
 - ch. 4, v. 2-3, pg., 213
 - ch. 4, v. 5, pg., 18
 - ch. 4, v. 8, pg., 277
 - ch. 4, v. 11, pg., 287, 303, 518, 702, 752
 - ch. 5, v. 8, pg., 55, 252, 260
 - ch. 5, v. 9, pg., 121, 671
 - ch. 5, v. 12, pg., 184, 659, 702, 907
 - ch. 6, v. 1, pg., 214
 - ch. 6, v. 16, pg., 872
 - ch. 7, v. 9, pg., 121, 144, 213, 283, 303, 339, 344, 376, 394, 523, 583, 659, 671, 683, 715, 751, 758
 - ch. 7, v. 9-10, pg., 213, 659
 - ch. 7, v. 17, pg., 404
 - ch. 8, v. 3, 4, pg., 55
 - ch. 14, v. 15, pg., 341
 - ch. 15, v. 3, pg., 271
 - ch. 17, v. 8, pg., 527
 - ch. 18, v. 1-24, pg., 301
 - ch. 19, v. 6-8, pg., 875
 - ch. 19, v. 7, 9, pg., 721, 748, 751
 - ch. 19, v. 7, pg., 682, 721, 748, 751
 - ch. 19, v. 9, pg., 99, 213, 292, 327, 404, 532, 558, 605, 651, 731, 899
 - ch. 19, v. 10, pg., 184, 517
 - ch. 19, v. 16, pg., 573, 681
 - ch. 20, v. 2, pg., 323

- ch. 20, v. 4, 6, pg., 655
- ch. 20, v. 6, pg., 366
- ch. 20, v. 10, 14, 15, pg., 453
- ch. 20, v. 10, 14, pg., 453, 623
- ch. 20, v. 10, pg., 453, 538,
623, 671
- ch. 20, v. 11-15, pg., 726
- ch. 20, v. 12, pg., 527
- ch. 20, v. 13, pg., 271, 619
- ch. 20, v. 15, pg., 561, 573
- ch. 21, v. 1, pg., 208, 759
- ch. 21, v. 1-22.5, pg., 902
- ch. 21, v. 2, 9, pg., 547, 721
- ch. 21, v. 2-4, pg., 208
- ch. 21, v. 3, 4, pg., 342
- ch. 21, v. 3, pg., 30, 342, 645
- ch. 21, v. 3-4, pg., 645
- ch. 21, v. 4, pg., 208, 213, 688
- ch. 21, v. 8, pg., 351
- ch. 21, v. 9-11, pg., 804
- ch. 21, v. 14, pg., 452
- ch. 21, v. 23, pg., 18
- ch. 21, v. 27, pg., 527
- ch. 22, v. 1, 2, pg., 808
- ch. 22, v. 2, 19, pg., 855, 860
- ch. 22, v. 2, pg., 213, 855, 860
- ch. 22, v. 5, pg., 558
- ch. 22, v. 9, 10, pg., 517
- ch. 22, v. 9, pg., 517, 876
- ch. 22, v. 12, 13, pg., 183
- ch. 22, v. 12, pg., 183, 908
- ch. 22, v. 15, pg., 36, 275, 351,
491, 496
- ch. 22, v. 16, pg., 23
- ch. 22, v. 17, pg., 200, 305, 683