

THE KING'S MANIFESTATION 17:1-13

JESUS WAS TRANSFIGURED 17:1-13

Three of the disciples saw Jesus in a way that most never saw him.

*Mt 17:1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,*

Six days after his conversation with his disciples which is recorded in chapter 16 and verse 28 Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain. When recording this event Matthew and Mark (Mk. 9:2) say "*after six days*", but Luke says after "*about eight days*" (Lk. 9:28). There is no discrepancy between these accounts. To begin with, Luke is not claiming to name the exact time for he says, "*about*" eight days. Also, Matthew and Mark count the days between Peter's confession and the day of Jesus' transfiguration. When Luke counted the days, he included the actual day of Peter's confession and the day of Jesus' transfiguration, which would make a total of eight days.

Peter, James, and John seem to be the closest to Jesus. John certainly was the closest of them all (Jn.13:23). He would take these three with him when he went to Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32). This does not suggest that Jesus had favorites. The bible makes clear that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). However, He does use individuals in different ways.

They went to a mountain together. Luke tells us Jesus went to this mountain to pray. As he was praying he was transfigured (Lk. 9:28-29). This ought to remind us how a time of prayer helps to bring us closer to the Father.

Luke also tells us Peter, James, and John were sleeping (Lk. 9:32). It seemed like the disciples were often sleeping when the greatest events were taking place. They slept at Gethsemane (Mk. 14:37,40,41). The reason for their sleep is explained by Luke. He said they were "heavy with sleep". The word "heavy" has the idea of weight, or distress. They were sleeping because they were so overwhelmed with grief. Grief or depression can make a person want to sleep. Peter, James, and John were still trying to process the facts of Jesus' comments of his coming death. This does not excuse their dozing off, but it does partially explain it.

*Mt 17:2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

This event was recorded by Mark (Mk. 9:2-13) and Luke (Lk. 9:28-36). I believe this was a fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:28. Jesus was giving them a preview of the coming kingdom and his majesty. He was "*transfigured*" in their presence. The word "transfigured" means, "to transform". This does not mean Jesus himself was changed. It simply means the real Jesus was revealed. His flesh obscured his real self while he walked in this world. But, for a few moments it was as though his flesh was pulled back and the real Jesus was revealed.

What a sight this must have been. Jesus' face shone as the midday sun. It was so bright it would have been difficult to look upon him. In a small way, this reminds me of Moses' face when he met with God. Just being in God's presence made his face shine (Ex. 34:29-35).

Even Jesus' clothing was as bright as light. Luke says his raiment was, "glistening". That means it was radiant. When the Hollywood stars want to be illuminated they have to have spot lights that shine on them. Their light comes from an outside source. Jesus needed no outside source of light for he was the source. The illumination was from within himself.

*Mt 17:3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Why would Moses and Elijah show up on this mountain? Moses and Elijah represent the Old Testament saints. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets.

Luke tells us they were talking about Jesus' death in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). This reassures us that his rejection and death was not a surprise to God (Mt. 25:34; 1 Pet. 1:20).

Someone may wonder how Peter, James, and John knew Moses and Elijah. The answer is simple, the Lord made it evident to them. When we get to heaven, we will know as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12). We will not only recognize those we knew on earth, we will know everyone.

*Mt 17:4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

As many times, before and afterwards, Peter spoke when he would have been better off to keep quiet. Luke tells us that Peter did not understand what he was saying (Lk. 9:33). How often do we talk without really understanding what we are speaking about? Mark tells us Peter did not know what to say because he was afraid (Mk.9:6). Fear makes us say and do strange things. Peter would have been much better off had he said nothing. We have learned a valuable lesson when we learn when to be quiet.

Peter did say one good thing. He said, "*it is good for us to be here*". He was right. It was good to be there. Anytime God reveals Himself it is good to be close at hand.

But, Peter's problem was he wanted to stay there. He said, "*let us make here three tabernacles*". The word "tabernacles" is talking about a tent. He probably has in mind the booths that were constructed for the Feast of the Tabernacles (Ex. 23; Lev. 16).

Luke says Moses and Elijah were leaving when Peter spoke these words. Perhaps when he saw them leaving he wanted to try to do something to stop them.

Peter may have spoke without thinking but I understand why he said what he did.

First, he was so overwhelmed by this experience he did not want it to end. Anyone who has experienced real communion with the Lord will understand Peter's desire. There nothing on earth better than communing with the Savior. It is, quite literally, a little bit of heaven on earth.

How we need those glorious moments. These type of experiences come only to those who are willing to come apart from the world and enter into His presence. Many Christians live their entire life and never have such an experience. However, these experiences cannot go on forever. Like Peter, James, and John, we must come off the mountain and deal with every day life.

Secondly, we should realize, Peter had no idea what all was happening on that mountain. It is quite possible that when he saw Jesus' glory he thought it was the actual beginning of the kingdom. We must remember, the kingdom was constantly at the forefront of the thoughts of all the disciples. They had anticipated the Messiah and His kingdom all their lives.

Consider these facts.

- Jesus had recently told his disciples some of them would not die before they saw his majesty (Mt.16:28)

It would not be surprising that Peter might think this was the actual beginning of the kingdom.

- Jesus' glory was revealed before them

Peter knew the kingdom would involve a glorified Christ. When Jesus returns the second time he will come in glory (Ps. 102:16; Mt. 24:30).

- Moses and Elijah were present

Peter knew also the kingdom would include the Old Testament saints (Mt. 24:31). The Old Testament teaches that Israel will be restored to the land (Dt. 30:1-10). When Jesus comes to set up His kingdom He will gather Israel together (Mt. 24:31).

For more information concerning the millennial reign of Jesus note these verses (Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:8-21; Ezk. 34:17-24; Dan. 7:13-14; Micah 4:1-5).

Considering these facts, it would be easy for Peter to think it was the beginning of the kingdom. He did not understand it just a preview of the kingdom.

There is another problem with Peter's comments. When he said, "*one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias*", he was putting Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah. We should never put any man on the same level as Jesus.

*Mt 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

While Peter was speaking a "*bright cloud overshadowed them*". The word "overshadowed" has the idea of enveloping. The cloud surrounded them. This glory cloud is seen throughout the bible. It represented God's presence (Ex. 14:19-20; Ex. 19:16; Ex. 24:15-17; 1 Kg. 8:10-11; Ezk. 1:4; Ezk. 10:4).

This is the second time a voice from heaven was heard (cf. Mt. 3:17). Both times the voice tells the disciples to hear the Son.

This voice tells us how the heavenly Father feels about His Son. He is well pleased. Jesus had done what the Father desired. Jesus said he did always those things which please him (Jn. 8:29). He said his "meat" was to do the will of him that sent him (Jn. 4:34). I wonder, can the Father say the same about us?

*Mt 17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

Peter, James, and John were so frightened they fell to their faces. Fear is a common reaction to the presence of God (Ex. 20:18-19; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 8:17; Acts 9:3-4; Rev. 1:17).

*Mt 17:7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

Jesus literally touched them. What compassion. There is something about his touch. It is amazing what the touch of the Lord can do. No one who ever received his touch remains the same. Jesus understood why they were afraid and assured them there was no reason for fear. Thank the Lord for His comfort.

Jesus said, "*Arise*". It was not time to sit or lay, it was time to get on the move. It was time to serve. As He did with Joshua (Josh. 7:10) the Lord told Peter, James, and John to get up. As wonderful as this experience was there was too much to do to be still.

It wasn't time for fear. Jesus said "*be not afraid*". We cannot think clearly while overwhelmed with fear. Remember when fear takes control of you, he still has peace. Don't forget, he is close.

*Mt 17:8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

When they lifted their eyes only Jesus remained. Jesus was restored to his natural state. The glory and majesty of this event was gone, but the effects of it lasted (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

It was time to head down the mountain and back into the regular world. The miraculous experience was over but they carried this with them. I am sure it gave them grace to go on in the days ahead. When they faced things they did not understand they had this experience to look back to. They could see him in his glory and somehow they knew things would be ok.

The Transfiguration was a preview of Jesus' coming Kingdom. The bible tells us the Kingdom (also called The Millennium) will be a time of physical and spiritual peace (Micah 4:2-4; Isa. 32:17-18). It will be a time of obedience and holiness (Jer. 31:33). Jesus will rule (Isa. 9:3-7; 11:1-10). Jerusalem will be the capitol of the world (Zech. 8:3). This Kingdom will last for 1000 years (Rev. 20:4). Afterward, the devil will be loosed to tempt those who were born during the Kingdom (Rev. 20:7-8).

The Transfiguration is a picture of the Kingdom in the following ways.

- The Messiah will be the center of attention

As Jesus was the center of attention on the mount, so will he be during the Kingdom. He will rule and reign. The world will be focused on him.

- The Messiah will come to a mountain

As Jesus went to a mountain to be transfigured, so will he come to earth on a mountain when he is about to set up his Kingdom. Zechariah tells us the feet of the Messiah will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).

- The Messiah will gather His people together

As Moses and Elijah were present on the Mount of Transfiguration, so will Israel be gathered together in the Kingdom (Mk. 13:26-27).

- Some of those who enter the Kingdom will have died

Moses was on the mount with Jesus during the transfiguration. He represents those who have died, gone to heaven, and then return with the Lord when he sets up his Kingdom (Rev. 19:14; Jude 14).

- Some will enter the Kingdom in their natural bodies

Elijah was also with Jesus at the transfiguration. Elijah was taken to heaven without dying (2 Kgs. 2:11). He represents those who will survive the Great Tribulation Period and go into the Kingdom in their natural bodies without dying

- The New Testament believers will be a part of the Kingdom

Peter, James, and John were with Jesus at the transfiguration. They represent the church. Even though our citizenship is in heaven, (Phil. 3:20; 1 Pet. 1:4) those who were a part of the New Testament church will be a part of the Millennium (Lk. 19:17; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Th. 1:10; Rev. 2:26-27; Rev. 5:8-10; Rev. 20:6).

*Mt 17:9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

Jesus told them to wait until after the resurrection to tell anyone about this experience. By that time, they would know he did not come to conquer Rome. He came to conquer death.

*Mt 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

As they were descending the mountain Peter, James, and John asked Jesus a question about Elijah. Seeing Elijah on the mountain it must have made them think.

The book of Malachi said Elijah would come before the Messiah. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would "*turn the heart of the fathers to the children, And the heart of the children to their fathers*" (Mal.4:5-6). Therefore, the Jews believed Elijah would come before the Messiah as a great reformer. They believed he would start the turning of the Jews back to their God. They were expecting Elijah to come and begin to right the wrongs suffered upon them. In essence, these disciples were asking, "We know you are the Messiah, so why has Elijah not come". If Elijah was to come before the Messiah, where was he?

*Mt 17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.*

Jesus acknowledged the fact that Elijah would come before the Messiah as prophesied.

*Mt 17:12-13 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

Jesus shocked the disciples by telling them Elijah had already come. John the baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elijah as recorded by Luke (Lk. 1:17). He came in the same manner as Elijah. John's preaching was straight and powerful, as Elijah's had been. John's message upset people in high places, as Elijah's had done. John was a man who had a zeal for God, as Elijah had. John called for people to repent, as Elijah did. John lived a godly life in a corrupt time, as Elijah did.

Had the Jews accepted John, he would have been the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. But, they rejected John and his message. When John came the beliefs of the Jews were far from scriptural. The Scribes and Pharisees had added so many of their man-made traditions that God's Word had been lost in the process. Into this mixed up mess came John preaching the truth. But they would not accept him or his message. As Jesus said, they had done what they "*listed*". In other words, they did what they wanted to him. They rejected his message and ministry. And then, Herod put him to death (Mt. 14:10-11).

Jesus said also, "*Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them*". They were going to do to him what they had done to John the baptist. Jesus was trying to prepare his disciples for what was ahead.

The rejection of John the baptist as the forerunner and Jesus as the Messiah would cause God to postpone the Kingdom. Had the Jews simply accepted them, the Kingdom they longed for would have become a reality. Of course we know God has not forgotten His promise. He will establish a Kingdom. His Son will yet reign. Man's rejection will not undo God's promise for a Kingdom. Also, there is a good chance that Elijah will be one of the witnesses that preach during the Great Tribulation and before the Lord's return to set up his Kingdom (Rev. 11:3-13).

#### THE KING'S MERCY 17:14 - 20:34

The mercy of God is seen through the next few chapters. He revealed his mercy by healing the sick, by instructing those who would listen, and by continuing to reach out to those who would listen.

Jesus knew he would be leaving soon. He poured himself into his disciples in an attempt to prepare them for what was ahead. As before, Jesus used the situations of life to teach his disciples how to live.

#### JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY HEALING A DEMON POSSESSED BOY 17:14-21

*Mt 17:14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,*

Jesus and the three disciples descended the mount and were confronted by a "*multitude*". The multitude consisted of some scribes (Mk. 9:15), a crowd of regular folks, and the nine disciples who did not go to the Mount of Transfiguration.

Mark tells us when Jesus and the three disciples were approaching the crowd he saw some scribes who were questioning the nine disciples that did not go to the mount (Mk.9:14). As Jesus began a conversation with the scribes a multitude gathered. Mark says, "And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him" (Mk. 9:15).

We are not told why they were amazed. There may have been something about his appearance that caused a sudden interest. It is quite possible there were some traces of his glory still remaining from the Mount of Transfiguration.

When Jesus asked the scribes why they were questioning his disciples a man interrupted the conversation. He came to Jesus "*kneeling down to him, and saying*". As we will discover, this man's son who was demon possessed. The scribe's discussion with the disciples no doubt had to do with their inability to heal a demon possessed boy. We can be fairly certain they were criticizing the disciples for their inability to help this boy. As heartless as it was, they were probably glad the disciples failed to heal the boy. They so hated Jesus they wanted him and his disciples to fail. They were quick to attack the disciples anytime the opportunity presented itself.

It is noteworthy to mention, Peter, James, and John were quickly snapped back to reality. They went from the thrill of the transfiguration to the agony of a demon possessed boy. They left the glory of the presence of God and came to the gloomy presence of evil. The devil loves to attack us after mountain top experiences. The most dangerous place for any Christian is just after a great victory. We need to be careful lest our enemy catch us off guard. Paul warns us, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Co 10:12).

*Mt 17:15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.*

The father asked nothing for himself. Instead, he asked for mercy for his son. The condition of this child is horrible indeed.

The word "*lunatick*" means, "to be moonstruck". They believed the moon had an influence over earthly matters.

The boy was "*sore vexed*". The word "*sore*" means, "miserable or grievous". The young boy lived in torment.

The demon that possessed this boy had tried to kill him. For, "*oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water*". He would go into fits that would cause him to frail around.

Mark calls this demon a "*foul*" spirit. The word "*foul*" means, "lewd or impure". An ungodly spirit had taken over the life of this young boy. He could not hear or speak (Mk. 9:25). He had been in this condition since he was an infant (Mk. 9:21). At times, the demon would violently throw the boy to the ground (Mk. 9:18). To makes matters worse, he was an only son (Lk. 9:38).

The demon totally controlled the lives of the father and son. Neither could have a moment of peace. If there were brief moments of relief, there was always the fear that another attack could happen at any moment. Both lived in constant heartache and misery.

This father came in tears begging Jesus for "*mercy*" (Mk. 9:24). He obviously loved his son very much. His heart was broken over his condition. Mercy is for those who can not help themselves. Mercy is for those who do not deserve it. We all need mercy.

*Mt 17:16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.*

This was truly a difficult case. It was so severe, nothing this dad tried had helped. Even the disciples had not been able to help them. All seemed hopeless. However, the father had one thing going for him. He refused to give up. He didn't quit. When the disciples failed to heal his son he went to Jesus for help.

Jesus told the father the key to his problem was faith. Mark tells us, "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mk 9:23).

The key to any problem is faith. If there is any failure in the family of God, it is our lack of faith. We simply do not believe. We are much like the church that prayed for Peter's release (Acts 12:1-18). We go through the motions of prayer, but we do so without expectation.

The dad was honest. To Jesus' comments about faith, he replied, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mk. 9:24). Like so many of us, this father believed Jesus could but he was having trouble believing Jesus would. Does that sound familiar at all? I am afraid most of us have the same problem.

This father was not saying he did not believe Jesus. He was not rejecting the power of Jesus. He was simply saying the possibility of his son being healed seemed too good to be true. He was having trouble believing but he did believe Jesus could help him to believe. He asked for his faith to be increased. That is a good request. I believe it was a request that pleased Jesus.

He wants us to believe. If we lack faith, he wants us to ask him for it (Jam. 4:2).

It seems obvious from this situation that there are some demons more powerful than others. The bible seems to suggest there is a hierarchy in the demon world, and demons are divided into ranks (Eph. 6:12).

*Mt 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.*

When Jesus spoke of the "*faithless*". He could have been referring to most of those present. It could apply to the scribes, the father, or even his own disciples. None of them believed as they should have.

The word "*perverse*" means, "morally corrupt". It has the idea of turning from that which is true. It is used of a craft that is no good because the craftsman was no good.

Jesus said, "*how long shall I suffer you*". Jesus had an indescribable patience, but it did have a limit. The patience of God does run out. The mercy of God does run out.

Jesus had every right to feel this way. A multitude stood before him of which consisted of, a bunch of people who wanted only what they could get out of him, a group of scribes who despised him, a father and son who were tormented, and his own disciples who were powerless. This crowd was a representation of what was wrong with the world. It was a description of what sin had done to humanity. He had poured himself into this world and it seemed like it had done little good. After all he had said and done, they still did not get it.

Jesus told them to bring the son to him. Luke says that as the father was bringing his son the demon took over his body and mind one more time. Luke says, "And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him" (Lk 9:42). He knew he was about to be cast out by Jesus and he wanted to do as much damage as he could before it happened. The devil doesn't go down without a fight.

There are times when things get worse just before they get better. Maybe you are praying for a lost loved one who is living in awful sin. The more you pray the worse they act. Dear friend, do not give up, keep praying, keep trusting.

*Mt 17:18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.*

A simple word was all it took. Jesus told the demon to depart from the boy and to never return (Mk. 9:25). The work was to be permanent. Instantly, the lives of this father and son were changed. The agony was gone for good.

*Mt 17:19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?*

Notice, the disciples did not ask Jesus how he cast the demon out. They knew how he did it. They knew he did it by the power of God. Their question was why could they not do it.

At least the disciples asked about their failure. Where are those who care enough to ask God to show them the reason they are failing? Most Christians are content with failure. Failure has become the norm. May the Lord open our eyes.

*Mt 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*

Jesus told them their problem was "*unbelief*". Notice, he did not sugarcoat it. He told them straight and to the point. They needed to hear it.

Notice, Jesus knew what their problem was. He knows what is lacking in our lives and he is able to fix us. But, we have to ask him to do so.

Jesus told them they needed faith as a "*grain of mustard seed*". So many have misunderstood Jesus' point in this statement. Since Jesus spoke of a little mustard seed, they say Jesus was saying our little faith can do great things. We have all heard someone talk about how we need little faith in a big God. However, little faith was not what Jesus was referring to.

Jesus was saying our faith needs to be like the mustard seed. It may start small but it grows and becomes something gigantic. Our faith should be growing. I hope your faith is greater today than it was a year ago. In this last year, has the Lord not done things that made you trust Him more? Has He not proven Himself trustworthy? Has He not done the impossible? Sure He has. Therefore, our faith should have grown.

The question must be considered, was Jesus talking about a literal mountain? Well, there aren't many of us who would need a literal mountain moved, so I believe Jesus was speaking figuratively. He was talking about a mountain size problem. The most difficult undertaking can be accomplished when we believe.

*Mt 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

Jesus said this kind "*goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*". Did he mean the disciples should have prayed and fasted when the father brought his son to them? We should take note that Jesus did not pray or fast before he cast the demon out. I don't think he was talking about needing to pray and fast about the son, I believe he was talking about a lifestyle that included prayer and fasting. A life filled with prayer and fasting would have produced the faith needed to deal with this demon when the father approached them.

The disciples had a *power*. Jesus had given them power over unclean spirit and diseases (Mt 10:1). Yet, this power seemed useless when they faced the demon possessed son.

The disciples had a *promise*. Jesus promised to give them what they needed (Mk 6:7). Yet, this promise did them no good when this need arose.

The disciples had a *problem*. Their problem was their little faith. Because they had little faith, they gave up. Little faith does not persist. Little faith gives up easily. Great faith continues to ask. Great faith keeps knocking like the friend in the parable (Lk. 11:5-10). Great faith refuses to give up.

George Mueller established 117 schools that provided an education to over 120,000 children. He started and operated several orphanages that housed hundreds of children. The amazing thing about Mr. Mueller was the fact that he never asked anyone for the funds necessary to operate these schools and homes. He relied totally on prayer and faith. This man of faith became burdened about five of his lost friends and began to pray for their salvation. He prayed for years without any of them being saved. After five years of praying, one of them was saved. After ten years, two of them got saved, after twenty-five years of prayer, another was converted. Finally, a few months after Mr. Mueller died, the last of the five got saved. The prayers he had prayed while living were still working even after his death. George Mueller's faith was great enough to keep him praying. He kept believing even though the answer did not come quickly. What if he had given up?

One of the most important lessons of the Christian life is the fact that God does not always give us what we desire the first time we ask. Everything will not come the first time you pray. There will be times when we have to wait and trust. If God always gave us what we ask for immediately our faith would never grow.

#### POINTS TO PONDER...WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE VERSES

- We can not handle big problems with little faith

There are some problems that require great faith.

- Having great faith does not mean we always get our prayers answered quickly

The disciples asked but did not receive. They should have kept asking.

- We should keep asking and keep believing even when the answer does not come

We are not to ask once and give up. We should keep asking until God answers or until He tells us to quit asking.

- God wants us to trust Him even in extreme times

We can trust Him in the most extreme of situations.

- There is nothing too difficult for God

Jesus told the father, "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mk 9:23).

#### JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY TEACHING ABOUT HIS COMING DEATH 17:22-23

This is the second time Jesus told his disciples he would be betrayed and put to death (cf. Mt. 16:21-23). Things were going to get difficult for them and he wanted them prepared.

*Mt 17:22 And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:*

Judas was the traitor. He "*betrayed*" the Lord. Some have suggested Judas did what he did because he was trying to force Jesus into setting up the kingdom. Those who hold to this opinion believe Judas expected Jesus to fight back when confronted by those who sought to arrest him.

However, the word "betrayed" means to deliver in a treacherous manner. That tells us Judas' motive for selling out Jesus was ungodly. He was a hypocrite who loved himself more than Jesus.

This reminds me of the supreme love Jesus had for mankind. He loved even though who despised him. He died for Judas as much as he did for me.

*Mt 17:23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*

Jesus went into details about his coming death and resurrection. The disciples were "*exceeding sorry*". Luke tells us the disciples did not understand this saying because it was hid from them (Lk. 9:45). They were afraid to ask Jesus what it all meant. This may have been because they could not bring themselves to discuss such a heartbreaking matter. It may have been because they could not comprehend how he could be the Messiah if he was going to be put to death. His death was so contrary to everything they had always believed, they were having difficulty understanding it all.

It is obvious that the disciples did not comprehend the glorious resurrection of Jesus. But, their fear was needless and their concern was unfounded. God had the situation very much in His control. And so it is with our lives. Those things we don't understand are very much in His hands and under His control. We can trust Him completely.

## JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY TEACHING ABOUT TRIBUTE MONEY 17:24-27

The Christian walk deals with more than just spiritual facts and figures. It deals with every day life and how to live it. In these verses, Jesus taught the disciples about stewardship and finances.

*Mt 17:24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?*

Jesus and his disciples traveled to Capernaum. Capernaum is called Jesus' "own city" (Mt. 9:1) because he stayed there at times (Mt. 4:13).

Someone who collected the "tribute money" asked Peter if Jesus paid tribute. This person could have asked Jesus if they really wanted an answer. They were probably wanting to ensnare Jesus and his disciples.

The tribute money spoken of here was not a tax that was paid to the Roman government. It was a fund that was collected by the Jews. It was an annual tribute money that was collected from every Jewish male above twenty years of age (Ex. 30:11-16). Every male paid a half shekel whether they were poor or rich. This money was used to support the maintenance and function of the Temple.

Stalls were built in the towns and villages where this tribute could be paid. The money was due by the twenty-fifth of the month Adar (equivalent to February - March). The collectors of this money asked Peter, "*Doth not your master pay tribute?*". From the wording of their question we can assume this time of collecting had come when these men approached Peter with their question.

The paying this tribute was voluntary, but expected. Every dedicated Jew would consider it his obligation and privilege to pay to this fund. Anyone refusing to pay would be considered an unfaithful Jew. Had Jesus refused to pay, they would have accused him of wrong doing. Jesus refused to do anything that might give them the opportunity to say he despised the Temple or anything of God. In like manner, we should avoid suspicion at all cost, even at times when it is unfounded.

This should remind us how it takes money to operate God's house. There are expenses in a church or ministry just as there are in any business. God's design has always been that His work be provided for by His people. It is a shame for God's people to go to the world to pay for God's work. God does not need the world's money to do His work. If the work is of God, He will provide in His way.

*Mt 17:25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?*

Peter quickly said "yes". As was his custom, he spoke quickly and without much thought to his answer.

After this conversation, Peter went into a house that may have been his own (cf. Mt. 8:14). Jesus undoubtedly was already in the house. Peter came in to tell Jesus what had just happened, but as we will see, Jesus already knew about it all.

Jesus "*prevented*" Peter simply means Jesus spoke before Peter did. You probably had to be quick if you wanted to speak before Peter.

He asked Peter who paid taxes. He asked if the kings collected taxes from their "*children*" (their family members) or from "*strangers*" (those not of his family).

*Mt 17:26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.*

Peter answered Jesus' question correctly. The kings collected tribute from "*strangers*", or from those outside of his own family. Kings did not tax their own children. The king of a country would tax the citizens for two reasons. One, to provide what was needed to run the county. Two, to provide for his own family. That is why the children of the king were free from paying any tax. Why take money from his children if the money was used for his children?

So, Jesus could have claimed himself exempt from this tribute for at least two reasons.

First, as already discussed, a king and all the royal family were exempt from paying taxes. If the sons of a king were exempt from this tribute, surely the Son of God would be also.

Second, since the tribute being discussed was for the temple, surely the Son of God would be exempt from paying it. Why would God be expected to pay tribute to His own house?

*Mt 17:27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.*

Even though Jesus could have claimed himself exempt from this fund, he did not do so. To avoid giving them a reason to accuse him of wrong doing, he submitted to this tribute. By so doing, he taught a valuable lesson to all his disciples. That being, a good Christian is a giving Christian.

Even though this fund was for the temple, the principles found here can be applied to the taxes of the land. This certainly teaches that a good Christian is also a good citizen. We find this same thought being taught in other parts of the New Testament (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).



The business of Christians is to live godly in an ungodly world. That includes obeying laws and paying taxes. We are not here to reform, or rebel against, the government. We are to obey the law of the land unless the law violates scripture (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). When the law violates the Word of God, we are instructed to obey the Word instead of man (Acts 5:29).

Jesus did not want to "*offend*". The word "offend" means, "to cause to stumble". It has the idea of causing someone to do wrong. If he refused to give the tribute it may have caused someone to reject him. Jesus would rather give the money than take a chance of offending even one person.

As Christians we should always be mindful of our testimony. So many times, we are quick to demand our rights or take up for ourselves. Yet, Jesus did neither. Our testimony should be more important than whether we get our way or if our rights are violated. There will be times when we need go beyond our duty in order to not do harm to the cause of Christ.

People's opinion of us does matter. We should not be controlled by the opinion of others but we should be very careful to never do anything that would offend. Many people are looking for an excuse to not follow Christ. I do not want anyone to use me as excuse to reject Christ.

Jesus told Peter to go to the sea and cast in a hook. Capernaum was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, so he didn't have far to go.

The miracle performed here should not be overlooked or taken lightly. Jesus was about to prove that he was not only the Lord of the temple, but he was the Lord of the sea.

It was a miracle because only a hook was used. Peter did not put any bait on the hook.

It was a miracle because a hook was used. They did not use hooks to fish in that area. This is the only time in the New Testament where a hook was used to catch a fish. Nets were used because the natural food supply was so plenteous in that area that a fish would not be allured by the bait on a single hook.

It was a miracle because the fish took a coin in his mouth but did not swallow it. Fish do not take something in their mouths without swallowing it. The only reason a fish takes anything in it's mouth is to consume it.

It was a miracle because the coin was in the sea. We are not told how the fish got the coin in his mouth. We do not know if God miraculously made it appear, or if He drew the fish to a coin that had been accidentally dropped into the sea. Either way, it was a work of God. If the fish picked up the coin, that means, someone of the surface of the water had to drop it. They had to drop it in the exact place where Peter would come.

It was a miracle because, Peter was divinely guided to the right spot to cast in the hook.

It was miracle because the coin was the exact amount needed to pay for Jesus and Peter.

God does indeed to all things well. He will provide for that which is His will, even if He has to perform a miracle to do it.

These verses remind us of the poverty of Jesus. Had they had any money on hand, certainly Jesus would have instructed Peter to simply pay the collector. The prosperity preachers of our day do not want to admit this fact. They tell us if we will follow Jesus we will be rich and prosperous.

#### JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY TEACHING ABOUT HUMILITY 18:1-14

These verses teach us the importance of humility. As we will see, Jesus dealt with several aspects of humility in these verses. The key to knowing he was still dealing with the subject of humility are the words, "*little ones*". These words are found throughout the first fourteen verses.

Jesus will speak about "*little ones*" in these fourteen verses. He will show how precious they are to him. He demonstrates this by how he promoted them (v. 4). He demonstrates this by how he protected them (v. 6 and 10). He will also demonstrate this by how he pursued them (vv. 11-14).

*Mt 18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

At the "*same time*" means Jesus and the disciples were still in the house (Mt. 17:25 cf. Mk. 9:33).

We see into the hearts of the disciples in these verses. In Mark's account of this event we are told the disciples were actually arguing among themselves about which of them would be the greatest (Mk. 9:33-37). Once again we see their selfishness. They were still wanting the power and prestige which they thought the kingdom would provide. They were expecting a kingdom that would include different levels of authority.

They longed to have the best positions when the kingdom was set up. What made it worse, they believed they deserved the highest seats. It's one thing to desire the best, it is quite another to believe you deserve the best.

Desiring to be the greatest may be fine in an earthly kingdom, but not in God's kingdom. Mark tells us Jesus said, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Self promotion does not work in the kingdom of God.

Jesus had taught them about self-denial (Mt. 16:24) but they certainly had not applied his lesson to their lives. They were about to learn another lesson about humility.

It must have grieved Jesus to even have to discuss this matter. He knew he was about to go to the cross, and his disciples were clamoring about which of them would get the highest position in the kingdom. How ironic that the while the Master of the universe was humbling himself, his disciples were doing all they could to elevate themselves. Anytime we seek honor for ourselves instead of honoring our Lord, we grieve Him.

The disciples asked Jesus, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*". Mark tells us Jesus had asked them, "*What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way*" (Mk 9:33). Being God, he knew about their discussion about who would be the greatest (Lk. 9:46-47).

Jesus answered their question but they never dreamed his answer would be what it was. He was about to pop their bubble. He would say the way to be the greatest was to become the least.

*Mt 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

As he had done before, Jesus used an object lesson to get his point across. He called a young child and sat him in the middle of the disciples. These adult men were about to learn a lesson from a little boy. We are not told how old this child was. All we know is he was old enough to walk since he came when Jesus called him. Jesus took the child in his arms (Mk. 9:36). What a sight, the Son of God with a little boy in his lap.

No doubt about it, Jesus' response shocked the disciples. He was about to use this little boy as an illustration of humility.

*Mt 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

When Jesus said, "*Verily*" it meant the subject he was about to discuss was very serious. Not that all of what he said was not important, but this word was a call for them to listen closely, and take seriously, what he was about to say. Indeed, what he said was life altering. What he was about to say had eternal consequences.

Since the disciples believed they deserved to be promoted when the kingdom began, Jesus used a small boy to teach them some things about being promoted. Who would do such a thing? To make a point about being promoted most people would use the greatest and brightest CEO of a successful business. They would bring in some rich and famous business man as an example. But, Jesus was not like most people.

He sat the little boy in his lap, and said, "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*".

The word, "*converted*" means, "to turn around". It has the idea of turning away from sin, and turning to the Lord for forgiveness. Of course, he was talking about being saved. He was reminding them how they got into the kingdom to begin with.

They were so concerned about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus was telling them no one could even get in his kingdom unless they humbled themselves and became like a little child. His kingdom was not about self-exaltation, it was about self-abasement.

He said the way to enter the kingdom was to "*become as little children*". He was talking about the child-like faith it takes to become a Christian. A child does not think of themselves as important or better than others. A child simply depends on his parents. So the sinner must depend totally on the Lord to provide salvation.

*Mt 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

In this verse, Jesus talked about how he PROMOTES his disciples. Those who were the least, have become the greatest.

The "*greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" is the one who is willing to "*humble himself*" as a "*little child*". Humility is the way to greatness in God's kingdom. God's way is always the opposite of the world's. The greatest in the world is the one who promotes themselves and pushes their way to the top.

God's way to the top is to humble ourselves. Instead of seeing how high they could get, he wanted them to see how low they could get. Self ambition is sinful and displeases God (Phil. 2:3-4). There is no greater example of pride than to want to be first, and think you deserve it.

Jesus was trying to get the the disciples to stop all the competition among themselves. Their selfish ambition had caused a division among the group.

It is worth mentioning, we enter God's family by humbling ourselves and trusting God. However, there should never come a time when we outgrow that attitude. I will need the Lord as much at the end of my life as I did the moment I first trusted Him as my Savior. The "*greatest*" in the kingdom is the one who *continues* to have that child-like trust. One aspect of spiritual maturity is learning we never outgrow our need for God.

*Mt 18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

An all important question is, who was Jesus referring to when he said, "*one such little child*"? Some believe he was referring to a literal child. Some believe he was referring to the those who had accepted him as their Savior and been born again. I personally believe he was speaking about those who had become as a little child and accepted Jesus as their Savior.

The word "receiveth" was a word that meant being helpful to someone. It was used when referring to the custom of homeowners that received travelers into their homes for the night (cf. Mt. 10:48). This custom was more than just good manners. Being received by a home owner would be a great blessing to a weary traveler. They were provided with a place to rest, eat, and sleep. The bible is filled with examples of such hospitality (Gen.18:3-5; Gen.24:28-32; Ex.2:20; Judges 13:15; 2 Kgs.4:8-11).

So, when Jesus spoke of receiving one such little child, he was talking about being kind to, or being a help to his disciples.

Jesus said the one who receives the least, "receiveth me". When you treat the least of his disciples right you are treating him right. This is much like the relationship between a father and his children. If you want to get on the good side of the father, be good to his children. On the other hand, if you want to upset the father, all you have to do is mistreat his children. What you do to the children, you are doing to the father. God said the same about His little children. How a person treats them was how they were treating Him.

This is not the only time Jesus would say this type of thing. Part of the judgment of those who stand before the Lord after the Tribulation Period will be how they treated God's people (Mt. 25:31-46). Jesus will say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mt. 25:40).

To fully understand what Jesus was saying we must keep in mind the reason for this discussion. Remember, this conversation began when the disciples were wanting the highest positions in the kingdom. They wanted to be promoted.

Those who desire promotion usually try to associate with the ones who can help them on their way up the ladder. The business man strives to get a connection with the executives. The idea is, be good to the boss and the boss will be good to you. Many an employee has done favors for their boss in hopes of it getting him promoted later.

But, Jesus was teaching the exact opposite. He was teaching the way to be promoted in his kingdom is to do good to the least, not the greatest.

We dare not overlook the words, "in my name". In other words, we do this because we are his. We do it, in his name. This, says Jesus, is true greatness.

*Mt 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*

This comment tells us who Jesus was talking about when he was referring to "these little ones". He made it clear that he was speaking about those who "believe" in him.

In this verse, Jesus talked about how he PROTECTS his disciples. Those who wrong his disciples will be sorry.

In verse five, Jesus taught those who were good to the least in his kingdom were being good to him. In this verse, he taught that those who mistreat the least were mistreating him. Jesus takes it personally when someone mistreats those he loves.

The word, "offend" means, "to stumble" or "to cause to fall". It has the idea of causing one of his disciples to sin. It also carries with it the idea of keeping someone from doing right. Jesus' point is we should be careful that we do not do anything that would cause someone to sin, or stop someone from doing right.

Our influence on others is so important, especially if that person is a child of God. A friend with a loose life can pull the most dedicated Christian into sin.

We can cause someone to fall *directly*. I mean by that, causing another to sin on purpose. Many have fallen into sin because they were enticed by another. So many have had their lives ruined because someone talked them into doing something they should not do. How many lives have been destroyed because someone enticed them to take their first drink? How many end up in prison for life because someone talked them into stealing the first time?

We can cause someone to fall *indirectly*. I mean by that, our lifestyle has an influence. How we live does matter. If we live a life that is not dedicated to the things of God, someone will follow our example. If we love the world, it will cause them to love the world. Our influence is greater than we realize. Jesus warned us to not take it lightly.

If we fail to lead children to righteousness we are automatically leading them toward unrighteousness. It would do us well to set our standards high, less we be an offense to someone.

Jesus said it would be better for a "millstone" to be hung around "his neck" and he be drowned in "the sea". This type of millstone was a huge stone that was used to grind corn to make flour. Certainly the great weight of this stone would pull a person violently to the bottom of the sea. There would be no hope of survival. As a side note, this was a form of capital punishment among the Romans.

This struck home to Jesus' listeners for the Jews had a fear of drowning. To them, it was one of the worse ways to die.

Jesus was saying it would be better for you to be dead than to do something to cause even the least in his kingdom to do wrong. Why would he say such a thing? The answer is simple. To influence these little ones in a negative manner would not go unpunished. God promised to deal with those who mislead his little ones.

Those who lead these little ones into sin will suffer the wrath of God. No one wants to suffer the wrath of God. Our God is a consuming fire (Dt. 4:24; Dt. 9:3; Heb. 12:29). Those in the Tribulation Period will beg for the mountains to cover them that they might escape the wrath of God (Rev. 6:15-16).

Take a good look at God's wrath. It caused Him to expel Adam and Eve from the garden (Gen. 3), it caused him to destroy the world by the flood (Gen. 6:17), it caused Him to consume Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24-25), it caused Him to send His children into the wilderness for forty years (Num. 32:13), and it caused Him to put Ananias and Sapphira to death (Acts 5:1-10), it caused Him to judge His Son on Calvary (Isa. 53:10-11).

This certainly shows how serious God is about holiness. It shows how much God hates sin. It also shows how much He loves everyone, even the least of this world.

I would like to say to anyone who has little or no desire to live for the Lord. If you want to ruin your life, that is your choice, but you do not have the right to ruin someone else's life. Please remember, you are placing yourself in grave danger. Jesus said it would be better you die a violent death than to cause someone to sin. If you are determined to live an ungodly life, please do yourself a favor and stay away from anyone you might influence. If you are guilty, you are playing with fire, God is watching, and He is angry.

Verse six is Jesus' answer to the person who humbles themselves as he had suggested in verse four. In verse four, Jesus said we are to humble ourselves. An obvious question would be, if I humble myself like he said, will I not be mistreated? Will I not be opening myself up to abuse? Won't people take advantage of me?

Jesus understood this possibility. So, he promised a special protection for those who were willing to humble themselves. Like a loving father, our Lord protects His children. Any father who loves his children will do whatever it takes to protect them from harm. Those who are foolish enough to harm them will face the wrath of their father.

*Mt 18:7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*

In this verse, Jesus was still talking about "offences". He was still talking about living in such a manner as to cause someone else to sin. It is important to remember that he was still primarily referring to those who cause his disciples to fall.

The "world" thinks nothing about how they live. They could not care less about how their ungodly lives effect others. They declare proudly that they will live as they please and no one has the right to say anything about it. They certainly do not care how they are effecting those little ones that believe (cf. v. 6). But, Jesus said they had better care.

The word "Woe" is an expression of grief. It carries with it the idea of being cursed. Those who live with no regard to how they influence others will be sorry. They are asking for trouble and Jesus said they will get it.

Jesus said, "Woe unto the world" because the world is sinful. The world is full of things that could cause a person to fall into sin.

And, Jesus said, "it must be that offenses come". As long as there is man, sin (offenses) will be a part of this world. The depravity of man causes him to live as he does. Sin comes naturally to man. Most people have no desire, or intention, to live right.

Jesus was quick to say, "woe to that man by whom the offence cometh". The fact that the world is full of sin gives no one an excuse to do wrong. The fact that so many in the world are living in sin does not give anyone the right to do wrong. The person who is an evil influence on others will pay the price.

Especially as Christians, we should determine, with God's help, I will never be the cause of someone sinning. I will be an example of the believers as Paul told Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12).

In the next two verses, Jesus turned his attention to those who were lost.

*Mt 18:8-9 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*

Notice he said here, if thy hand or thy foot offend "thee". He was no longer talking about how their lifestyle effected others, as in the previous verses, he was now talking about how their lifestyle effected them.

In verse eight and nine, Jesus addressed those in the world who live an ungodly lifestyle. He warned them to do whatever it took to stop living in such a manner.

He talked about their "*hand*", their "*foot*", and their "*eye*". The body (hands, feet, and eyes) can be used to glorify God, or to please self. Everyone has to determine how they will use their bodies. Jesus said those who use their bodies to sin should do whatever it takes to change. He went so far as to say it would be better to cut off their hand and foot than to continue in their sin. If what they look at causes them to sin, they need to pluck out their eye that they may cease sinning.

Jesus certainly did not mean they should literally dismember their bodies. Removing a hand, foot or eye would do nothing to correct the craving for sin. He was talking about dealing severely with the root of the sin problem. He was saying a person should be willing to do whatever it takes to get rid of the sin that controls their lives.

Clearly Jesus was speaking to the lost in this verse for he talked about being cast "*into everlasting fire*", and "*cast into hell fire*". It would be better to go through life without a hand, foot, or eye than to die and go to hell forever.

Some people seem to never give eternity a second thought. They live completely for today. They have devoted their hands, feet, and eyes to temporary pleasure. What makes it worse is the fact that this type of pleasure never satisfies, it leaves them empty, and, the end result will be hell.

Jesus certainly was not implying that anyone goes to heaven without hands, feet, or eyes. He was simply making a point. He was trying to show the horrible results of sin. Whether it be it's influence on others (v. 6), or it's effect on the sinner (vv. 8-9).

*Mt 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

Jesus continued to issue warnings to those who might abuse his "*little ones*". As he had done on verse 6, he spoke about how he protects his own.

The word "*despise*" means to "think down on", to "disesteem" or "to hold in low regard". It has the idea of being undervalued. The world may not think much of God's little ones, but He does. The reason these little ones should not be despised is because God is taking special care of them. The most insignificant member of God's family is important to Him. They mean nothing to most, but they mean a lot to Him.

Part of the reason the little ones should not be mistreated is because there are angels ready to rush to their rescue. In heaven there are "*angels*" that "*behold the face*" of the Father.

The bible teaches that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for the them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Part of the function of the angels is to guard God's little ones. They constantly watch the face of God for the slightest concern over His children. They are ever ready to be dispatched to handle the situation if one of these little ones needs assistance. All it would take would be a word from the Father, and they would immediately rush to the rescue of the needy saint.

The words, "*take heed*" mean "to stare at" or "see clearly". In other words, he was telling his listeners to really pay attention. This was not anything to ignore. This warning should not go unheeded. Those who neglect, mistreat, scorn, or abuse, even the weakest Christian, are asking for trouble from heaven.

Some have used this verse to say that every Christian has their own personal guardian angel. This is possible but the wording in this verse seems to suggest that all believers are served by angels in general.

To be honest, I would rather have *all* the angels watching over me. Either way, those who know the Lord can rest assured that they are being watched over. Their heavenly Father is very much aware of what they are going through.

*Mt 18:11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

Of course, Jesus was speaking of himself when he spoke of the "*Son of man*". The title "son of man" is found 88 times in the New Testament. This title seemed to be Jesus' favorite when referring to himself.

This verse tells us why Jesus left heaven and came to this world. He came for one reason, he came "*to save that which was lost*" (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 9:56; Lk. 18:10; Jn.3:17; 10:10; 12:47; 1 Tim. 1:15).

Jesus' comment reminds me of someone who is drowning. For them to be saved there are three factors that must take place.

First, the drowning man must acknowledge his need to be saved and want to be saved. If he refuses to admit his need, he will drown.

Second, there must be someone who is able to save the man. There may be several people standing on the river bank who would be willing to save the drowning person, but if they cannot swim, so they are unable to save the man in the water.

Third, there must be someone who is willing to save the drowning man. There may be several on the river bank who can swim and could easily save the drowning man, however, if none of them are willing to dive in and pull the man out, he will drown.

Jesus was able and willing to save anyone who will hear his call, repent of their sin and believe. So, it all depends on the attitude of the sinner. If they are willing, they can be saved.

In the next three verses, Jesus spoke of how he PURSUED his disciples. They had been like lost sheep, but he pursued them till he found them. He loved them enough to go after them. This is another one of the reasons why he will not allow them to be mistreated. He invested a lot of time and energy in these little ones, he is not about to let anyone mistreat them without repercussion.

*Mt 18:12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?*

This verse tells us a great deal about the condition of those who are in this world. They are pictured as someone lost, wandering in the darkness of the wilderness, without hope of discovering the way out on their own.

*Mt 18:13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.*

The shepherd rejoices more over the sheep that has been restored than the ones that never went astray.

He rejoices because of the *concern* he had with the wandering sheep. The shepherd's heart was broken over the sheep's condition. The days of searching served only to heighten this concern.

He rejoices because of the *communion* he had with the wandering sheep. The shepherd was thrilled to have the sheep close to him once again. Fellowship that has been broken and restored is always sweeter than a fellowship that has never been broken. The restored communion made the hours of searching worthwhile. He does not regret the agony of the journey when he went after the sheep.

Every parent can understand what Jesus said here. There is more joy about the child who repents after walking away from his parents instruction, than the child who never went astray. The parent who has spent long nights in agony because of a rebellious son, rejoices greatly when that son returns. The joy of the repentant child surpasses the joy of the child that never rebelled. It is like the mother who has a sick son. Her joy will be greater over the healing of the sick son than the son who never got sick in the first place.

Jesus' illustration about the lost sheep can be misunderstood if we miss one vital principle. The most important rule in understanding biblical illustrations or parables is there is always one primary lesson being taught. To try to make an illustration or parable say more than the Lord intended can cause great confusion.

This illustration in no way implies that a saved person can lose their salvation. Instead, it teaches how all of mankind is like a sheep that has gone astray. Like the sheep and the shepherd, to begin with, God and man was in communion with each other (Gen. 3:8). But, like the sheep that turned away from the shepherd, man turned his back on God (Gen. 3:6-8).

*Mt 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*

We are shown the heart of God in this verse. It is not His will that anyone "*should perish*". He has no desire that even one person go to hell. He wants all to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

Remember, the term, "little ones" refers to the least in the kingdom. God cared for the least one. He proved that at Calvary. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Jesus died for the least as much as for the greatest.

This also gives us insight at to God's will for us. We should be seeking those who are lost. Someone told you about Jesus, now it is your turn to tell someone else.

#### JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY TEACHING ABOUT FORGIVING AND FORGIVENESS 18:15-35

The rest of chapter eighteen deals with the importance of forgiveness. In verses 15 through 20, Jesus dealt with FORGIVENESS IS REQUIRED, in verses 21 through 22, Jesus dealt with FORGIVENESS IS RIGHT, in verses 23 through 27, Jesus dealt with FORGIVENESS IS RECEIVED, and in verses 28 through 35, Jesus dealt with FORGIVENESS IS REFUSED.

#### FORGIVENESS IS REQUIRED vv. 15-20

In these verses Jesus made it clear that sin cannot just be swept under the rug and forgotten. God does not just forget about sin. It must be dealt with. Confession, repentance, and forgiveness are vital.

In these verses, Jesus dealt with church discipline. Church discipline is when a member of a church has to be dealt with because of a sin they have committed and have refused to repent of.

In these verses, Jesus dealt with what are we to do if a fellow Christian wrongs us. The instructions he gave are to those who are in the church. He was not suggesting we all be like a sheriff going around with our spiritual six-shooters. There is no Christian FBI that goes around searching for anyone who dare break their rules. However, God does want His church godly and He expects us to keep the church pure.

When wronged, some will *clam up*. The offended person begins to ignore the person who wronged them. This never helps. We should not harbor a grudge.

When wronged, some will *blow up*. But, losing our temper will not solve the problem. When we loose our temper we are liable to say things we should not and regret it later.

We should deal with the situation as Jesus instructed us in these verses. God's way is always the right way.

We see in these verses, THE FAULT IS PERSONAL.

*Mt 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

This deals with a transgression that starts with two people. Notice how many times "*thy*" and "*thee*" are mentioned in verses 15 and 16.

These instructions are for Christians. Jesus was speaking about what should be done when a "*brother*" wrongs a brother. These instructions were based on an Old Testament principle (Lev. 19:17).

The word "*trespass*" means "to sin against". It has the idea of injuring by words or conduct.

If someone wrongs a believer the offended person is to go to the offender and tell them their "*fault*". It is to be, "*between thee and him alone*". In other words, it is to be a private thing between the offended and the offender.

A friendly conversation between believers will do wonders to repair a broken friendship. This private meeting will give the offender an opportunity to explain his part of the situation. Many times this is all that is needed to restore fellowship between the parties. In our modern day church it seems as though many are quick to talk to everyone other than the person who wronged them. We contaminate the church when we spread personal problems. Many a church civil war has started from nothing more than a little misunderstanding.

The offended person should PRAY.

The offended person should pray earnestly about whether they even need to go to the one who wronged them. I personally do not think this should be done over every little offence. Some offences are so insignificant that they can be ignored or disregarded. If the offended person can not put the offense behind them and have no hard feelings, they should go to the offender as Jesus instructed in these verses.

The offended person should pray for the person who wronged them. They should pray that God would open their eyes to the wrong they did. They should pray that God would convict them and bring them to repentance.

The offended person should pray for the love of God in their hearts. They should ask the Lord to give them a genuine compassion for the person who wronged them. They should ask the Lord to help them go to the offender in Christian love, understanding, and patience. When the offended person talks to the offender, it is important that they have the right attitude. It is not just what we say that is important, but how we say it.

The offended person should pray that the Holy Spirit touch all parties involved and the meeting accomplish the desired goal. Reconciliation is to be the desired goal.

The offended person should pray about what they are to say at this meeting.

The offended person should PREPARE.

The offended person should plan ahead. They should rehearse in their minds, what they intend to say. To the best of their ability, they should plan on how they will respond to the comments the offender might say. As much as possible, they should be prepared for anything.

The offended person must be prepared to accept the apology of the offender if they repent. They must be willing to put the issue behind them if the guilty person repents.

The word, "*gained*" carries with it the idea of a treasure. A good and godly friend is indeed a treasure. Losing such a friend is a great loss. We should not take it lightly.

*Mt 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

What should be done if the offender refuses to repent when the offended person confronts them? The offended person should get one or two other Christians and go back to see the offender. This group should confront the offender about their offense. Once again, it should still be done in a Christian attitude. They should keep in mind, their goal is to restore the offender, not to attack them.

Jesus probably said one or two witnesses because of the Old Testament principle that required two or three witnesses for evidence to be accepted (Dt. 19:15).

These witnesses will help to put more pressure on the guilty party to repent. The offender will be more likely to repent when they realize their offense is becoming more public.

These witnesses will be able to verify the actions of both parties. They can determine if the accusing person is justified in their accusation of the other person. Certainly there are times when someone is accused wrongly.

These witnesses must be impartial. They must deal with the facts of the situation without favoritism.

*Mt 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

If the guilty party still refuses to repent, the church should be informed about this situation. The church should be told about the offense and how the offender has been confronted twice in an attempt to get them to repent.

Once informed, some who represent the church should go to the offender in an attempt to get them to repent.

If the offender refuses "*to hear the church*" the next step should be taken. If the offender still refuses to repent, they should be informed that the church has no alternative other than to excommunicate them (voting them out of the church).

The offender is to excommunicated from the church membership. A "*heathen man*" and a "*publican*" were two types of people who were to be avoided by the godly. Jesus was saying the guilty party should be treated as a vagabond (2 Th 3:6). This may seem harsh but the purpose is still to get the guilty party to repent and get right.

Paul gives some details about how the process of excommunication should be carried out (1 Cor. 5:1-13). The church should call a special meeting for the purpose of addressing this situation. The offense of the guilty person should be stated again and the fact that they have been confronted three times without repenting.

Three things must be true when excommunicating the guilty person. One, they are a member of the church. The church has no authority to deal with those who are not members. Two, they must truly be guilty. The accusation of wrong must be proven. Three, they must be unrepentant after the steps described in these verses.

One important fact must not be lost in this process. The church must be willing to forgive. If at any time, the guilty party repents, the church is obligated to accept their confession, forgive and restore them (2 Cor. 2:6). The purpose of this procedure should be kept in mind through every step of the process. The purpose is to restore the brother or sister. It is not revenge, or to pay back for some wrong done.

We see in these verses, THE FAMILY IS PURIFIED.

When carried out as Jesus described, this procedure will help keep the church family purified.

This process purifies the offended. The offended person must be willing to look at his own life before he confronts the offender. Paul instructs us about this. He said, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1).

The offended person must look at their own life before they go to talk to the person who wronged them. When we take a good look at our own lives we may just realize we have done things as bad, or worse, than what we are accusing someone else of doing.

Jesus talked about this type of situation. He said we must get the "beam" out of our own eye before we can get the "mote" out of our brother's eye (Mt. 7:1-5). The offended person should repent of any sin the Lord might show them.

This process purifies the offender. Once again, the goal in confronting the guilty person is to get them to repent. Thank the Lord for the times when this procedure accomplishes what the Lord intended, and a sinning Christian repents.

This process purifies the witnesses. Those chosen as witnesses in this process must take a look at their lives.

This process purifies the entire church. When this situation is presented to the church, everyone there should take a good look at themselves. They should examine themselves before they decide the fate of the offender. If they see some error in their lives, they should repent of it.



We have the idea that we should not pressure a person to live right. This certainly has some truth to it. We can not *make* a person love the Lord. However, God certainly pressures His children into doing right. Like a good father, he disciplines His children. Discipline is simply applying pain to a disobedient child in an attempt to get them to change their behavior.

God does this to His children and tells us to do the same (Pro. 10:13; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15) He even tells us why He does this. He chastens His children that they might live right. Hebrews 12:10, says, "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness". God tells us if we do not obey Him we will suffer the consequences.

God makes it clear, He wants His people holy (Lev. 11:44; 20:26; Dt. 7:6; Dt. 26:18-19; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 1:16; Heb. 8:10). Jesus is still the head of the church but he works through the members to keep the church pure. The sin of the offended person is to be addressed. God has always dealt with His children about their sin.

There should be more in the church than just preaching about living clean lives. We need to live it. The preaching of the Word of God is supposed to effects our lives. We are to live it, not just talk about it. When a church thinks it can merely preach against sin without applying it to their lives, it is in trouble.

We see in these verses, THE FATHER IS PRESENT.

These verses are often used out of context but Jesus was continuing his comments about church discipline in these next two verses.

*Mt 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

To "*bind*" is speaking about how a person is still bound in their sin. In other words, they have not been forgiven. To "*loose*" is speaking about a person who has been loosed from their sin. In other words, they have been forgiven.

God has given His children the authority to speak the truth about sin. When a person refuses to repent, we can truthfully say they are still bound by their sin. On the other hand, when a person repents of their sin, we can truthfully say they have been loosed from their sin.

When Jesus said, "*Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*", he meant simply that heaven agrees with our assessment of the person's condition. The key to it all is whether the guilty person repents. There is no forgiveness without repentance.

The authority of binding and loosing had been given to Peter (Mt. 16:19). Now, it is given to those who represent the church.

We must keep in mind, this verse is dealing with church discipline. Those who carry out Jesus' instructions in regard to church discipline can be assured they have heaven's approval.

God has given authority to those in the church who confront a sinning brother. They were acting as God's representatives. He had given them the authority to tell the unrepentant offender that he was still bound in his sins. On the other hand, they had the authority to tell the repentant offender that his sins had been loosed.

The church that carries out Jesus' instructions about discipline is acting in accordance to God's Word and will. I am reminded of the words Jesus spoke in his model prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). This is certainly not saying the church is infallible, nor is God obligated to defend their errors.

Jesus' comments in this verse would also assure the guilty person that the church was not acting on its own while carrying out church discipline. They had heaven's approval.

*Mt 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

This verse has been misused many times. Some think it means we can get anything we pray for as long as we can find another person to agree with us.

In the context of this verse, Jesus was still talking about the two or more witnesses that would go to the guilty party mentioned in verse 16. He was talking about those involved with dealing with the sinning brother. When they agree together to pray about the situation, the Lord promised to hear them.

*Mt 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

God said He will be in "*the midst*". Once again, the context of this verse is vital if we are to understand what Jesus was saying. We must remember, he was still dealing with church discipline in this verse. In context, this verse is saying, when those involved with dealing with the guilty brother meet together, God will be with them.

Jesus was trying to assure us that God had put His stamp of approval on the process of church discipline. Someone may ask, who gives the church the right to confront people about their sin? The answer is, the heavenly Father does. Our authority comes from the Father Himself and from His Word. He is the one who gave these instructions in His Word. There is no greater authority than the God of heaven and His Word. When we have that authority, we need no other.

In our day, church discipline is rare. Many think we have no right to stick our noses in other people's business or to confront them about how they live. The Word of God says otherwise.

The Word of God should direct our lives. We say we believe the Word of God has authority. We believe it is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. But, what good is all that if we do not do what it says?

One of the reasons why the church has lost so much of its influence in the world is because it talks about being holy, but does not live it. The church needs to be holy because the world is watching. How can we claim to know God if we do not obey Him? How can we expect the world to desire what we have when we live as they do?

Part of living holy lives is being in right fellowship with each other. The world will pay no attention to a church that cannot even get along with itself.

Many believe you will empty a church if you try to carry out what is found in these verses. However, we must ask ourselves, what does God say? Can the church be harmed by obeying God's instructions? Can we go wrong by doing our best to do things God's way? I say, if the church is emptied by us doing things the way God told us, let it be emptied.

Jesus was not suggesting that a church have a discipline committee. This is a personal issue that is to be kept among as few of people as possible. No one has the right to go through the church with magnifying glasses just trying to find some offense.

#### FORGIVENESS IS RIGHT vv. 21-22

In these verses, Jesus dealt with how we should forgive others. It is right to forgive. We are never more like God, than when we forgive. The book of Proverbs tells us it is man's "glory" to pass over a transgression (Pro. 19:11). That means man is at his best when he forgives.

*Mt 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

Jesus had just instructed the disciples about confronting those who wronged them (v. 15-17). So, Peter came to Jesus with a question relating to forgiveness.

Jesus responded to Peter's question by giving a parable about debt. It is vitally important that we understand the debt referred to in this parable is speaking about sin. Also, paying the debt is speaking of forgiving sin.

No doubt Peter thought he was being very kind when he asked if he should forgive someone "*seven times*". Jewish tradition taught a person should forgive three times. This tradition came from a misinterpretation of the book of Amos. Amos 1:3 says, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof...". Verse six says, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof...". Verse nine says, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof...". Verse eleven says, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof...". And, verse thirteen says, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof...".

So, the Jews believed these verses meant God would forgive a person three times, however the fourth time they committed the sin God would not forgive them. Since they believed God would only forgive three times, they thought they were required to forgive only three offenses. Of course, the verses in Amos did not teach this.

So, when Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive seven times he must have been pretty proud of himself. In their way of thinking, that was more than twice the number of times God would forgive.

What Jesus said in response to Peter's question must have floored him and the other disciples.

*Mt 18:22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*

Jesus said we should forgive "*seventy times seven*". He did not mean we should count the times someone wrongs us and when they get to 490 we can unload on them. He was simply telling us to forgive no matter how many times someone wrongs us. Our forgiveness should have no limit. Jesus also said we should forgive them even if they sin against us seven times a day (Lk. 17:4). Many people have difficulty forgiving one time, let alone seventy times seven.

#### FORGIVENESS IS RECEIVED v. 23-27

In these verses, Jesus dealt with the fact that forgiveness must be received. Our sin does not just go away. It doesn't fade away with age. Sin must be confessed and forgiveness must be received. Jesus gave a parable to make his point.

*Mt 18:23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.*

The words, "*likened unto*" shows us this is a parable.

The "*servants*" mentioned in this verse were men who had been assigned certain areas across the territory that were under the authority of the king. Part of the responsibility of these servants was to collect taxes in the area they had been assigned and to make sure these funds were taken to the king. Every so often, the king would demand accountability from these servants. The servant had to give details to the revenue he collected. He had to know who owed what in his area of the country.

This accounting of the servants speaks of the times God will confront a person about their life. God is like the king who had authority over the country. God is the king over this entire world. Everything, and everyone, is under His authority. Even those who do not know Him as their Savior answer to His authority. He has given every person on earth a certain amount of time, strength, and intelligence.

Every person will give account to God as to how they use what He has given them. If a person decides to use what God has given them for their own sinful pleasure, that is their prerogative. However, there will come a time when God will confront them as to how they have used what He gave them.

This time of confrontation is speaking of the times when the Holy Spirit deals with a person about their sin. God confronts the person in an attempt to make them see their need of forgiveness.

Can you remember a time when God confronted you about your sin? When that happens, there will be no excuses. The person God confronts sees their sin as it is. They see their wickedness. That is what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22), and Felix (Acts 24:25), and Agrippa (Acts 26:28), and Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:6), and the rich man (Mt. 19:22). These examples reveal how man's response to God's confrontation is different from one person to another. Some believe and repent, some refuse and reject.

Could I say a word to the person who hears the voice of God as He confronts you about your sin. Please do not take it lightly. This may be the last time He comes to you. This may be the last opportunity for you to call on Him for His forgiveness. While He speaks, do not turn Him away.

*Mt 18:24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*

The time of reckoning came. One servant was found to owe a tremendous amount. A talent was the largest coin. Also, ten thousand was the highest number in the Greek language that had a name. So, this man probably actually owed more than ten thousand talents. There is little doubt, the man owed multi-millions of dollars.

This is an astronomical amount. By comparison, the entire annual taxes collected by the Roman government from Galilee was between 300 and 500 talents.

He owed an insurmountable sum. The debt was so large he could have never paid it, even if he worked the rest of his life. This is a picture of someone lost. They owe an indescribable debt to the God of heaven.

Ten thousand talents was the amount this man owed at that time. The amount would continue to grow day by day. Such is life for the sinner. Their sin continues to grow the longer they live.

*Mt 18:25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

Like the servant who could not pay his debt, the sinner is unable to pay for his sin. This is a picture of someone going to hell. They will spend eternity trying to pay a debt that will never be paid off. When they have spent a million years in hell they will be no closer to paying their debt than the first second they entered.

This king had the right to demand payment. He was genuinely owed the money. He also had the right to demand that the man and his family be sold to pay the bill. This deals with a practice of selling the debtor, their family members, and their possessions when they were unable to pay a debt (Ex. 22:3; Lev. 25:30, 47; 2 Kgs. 4:1). The sell of these items would pay off as much of the debt as possible.

*Mt 18:26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

The servant did not try to deny his debt. He knew he was guilty. He did not say the king was unfair, he knew he was getting what he deserved. There is no need in trying to deny the fact that our sin has put us in debt to God.

This servant "*fell down, and worshipped*" the man he owed. This speaks of his humility. He recognized that he truly owed the debt. He pleaded for mercy but he knew he did not deserve it. After all, mercy is for those who do not deserve it.

He told the man he owed he would pay all he owed. He would make an effort to make it right. That is the usual first response when a person is confronted about their debt to God. They make an effort to do better. Many a sinner has tried turning over a new leaf in an attempt to get right with God.

Notice, the lord of the servant confronted him about his debt. God does the same. He confronts the guilty about their sin. We call it conviction. God will forgive sin but He makes sure the sinner recognizes his sin first.

Notice, he was not disturbed about his debt until he was confronted. The average sinner not only does not see their sin to be as bad as it is, but they will actually brag about how sinful they are. The drunk will brag about how much he drank, the harlot brags about how many men they are involved with.

*Mt 18:27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

The lord of the servant "loosed" him of his debt. The word "loosed" means "to release, relieve, or to pardon". The servant was released from the entire debt. In other words, he owed nothing.

This is a picture of what happens when a person accepts Jesus as their personal Savior. At that moment, all of their sin is completely forgiven. It is gone forever.

He was no longer responsible for the debt because the debt no longer existed. This reminds us of how a person who has been forgiven cannot go to hell. People go to hell because of their sin. If their sin is forgiven, there is no reason to go to hell.

The debt was forgiven. It was gone. It was as though it never existed. That is a perfect picture of how we are to forgive. We are to treat the person who wronged us as though the offense never happened.

This certainly is not suggesting that we forget about it. Unless we have some brain cells damage, we do not have the ability to forget. Forgiving does not mean we forget, but it does mean we act like we have forgotten. When the devil reminds you of what they did to you, tell him it is under the blood and it is gone.

We are never acting more like Jesus than when we are forgiving. God wants a church who acts like Jesus.

The lord of the servant simply forgave him. He did not ask the servant to work off the debt, he did not merely reduce the debt, he forgave the entire amount. This shows us how good works cannot buy forgiveness.

The lord of the servant absorbed the loss. That is exactly what Jesus did. He absorbed the punishment for our sin. The punishment for our sin was placed on him when he hung on the cross (Isa. 53:6; Jn. 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Jn. 2:2; Heb. 9:28).

#### FORGIVENESS IS REFUSED v. 28-35

The servant who had just been forgiven refused to forgive a fellow servant.

*Mt 18:28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.*

This "same servant" went out and found a fellow servant who owed him money. The first case was between master and servant, this case is between servant and servant. These servants had the same king. This speaks of the wrongs committed between fellow Christians. This is speaking about Christians and how they need to forgive each other.

The word "pence" was the word for penny. The penny was a Roman coin that would be worth about fourteen cents in our monetary system. So, the fellow servant owed this man about fourteen dollars. The amount he was owed was next to nothing to what he had owed (cf. v. 24). It would have taken 6000 pence to make one talent.

The "hundred pence" represents the debts we owe each other. What we owe each other is nothing compared to what we owed God.

Notice the violence of this man. He was furious. He "laid hands on him, and took him by the throat". He had a right to ask for payment of the debt but he certainly did not have the right to so mistreat his fellow servant.

This shows how disagreements can escalate. From a small disagreement a war can grow. In fact, most of the conflicts among Christians started from things that were so small they should not have mattered.

I dare not make light of any wrong done between one Christian and another. There are times when Christians do horrible things to each other. Unfortunately, Christians can do things that are very wrong. But, no matter what the offense, we are to forgive.

*Mt 18:29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

The fellow servant "fell down at his feet". His man was truly humbled by this situation. He was sincere.

This fellow servant said the exact words he had just said to the king (v. 26).

His fellow servant had all intentions of making it right. He made one request. He asked for "*patience*". Had the servant been patient his fellow servant would have paid him what he owed him. If we would learn to be patient with those who have wronged us, they may make it right. We need to learn how to be patient in such situations. If we give it to God, He can work in the heart of the one who wronged us and bring them to repentance. Unfortunately, there are many times when we do not really want things to be worked out. We would rather stay mad.

*Mt 18:30 And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

And he "*would not*". The words "would not" suggest a continual action. This tells us the fellow servant asked him to have patience with him more than once. His calloused heart would not be mellowed.

The prison was debtors prison which was the custom of that day.

Notice, he did not call for the king's officers to take the man to prison. He was so enraged, he took the man to the prison himself. How could he be so hard, especially since he had just been forgiven for such a large debt himself?

The idea behind this thought is that he refused to release the fellow servant from his wrong. That is what unforgiveness is. We refuse to release the guilty person. We refuse to let it go.

How quickly this man forgot. He forgot the amount of debt he had owed. He forgot the fact that he had been freely forgiven.

Notice the lack of mercy this servant showed his fellow servant. He *ceased* him, *choked* him, and *cast* him.

He put his fellow servant in prison but refusing to forgive actually puts *us* in prison. Unforgiveness leads to resentment, and resentment leads to bitterness. Bitterness destroys us. Someone has said bitterness is me drinking poison and waiting for you to die.

*Mt 18:31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

The fellow servants were "*very sorry*". It means they were grieved. No doubt the incident about the king forgiving this servant has spread throughout the kingdom. The fellow servants could see the damage that was being done because of the refusal to forgive. This should remind us how someone is always watching us.

The fellow servants telling the king about the servant's unforgiveness is a picture of God's people praying. We should talk to God about those who not yet learned how to forgive. If you know someone who is holding on to a grudge, pray for them. They need victory.

*Mt 18:32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:*

Jesus said those who refuse to forgive are "*wicked*". This tells us how God views forgiveness. He reminded the servant how he forgave him simply because he asked him to. The word "*desiredst*" means, to ask. God doesn't make us jump through a bunch of hoops before He forgives us, we simply have to ask.

*Mt 18:33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?*

The servant must have offered no response to the king's question. What could he say? What excuse would have been sufficient? He had received mercy but refused to give it.

What the lord said to the servant can be said to us today.

Notice, the king said he should have forgiven because he had been forgiven. The basis of us forgiving others is the fact that God forgave us. We should be willing to forgive others because God has forgiven us. Our debt to God is much greater than anyone's debt to us.

God is offended by sin a million times more than we are, yet He is willing to forgive. If He who is most holy is willing to forgive, should we who are least holy not be willing to do the same?

This servant should have remembered that he had done wrong himself. Also, his wrong was much worse than that of his fellow servant. We should be willing to forgive others because we have done wrong ourselves. In fact, most of us have wronged others much more than we have been wronged.

If we refuse to forgive others we are falling into the devil's trap. Paul was talking about forgiveness when he said, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Co 2:11). One of the devil's most successful strategies is to keep Christians from forgiving each other.

Whether it be a church, a family, or friends, no relationship can survive without forgiveness. Anytime a relationship between two people is broken, it is because of a refusal to forgive. It is not the offense that breaks the fellowship, it is the refusal to forgive. Any relationship can be repaired if both parties are simply willing to forgive.

*Mt 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

The lord of the servant was rightfully angry. He delivered the servant to the tormentors.

The word "*tormentors*" means "torturer". The tormentors were men under the authority of the king who would examine an accused criminal. They were given the authority to torture, if that was what it took, to get a confession out of the guilty party.

Being delivered to the tormentors is not talking about sending this man to hell. Verse 35 will tell us the tormentor is talking of God's work of chastisement. God will afflict those who are guilty of sin (Pro. 3:12; Heb. 12:6). No one wants to be turned over to God's tormentors. When God comes after you, there is no doubt what is happening. You know it is God.

*Mt 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Remember, in this parable debt is a picture of sin. So, what sin had this servant committed? What debt did he owe? What sin was he being tormented over? This verse explains clearly that the servant's debt being considered at that time was refusing to forgive the trespasses of his fellow servant. The king was not demanding this servant pay the original debt he had owed (cf. v 24). That debt had been forgiven (cf. v. 27). God does not demand payment of a debt that has already been forgiven.

This servant would be tormented until "*he should pay all that was due unto him*". The king had turned him over to the tormentors until he was willing to forgive. All he had to do was forgive his fellow servant and the torment would be gone.

This servant was tormented. Anyone who has ever refused to forgive will tell you it is torment. God allows us to endure the consequences of our unforgiveness. The consequences of unforgiveness are vast.

Refusing to forgive can cause us severe spiritual problems. Unforgiveness is a sin, therefore God will deal with us as He does any other sin in our lives. It grieves Him. It hinders our fellowship with God. It keeps Him from answering our prayer.

Refusing to forgive can cause us severe physical problems. Unforgiveness is classified as a disease in many medical books. It will literally make us sick. It causes, ulcers, headaches, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, depression, stress, tiredness, and sleep problems.

God will do what this king did. He will deal with those who refuse to forgive.

His work of chastisement may mean God will take some things from us. Many of God's children lack joy and peace. Yet, they fail to realize the reason is because they have refused to forgive someone. God may remove His power from our lives, or the desire to serve God may disappear. The saddest person on earth is the person who is saved but out of God's will. God chose the right word when He called it torment.

His work of chastisement may mean God will give us some things. He may give us sickness, or financial reversal, or family problems.

God's work of chastisement is always meant to cause us to get right with Him. Like a loving father, God will chasten us until we repent. As previously stated, in this context, the sin that must be confessed is the sin of refusing to forgive others.

#### POINTS TO PONDER....WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE VERSES

- God is willing to forgive all who confess to Him

Like the king that forgave his servant, God forgives those who confess.

- We are to forgive from our hearts all those who wrong us

Who we are to forgive? Jesus told us in verse 35. He talked about forgiving "*every one*". No matter how badly they have wronged us, no matter how many times they have wronged us, we are to forgive them. No matter how they treated us, it is not worse than we treated Jesus, yet he forgave us.

Refusing to forgive those who wrong us is as much a sin as getting drunk. Any sin in our lives hinders our fellowship with God.

We should forgive those who wrong us even if they don't ask us. Forgiving them may not restore our fellowship but it will relieve us of the burden of carrying a grudge, and will keep us from getting bitter.

- We are to forgive them because Jesus has forgiven us

Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Like the servant who should have forgiven his fellow servant, we should forgive others because we have been forgiven.

- We should forgive others for our own well being

Part of the reason we should forgive those who wrong us is because we harm ourselves by refusing to forgive.

- We will suffer under God's chastening hand until we forgive

Jesus taught that forgiveness was a prerequisite to our prayers being answered (Mk. 11:25). He taught us to pray that God would forgive our sins as we forgive the sins of others (Mt. 6:12). If we refuse to forgive others, it keeps God from forgiving us (Mt 6:15; Jam 2:13). Like any other sin in our lives, unforgiveness will keep us from enjoying God's best.

- Forgiving brings freedom to the one who forgives

Forgiving others brings a freedom that cannot be explained. It releases us from the prison of resentment.

- Forgiving the person who wronged us is not letting them off the hook

So many times we think forgiving someone is letting them get by with what they did. We are not letting them off the hook by forgiving them. Us forgiving them does not get them off the hook with God. They are still on God's hook, we are just letting them off our hook. They will still have to deal with God about what they did. He said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19). We can trust God with it all. Release it all to Him. He will handle it rightly (Rom.12:19).

Forgiving them does not mean our relationship has to be what it used to be. They may never be your best friend again, but that does not mean you have no forgiven them.

Forgiving them does not undo what they did. There may be a time before trust can be restored. Trust is something that must be earned. There may be times when the relationship is not rebuilt. We can truly forgive without

- There will be times when the person refuses to repent

There will be times when the person who wronged us will refuse to admit any wrong on their part. Paul told us, "If it be possible" we are to live peaceably with all men, (Rom. 12:18). Some will refuse to live peaceably. We cannot force them to admit their wrong or to confess. We must forgive them in our hearts and move on.

There is an epidemic of unforgiveness in our churches. Someone has said if they ever fell into sin they would rather the drunks at the neighborhood bar find out about it than the people at the neighborhood church. The drunks at the bar will have a fight one night and be best friends the next. Those who profess to be Christians will have a little disagreement and never get over it.

#### JESUS WENT TO JUDEA 19:1-2

*Mt 19:1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan;*

Jesus left Galilee, heading south. He would never return to Galilee. He was heading toward Jerusalem and eventually to the cross. Mark tells us he crossed the Jordan river into the coasts of Judea Mk.10:1).

*Mt 19:2 And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.*

Great multitudes followed him, and "*he healed them*". There is no way we can tell how many Jesus healed.

The book of Luke records some of Jesus' ministry and miracles that took place after he came into Judaea (Lk. 10:1-18:14). These accounts were not recorded by Matthew.

A note of interest, Jesus performed miracles even though he knew it would draw crowds and make it easy for his enemies to find him. Jesus knew his enemies hated him. He knew the more his popularity grew the more they would attack him. Yet, he still helped those in need. To his detriment, his love compelled him to keep helping those who needed help.

#### JESUS SHOWED MERCY BY TEACHING ABOUT MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE 19:3-12

In the next few verses we must remember Matthew is writing primarily to the Jew. These verses deal only with a husband who divorces his wife. A wife divorcing her husband is not discussed because Jewish women were not permitted to divorce their husbands. In the Jewish society, only the husband could initiate a divorce. Mark deals with the Gentiles and speaks of the wife initiating a divorce (Mk. 10:12).

As we read through these verses we should remember God created marriage. If man had made marriage he might have some right to define it, but since God was the one who made marriage, He is the only one who can define it.

#### THE CONFRONTATION 19:3

The Pharisees confronted Jesus with a question about divorce.

*Mt 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*

The Pharisees came "*tempting*" Jesus. They did not ask this question because they wanted to be informed. They were trying to entrap him. They were trying to get him to say something they could use against him. They knew, no matter what his answer, someone would disagree with him.

The Pharisees asked Jesus a question about divorce. Divorce was quite common in Jesus' day and was accepted by almost everyone.

There were two schools of thought about divorce at that time. These two beliefs originated from two rabbis. The first belief about divorce came from Rabbi Shammai. He taught divorce was permitted only if one of the marriage partners committed adultery.

The second belief about divorce came from Rabbi Hillel. He taught divorce was permitted for almost any reason. He taught a man could divorce his wife for something as simple as burning his supper, or talking about her mother in law, or even if he found a woman that pleased him more. During Jesus' day, this was the most popular view.

These two beliefs about divorce divided the Jews. We have the same type of thing today. There are groups who line up under different men about certain doctrinal issues. An example of this on going battle is the Calvin verses Arminian debate. Other topics that divide the body of Christ would be the gift of tongues, modern translations of the bible, standards of dress, and a thousand other issues.

Notice how the Pharisees worded their question. They asked if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for "*every*" cause. They were asking Jesus if he believed a man could divorce his wife for any reason as Rabbi Hillel had taught.

The Pharisees had an evil motive behind their question. They knew Jesus had already made his view clear (Mt.5:31-32). He had taught adultery was the only reason for divorce.

At the very least, the Pharisees were hoping Jesus' answer would stir opposition against him. They knew divorce was such a controversial subject that his answer would cause him trouble.

At the most, they were hoping Jesus' answer would cause his death. Herod had already put John the baptist to death because he said Herod's marriage to his brother's wife was sin (Mt.14:1-12). No doubt, the Pharisees were hoping Jesus would come to a similar end.

#### THE CONTROVERSY 19:4-6

Divorce was a controversial subject then, and it is now. The subject of divorce and remarriage still divides churches.

*Mt 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,*

Jesus begin his response by pointing the to the Word of God. He said, "*Have ye not read*". No doubt Jesus' question hit a tender spot with the Pharisees. They were supposed to be masters of the scripture. They spent hours reading the scripture, yet they were in so many ways, ignorant to the truth. Like so many, they had based their view about divorce on the opinion of the rabbis instead of the Word of God. We are faced with the same dilemma. Will we listen to the popular view of the day, or will we listen to God?

Notice how Jesus worded his response. He said "*he which made them*". He was reminding them, and us, that God made man. Since He made man, He has the right to make the rules about how man should live. Only God has the authority to determine whether divorce is right or wrong.

Jesus did not answer from the beliefs of Shammai or Hillel, he answered from what Moses said. He actually answered from what God said. He went back to "*the beginning*".

If we want to know God's will about a subject we need to go back and see what He said about it to begin with. We need to see it before man added his point of view.

Once again, Jesus defeated the attack of the Pharisees with the Word of God. Jesus took them back to "*the beginning*". In the beginning God made one man and one woman. This reveals God's design for marriage. His design was one man, with one woman, for life. If this is God's will, it should be our goal. We should never lower God's design. We should never try to drag God down to our level.

*Mt 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?*

The word "*cleave*" means, "to glue". This speaks of a union that cannot be broken. God's will for marriage has always been that a man and woman be glued together and never separated. A well glued board is strongest where the joint is held by the glue.

Marriage brings two people together to make "*one flesh*" (cf. Gen.2:24). It means two souls in one body. Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen.2:23). A married couple are to act as one. They should have the same beliefs, the same interests, the same desires, and the same goals. They should function as one.



*Mt 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

They are no longer two, they have become one. The words, "*What therefore God hath joined together*" tell us marriage is more than an agreement made between two people. Marriage is more than just a piece of paper. God legally unites the couple when they are married. He recognizes the marriage as legally binding.

So, Jesus made clear that God's original plan was for one man and one woman to marry for life (Gen. 2:24). God has not changed His mind about marriage. That is why Jesus said, "*let not man put asunder*". God hates divorce (Mal 2:16).

God so protects the marriage relationship that He said it was wrong to even desire another man's wife. The tenth commandment says "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife" (Ex 20:17). To covet is to desire. Jesus spoke about this in the New Testament when he said a man who looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart (Mt.5:28). God does not want a man or woman to even *think* about cheating their spouse. God's plan was that a husband and wife love each other and live for Him throughout their lives together. God would not even accept worship from those who had mistreated their wives (Mal.2:13-14).

#### THE CONFUSION 19:7-9

The Pharisees showed their ignorance and confusion with their next question.

*Mt 19:7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*

The Pharisees did not give up easily. They asked, "*Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement*". The Jews showed they were totally confused about the subject of divorce.

It is vitally important that we understand God did not command divorce. He merely allowed divorce. There is a big difference between commanding and allowing. God did command a writing of divorce be given in order to protect the innocent party (Dt.24:1) but He did not command anyone get a divorce. Jesus explained this in the next verse.

*Mt 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

God permitted divorce to protect the wife of an evil husband. The Jewish men had gotten to where they would divorce their wives for the most frivolous of reasons. They were divorcing their wives for things like, talking about their mother in law, burning supper, or speaking too loudly to their husband. These merciless husbands would simply make their wives leave without any notice or provision. So, God commanded a legal writing be made before there could be a divorce. That does not mean He agreed with divorce. It was simply a way to protect the wives who were being mistreated.

Jesus explained the reason God allowed divorce. At the same time, he was explaining the overall reason for any divorce. He said it was because of the "*hardness of your hearts*". Mankind is hard, he is sinful, he is stubborn, and he is selfish.

Like with anything else man touches, he has made a mess of God's plan for marriage. Israel was a perfect example of this. They never listened to God. God told them to possess the Promised Land, they didn't. God told them to put all the Canaanites to death, they didn't. God told them to avoid the gods of the Canaanites, they didn't. God told them to obey the law, they didn't. So we should not be surprised that Israel did not obey God when He told them to not divorce.

*Mt 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

Jesus made it clear that divorce was not allowed for every reason. He did not agree with Rabbi Hillel.

Jesus said the one reason for divorce was because of "*fornication*". The word, "fornication" is the Greek word "porneia". We get our English word pornography from this word.

Some teach that this word is talking about having sex during the Jewish espousal period. The espousal period was much like our engagement period. The one big difference was the couple was considered to be legally bound together (as in marriage) during this period.

However, the word "fornication" is a word that deals with all types of sexual sin. It was used to describe having sexual relations before marriage (Jn.8:41; 1 Cor.7:2), of a married person having sexual relations having with someone other than their spouse (1 Cor.5:1), of harlotry (1 Cor. 6:15), and even of incest. Taking this into consideration, Jesus' use of the word fornication must be speaking of more than just sexual relations during the Jewish espousal period.

Jesus said, the person who divorces and remarries for a reason other than fornication "*committeth adultery*". The reason God considers it adultery is because He did not recognize the divorce to begin with. In God's eyes, they are still married to their first spouse. As I alluded to earlier, we see an example of this with Phillip's wife. Even after she married Herod, God still called her Phillip's wife (Mt.14:3).

Jesus continued to say, the person who "*marrieth her*" who has been divorced "*doth commit adultery*". Since God did not recognize their divorce, He considers them to still be married to their first spouse.

#### THE COMMITMENT 19:10-12

Jesus' comments were the last thing the Pharisees wanted to hear. He made it clear, God's desire was for one man to marry one woman for life. That takes commitment. Marriage is supposed to be a commitment a person makes to God, and to the person they are marrying, that they will live with them the rest of their lives.

*Mt 19:10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.*

The disciples entered into the conversation at this point. Their comment show us they understood Jesus meant God's plan was for one man to be with one woman for life. They were actually saying, if that is the case it would be better to not even get married. Divorce had become so common, many people did not see marriage as a lifetime commitment. Most of them certainly were not willing to commit to a relationship that could only be broken by sexual unfaithfulness. They were not willing to commit to a lifetime relationship. Their attitude lives on for many people in our day are not willing to make such a commitment.

*Mt 19:11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.*

Jesus knew not everyone has the capacity to remain single all their lives. Most people are designed by God for marriage.

On the other hand, there are some to whom this statement "*is given*". There are some people who, by God's design, are to remain single all their lives. God has enabled them to deal with the natural desires that are associated with marriage, and remain single. God has equipped them in such a fashion to where they do not need the companionship associated with marriage. They have been gifted to be able to deal with the physical temptations that might arise from not being married.

*Mt 19:12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

Jesus gave some reasons why marriage would not be a good idea for some. In Jewish society marriage was expected. But, Jesus told them there was another alternative. For some, the single life is best.

A eunuch was a man who was physically unable to have sexual relations. There are some who are eunuchs "*from their mother's womb*". They were born with some physical abnormality that made it impossible for them to have sexual relations. There are some who have been "*made eunuchs*" by men. This speaks of those who, either by self-mutilation or mutilation done by others, have been rendered unable to have sexual relations. It was common for a king to have this surgery performed on the men who would work in their harems.

There are some who have made themselves eunuchs "*for the kingdom of heaven's sake*". God has gifted some to be able to overcome the normal sexual desires in order that they may stay single and serve Him without the fetters associated with having a marriage partner and family. Paul deals with this subject (1 Cor. 7:26-27). Especially during the days when persecution was so rampant, it might be better for a Christian to remain single since a man could lose their life at any moment and a family would be left behind.

#### THE CONCLUSION 19:12b

The conclusion to the matter of marriage is every person should search their own hearts, determine what God wants for them, and obey Him. Jesus said, "*He that is able to receive it, let him receive it*". Our society puts pressure on everyone to get married. However, as with any other aspect of our lives, we should not let society dictate what we do.

The bottom line is, it is God's will for some to marry and some to remain single. For those who are to marry, it is the right and godly thing (Heb.13:4). For those who are to remain single, it also it the right and godly thing (1 Cor.7:7-9).

#### POINTS TO PONDER....WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE VERSES

- God hates divorce

An honest study of the bible can bring only this conclusion, God hates divorce.

Mal 2:16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away....

Divorce is an extremely serious violation against God and a spouse.

- Divorce is displeasing to God because He created one man for one woman

Verse 4 says, "he which made them at the beginning made them male and female". God made one man and one woman (Ge 1:27). He did not create a few extra men and women just in case it did not work out between Adam and Eve. They had to make it work.

- Divorce is displeasing to God because of the strong bond between a husband and wife

Verse 5 says, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife". The word "cleave" means, to glue. The marriage partners are to give themselves totally to each other in total devotion.

- Divorce is displeasing to God because the two have become one

Verse 6 says, "they are no more twain, but one flesh". Through marriage, the two become one. You cannot divide the number one.

- Divorce is displeasing to God because He has put the couple together

Verse 6 says, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder". God established marriage and He legally puts the couple together when they are married.

- God allowed divorce in certain cases

There is no doubt, God's original plan was for one man and one woman to marry for life (Gen. 2:24). He has not changed His mind about marriage. However, He has allowed divorce in order to protect the innocent.

Verse 9 says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery". Jesus did give a reason for divorce in this verse.

- God allowed divorce, but He did not require divorce

God did not command the offended spouse divorce their partner. He still encourages reconciliation if the guilty spouse is willing. If a Christian should forgive their enemy (Mt.5:44; Mk.11:25; Eph.4:32) they certainly should forgive their spouse.

- God forgives those who have been divorced

As with any sin, God is willing to forgive those who have gone through a divorce. He is willing to forgive ALL sin (1 Jn.1:9).

Some may ask, what should a person do if they have divorced and remarried? Should they divorce the partner they are now married to? Of course not. The egg cannot be unscrambled. They should confess their sin, dedicate themselves to their partner, and serve the Lord in whatever capacity He provides.

There is life after divorce. God does forgive, He does bless, and He can use the person who has endured the agony of divorce.

A word of warning. If you are thinking about divorce, do not do it. Some may think since they know God will forgive them, they will just go ahead and get divorced, remarry, ask God to forgive them, and everything will be fine. Could I say without apology, that kind of thinking is ignorance on display. We do not toy with God's forgiveness and get by. Do we really expect to knowingly commit sin in such a manner without serious repercussions?

If you are involved with someone other than your spouse, stop it. Stop it immediately and completely. If you are considering a relationship with someone other than your spouse, do not. It cannot work. God will make sure it does not. The Word of God warns us of such matters. The book of Proverbs was written to give us wisdom. Listen to its wisdom relating to this type of situation (Pro. 7:6-27). The temptation to sin is seen as a harlot trying to entice anyone who is foolish enough to give heed to her seduction (v. 6-7). She lies in wait for her victims. The person who allows themselves to be allured by her temptation is like a man without wisdom (v.7). The allurements are quite enticing, she is dressed to attract (v.10). She comes out looking for someone to corrupt (v. 12). Her victim is said to be "caught" (v.13). She makes wonderful promises of pleasure and reward to the one who will give heed to her (v. 14-18). She says they won't get caught (v. 19-20). The simpleton gives in to the allurements (v. 21-23). He is like an ox being led to the slaughter and a bird flying into a snare (v. 22-23). He is heading towards heartache and destruction. This warning ends with the terrifying words to those who might be tempted, she has caught many before you and she will catch you (v. 26). Greater Christians than you and I have fallen to the allurements. We must listen and be wise.

- God gave the best example of marriage and divorce

God is so serious about our marriage because He is so serious about His marriage to us. God was like a faithful husband to Israel. Israel was unfaithful but He still loved her (Ezk.16:10-43; Jer.3:20). He was patient with her for 700 years and gave her time to repent (Jer.3:8). God certainly does not do anything that isn't right. By the way, God will remain faithful, one day He will take Israel back (Jer.31:31-37; Zech.12:10; Joel 3:20-21).

For those who are considering divorce: Ending a marriage is one of the most serious decisions you will make in this life. Do not take it lightly. More than likely, you will carry the problems of your first marriage into a second. God can give you the desire and the wherewithal to work it out with your spouse.

For those who are single: Be content where you are for now. Concentrate on your own spiritual walk. Do not just look for the kind of person you desire, *be* the kind of person you desire. No matter what your marriage status, God can give you a happy, fulfilled, and productive life.

Jesus was the most complete man who ever lived and he was single. Many of the spiritual giants who have lived were single. Walk with God and let Him give you grace to be single, or to bring you the spouse He wants you to have according to His will and His timing. You will not regret waiting on God, but you will regret it for the rest of your life if you get ahead of Him. There is something worse than being single, it is being married to the wrong person. It would be better to be single and wish you were married than to be married and wish you were single.

## JESUS AND LITTLE CHILDREN 19:13-15

*Mt 19:13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.*

Luke tells us at least some of these "*little children*" were infants (Lk. 18:15). The word used for "*little children*" can mean an infant or a small child.

Someone "*brought unto him little children*". What a wonderful sight. We are not told who brought these children. No doubt, some of them were brought by their parents. Maybe some were brought by family members who were concerned about the well being of a nephew or niece. Whoever brought them, it showed someone cared.

They brought these children that "*he should put his hands on them, and pray*". It was a common custom among the Jews to lay their hands on the heads of those they wanted to bless or pray for (Gen. 48:14; Mt. 9:18). They wanted these children to be blessed by the Lord of blessings.

What a blessing to see someone who wanted their children to be blessed by the Lord. We are living in a day when the greatest desire of parents and grandparents is to make sure their little Johnny gets the best coach he can get, or that little Susie goes to the best school available. The spiritual condition of our children should be more important to us than whether they can throw a ball or run a corporation.

As so many others times, the disciples did not get it. They "*rebuked*" those who brought the children. They saw these infants and young children as too young to accept him, too little to serve him, and too small to give to him, so why waste time with them? There were already more adults coming to Jesus than he could deal with, he certainly did not have time to waste on these little ones. If we are not careful, we will adopt the same attitude.

*Mt 19:14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus did not accept the disciple's "adult first" attitude. Mark tells us Jesus was very displeased with his disciples (Mk.10:14).

He was displeased because he loved children. He wanted to influence them before the world had a chance to get it's claws in them.

He was displeased because he loved parents. He did not want any parent to go through the heartbreak of a wayward child. There is no pain like the heartache a parent has when their child is not saved.

He was displeased because of his disciples. Had they come this far with him and still did not understand him or the purpose of his mission? He had come to die for all, adults and children.

The word "*suffer*" means, "to allow". The words "*Forbid them not*" means, "stop hindering". The Greek tense of these words means to let them come and don't ever stop them again.

No doubt, Jesus' response to these little ones surprised those who were watching. In the Jewish society, many adults did not appreciate the value of children and often neglected them.

For "*of such is the kingdom of heaven*" means children are able to enter the family of God. Remember, Matthew is writing to the Jews about the kingdom. It does not mean there will be babies and little children in heaven. Heaven is a place of perfection. There are no little old grannies nor little babies who have to rely on someone to take care of them. All who are in heaven will have a body that is perfect. John said we "shall be like him" (1 Jn.3:2).

Jesus' comment opens up the question about what happens to an infant when they die. We must get the answer to this question from the bible. We cannot allow our emotions to guide our thoughts. I believe there is sufficient biblical evidence to tell us they go to heaven if they die before they reach the age of accountability.

- When considering this question we must keep in the mind the character of God

God is holy and He will always do right.

- When considering this question we must keep in mind the fact that all are sinners

Many believe an infant is innocent because they cannot grasp the concept of their sin. This simply is not true. Babies are not free from the guilt and corruption of Adam's original sin. The bible clearly teaches that all are under the condemnation of this sin (Ec. 7:20; Rom. 3:12; 3:23; 5:12,18-19). David said he was a sinner when he was conceived (Ps. 51:5). He also said, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps.58:3). Our sin nature makes us a sinner whether we understand it or not.

- When considering this question we must keep in mind the mercy of God

God is holy but He extends mercy to those who are not capable of discerning their spiritual need. He has mercy on those who are not able to intellectually understand the gospel message.

We come to this conclusion because of the following reasons.

David said he would go to be with his son that died in infancy (2 Sam.12:23). Those words were more than the sentimental comments of a broken hearted daddy, they are the inspired words of the Word of God. Some say David was talking about how his son had gone to the grave, and he would follow. But, David said he would "go to him". He meant he would literally go where his son was and be able to be with him.

Another example of God's mercy is found in the book of Numbers. God did not hold the younger Jews responsible when He judged Israel for refusing to possess the Promised Land and for murmuring against Him (Num.14:27-29).

Only those above 20 years of age were held accountable. This certainly seems to indicate that God has mercy on those who are not responsible.

So, it seems as though God extends mercy to those who are not able to understand the way of forgiveness. But, what is this age? When does this mercy run out? Some have said it is 12 years because Jesus was 12 when he went to the temple. However, there is no biblical evidence for that idea. Some have said it is the age when a child is old enough to know right from wrong. I disagree with that totally. A child that has been taught to not touch the television knows it is wrong to do so a long time before they could understand the gospel and be saved.

I personally believe a person reaches the age of accountability when they have come to the place where they could understand the gospel message if it was presented to them clearly. That would be a different age for every person because every person has a different mental capacity.

When addressing the thought of little ones who die, we must also consider the subject of abortion. Abortion is a terrible sin. Those who decide to end the lives of their babies before they can be born will pay for their sin. However, the one positive aspect of abortion is the fact that the millions of unborn will go to heaven.

There are many who will never be born because of a miscarriage. Thank the Lord, His mercy is extended to these who never had a chance to live their lives in this world. They also, will be protected by the mercy of God and will go to heaven.

We must also remember the many little babies in foreign lands who will die of starvation. Their lives being cut short is tragic, but they will spend eternity with Jesus.

Death at any age is sad, but especially those who die young. But, the mercy of God keeps these children from having living a life of misery. They are spared the pain and heartache of a cruel world. They will miss the heartbreak of neglectful parents, empty stomachs, and mental torment of a world that does not appreciate them. Even if they had been born into families that loved them, this world is a place of more pain than pleasure. Going straight to heaven is not a bad thing.

*Mt 19:15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

Mark tells us Jesus took them in his arms, and blessed them (Mk.10:16). This was more than a pat on the head. A blessing from God was transferred from Jesus to these little ones. It was as though he was asking the Father to have mercy on the child, to save them as soon as they were old enough, and to use them for His glory. There is no telling what this event did in the lives of those that were brought to him that day. His touch is still working today. He is still touching and blessing people.

## POINTS TO PONDER...WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE VERSES

- Even children need forgiveness

Notice, Jesus did not talk baby talk to the little ones. He saw them as they were, sinners in need of a Savior and dealt with them as such. When the bible says all have sinned, it is including children (Jer.17:9; Ps.51:5; 58:3; Rom.3:10-11; 1 Cor.2:14; Eph.2:1-5). If you doubt that, just ask a parent. A child has to be taught to share, but it does not have to be taught to be selfish. A child has to be taught to tell the truth, but it does not have to be taught how to lie. The sinful nature of man is seen even in the heart of a little child.

- We should recognize the importance of getting children to Jesus

There are a vast number of matters that we should teach our children, but nothing is more important in the training of a child than the fact that they need Jesus. We should do all we can to get the gospel to the children while their hearts are tender towards the message of salvation. Statistics tell us the older a person gets the less likely they will be saved. Of those who are saved, 85% were saved from the ages 4 to 14, 10% from the ages 15 to 30, but only 4% after the age of 30. When an adult is saved, a soul is saved. When a child is saved, a soul and a life is saved.

- Jesus has a plan for the children

He said for us to rebuke them not when they come to him. God can use young and old. Some of the greatest revival movements came through young people.

- Like Jesus, we should spend time with children

Time spent with a child is an investment in eternity. It is time well spent. You may not enjoy it, but they will.

- Family life is vitally important for children

We dare not miss how this event with children is recorded by Matthew immediately after his dealing with the importance of married life. For there to be a happy child, there needs to be a godly family.

## JESUS APPROACHED BY RICH YOUNG RULER 19:16-30

### A SINNER'S REQUEST

A man approached Jesus with a question.

*Mt 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

This man had a lot going for him. He was young (v. 20), rich (v. 22), and he was a ruler (Lk. 18:18). We are not told what type of ruler he was but many believe he had a position of some authority in the synagogue.

He called Jesus, "*Good Master*". The word used for "good" is not referring to Jesus' moral character but to his position as a teacher. This term was used quite often in referring to the rabbis. The word "*master*" means, "teacher". He addressed Jesus in the same manner he would have any Jewish teacher of that day. He clearly did not have a full discernment of who Jesus was. He was a perfect example of someone who knows about Jesus but does not know Jesus.

#### *His Request Was Sincere*

Mark says this man came running and fell on his knees before Jesus (Mk. 10:17). He was humbling himself. He was totally sincere. Had this man been in our modern church service, he would run down the aisle when the invitation was given. He was like the person who runs to the altar before first verse of "Just as I am" is finished. He spoke openly not caring if anyone heard him. He was totally sincere.

#### *His Request Was Serious*

His question was urgent. He did not take time for a friendly chat, he got straight to what was on his mind. His request was the most serious request ever made. It dealt with where he would spend eternity. He asked, "*what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life*". No greater question can be asked in this life.

"*Eternal life*" means we are forgiven for our sin but it means more than that. It is a term that includes all of what biblical salvation involves. It deals with more than just the length of life, it deals with the quality of life. Those who are saved will readily confess that the life they have with Jesus is the much better than the one they had before they accepted the Lord.

Eternal life is not something we experience when we get to heaven, it is something we enjoy here and now. John says "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (emphasis added). Eternal life provides forgiveness for the guilty, (Jn.5:24) satisfaction for the thirsty (Jn.4:14), power for the weak (Eph.6:10), and a promise of resurrection to all (Jn.6:40).

Eternal life is a fellowship between a sinful man and a sinless God (1 Jn.1:3). It is God living in us. I would not want a life that lasted forever without God. It would be torment to live in this world, in these bodies, forever, without Him.

#### *His Request Was Sad*

His religion did not make him happy. In spite of having so many good things going on in his life, his conversation with Jesus revealed he was a sad and empty man. His question indicates he knew something was lacking in his life.

He realized that even though he had done many good things, he must have not done whatever it took to have eternal life. He knew he did not have peace. No doubt, he had been taught that doing good would bring him into right standing with God, but he had done everything he knew to do, and still lacked peace of mind.

His riches did not make him happy. He had enough money to buy anything he wanted, but it did not provide the one thing he desired, peace. This shows us how nothing other than a right relationship with God can provide satisfaction. This world has many trinkets but none of them can fill an empty heart.

#### *His Request Was Smart*

He did the smart thing. He came to right source. He did not go to the synagogue, he had already gone there, and left as empty as when he went. He did not go to one of the rabbis, he had tried them, and had been disappointed. Jesus certainly was the one who had the help he needed. In fact, Jesus was the only one who could help him. He would get help if he was willing to do what Jesus told him.

#### A SAVIOR'S REPLY

*Mt 19:17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

#### *His Reply Was Direct*

Jesus got to the point, his reply was direct. Jesus didn't pull any punches, he went to the heart of the matter. First, Jesus pointed to himself. A right view of the Son of God is essential if we want eternal life.

Jesus asked this man why he called him "good". There is none that are truly good, but God. So, if Jesus was good, he must have been God. And, if he was not good, he was not God. If Jesus was not who he claimed to be he was the biggest liar, and greatest impostor, who has ever lived. Thank the Lord, he was both, good and God.

Then Jesus pointed to the law. He told the man to "*keep the commandments*". No doubt the rabbis had told him to do the same thing, so what was the difference when Jesus said it? There is always a difference when God speaks to us. My mother told me many times that what I was doing was wrong, but I gave her no heed. I had family members who told me I was wrong, and it did not touch me at all. There were preachers who told me I was in sin, but I laughed at them and kept living as I pleased. But, the day came when God spoke to me through the Holy Spirit, and I started listening. There is a difference when it is God speaking.

Jesus was trying to get him to see that he had not kept the commandments as he thought. Jesus pointed this man back to the commandments because he needed to see his sin and failure. He had not been as good as he thought. He needed to see how he had sinned against God and His Word. Before a person can have eternal life they must see themselves as guilty before a Holy God.

*Mt 19:18-19 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

His question revealed a great deal about himself. He asked, "*Which*" of the commandments am I supposed to keep? The first thing I think about is, how about all of them. Are there any commandments that are less important? Unfortunately, this is the attitude of so many today. They want focus on the portions of the bible they like and try to ignore the parts they don't.

Jesus mentioned the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments. He mentioned only the commandments that deal with man's relationship with man. He did not mention the first four commandments that deal with man's relationship with God. It is one thing to be right with our fellowman, it is something totally different to be right with God.

*Mt 19:20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*

He truly thought he had kept the commandments Jesus mentioned. And, he probably had to a great degree. His attitude was a perfect example of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is thinking we have done good enough to satisfy God.

He may have thought he had kept all these commandments, but he was mistaken. He probably had lived a better life than many Christians I know. However, no matter how good he had been, he certainly had not done good enough to earn eternal life. He may have done pretty good with the commandments that related to man, but he, like all mankind, had failed miserably in keeping the commandments that related to God. He had done many good things but none of his good works compensated for how he had offended a holy God.

The Jews had so externalized the law that they ignored the internal part of God's law. They were not concerned about the heart. But Jesus talked about how sin starts in the heart (Mt. 5:28). He said they were like whited sepulchres that looked good on the outside but were corrupt on the inside (Mt. 23:27).

The rich ruler asked, "*what lack I yet?*". He knew in spite of all he had done he still lacked something. Little did he know, the one thing he was missing was God. Eternal life is, God in us, living His life through us. And this man did not have that. That is why he was empty.

He was actually asking a pretty fair question. He had tried, what more could he do? He needed to believe, repent, and trust.

#### *His Reply Was Difficult*

Jesus asked this man to do the one thing that was most difficult for him.

*Mt 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

The word "*perfect*" means, "complete". Jesus was not talking about sinless perfection. No where in Scripture is sinless perfection taught. The word "perfect" has the idea of lacking nothing. That meant a lot to this man who realized there was something lacking in his life. The possibility of being complete gave him hope. Maybe he would finally find what he had been searching for.

But then, Jesus dropped a bombshell on this man. He told him to "*go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me*".

Jesus told this man to go, sell, give, come, and follow. Every one of these are commands.

Jesus got to the center of the matter when he told this man to come and follow him. The real question was, what would he do with Jesus. That is still the question to us all.

This is certainly not a call to all who are rich to give away their riches. This was a call to this one man who loved his riches more than he wanted eternal life.

The rich young ruler loved his wealth but Mark tells us he was trusting in his riches (Mk.10:24). It means he was relying on his money to provide what he wanted and needed. If he got in trouble, he believed he had enough money to buy his way out. If he wanted friends, he believed his money would make him popular. If he wanted some new toy, he had the money to buy it.

Wealth can give a false security. Many times, a rich person thinks they don't need God because they feel like they have everything they need. Quite often, a person of wealth feels like they have worked for, and deserve, what they have. The attitude and energy that it usually takes to become wealthy is what keeps that person from thinking they need God. In their mind, they have what they need and can handle their own lives without anyone's assistance, including God. The attitude of "I have earned what I have" carries into their thinking when it comes to needing salvation.

Salvation is more than asking God to forgive you and waiting for Him to take you to heaven. Salvation is a call to lose your life for Christ (Mt.16:24; Lk.14:33). As we will see, this man was not willing to do that.

#### A SAD RESPONSE

This man responded in the worse possible manner.

*Mt 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

#### *There Was No Remorse In His Response*

He went away "*sorrowful*" because he loved his riches.

Notice, this man showed no remorse whatsoever. He loved riches but he had another problem. He did not see himself as guilty. There was no admission of guilt and no confession of sin. He needed to recognize he had broken the law he thought he had kept. He was guilty and he needed to admit it. Until we see ourselves guilty before a holy God, we will not turn to the Lord.

Jesus unmasked this man's problem with his one comment. He walked away from Jesus because he loved his riches. There has been many who walked away from Jesus for a lot less. Many things keep people from the Lord, riches is just one of them.

#### *There Was No Repentance In His Response*

When Jesus started dealing with what this man loved, he rejected it. How sad that his possessions meant more to him than eternal life. If you have never been saved, what is stopping you from getting saved? Which means more to you, your money, your friends, your sin, or your eternal soul?

Notice, Jesus let him walk away. He did not even try to stop him. Jesus certainly would have flunked evangelism 101.

The rich young ruler seemed so ready when he first came to Jesus. It would seem that anyone could have led him to salvation. Many people would have had gotten him to pray a quick prayer, and told him he was saved. He certainly seemed ready, but he wasn't. He was not willing to forsake what he loved the most, his riches.



Jesus would not accept him on his terms. He loved him (Mk.10:20), he was going to die for him, but he would not lower the requirements for salvation.

Jesus preached law first to this man, then grace. You cannot understand grace if you do not understand law. The law shows us we are sinners, but grace points us to Jesus who will forgive us.

### *There Was No Redemption In His Response*

This man's response to Jesus caused him to forfeit the eternal life that was available to him.

He went away the same way he came, still in bondage to his riches, still empty, and still lost.

Real salvation brings a change to the life of the one who receives Christ. Notice the difference between this man and Zacchaeus. The rich young ruler went away still grasping to his riches. After Zacchaeus met Jesus he wanted to give everything away (Lk.19:8-9). And Jesus said "This day is salvation come to this house".

Salvation isn't just me getting something from God to make my life easier. Salvation isn't someone coming to God to get his problems solved. Salvation is a rotten sinner coming to Jesus begging him to forgive their sin, and giving their lives to Him.

The love of riches has sent many people to hell. The sad thing is, when he died he lost it all anyway.

*Mt 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus' comments must have shocked the disciples. The Jews thought wealth was a sign of the blessing of God. They even taught alms giving guaranteed a person for heaven.

Some of the Jewish writings say "It is good to do alms rather than to treasure up gold for alms deliver from death and they purge away every sin", and "Alms will atone for sin". The Talmud says, "Alms giving is more excellent than all offerings and is equal to the whole law and will deliver from the condemnation of hell and make one perfectly righteous"

As we have seen, the rich young ruler loved his wealth, but Mark tells us he was *trusting* in his riches (Mk.10:24). It means he was relying on his money to provide what he needed. As previously stated, wealth can give a false security. Many times, a rich person thinks they don't need God because they feel like they have everything they need. The attitude of "I have earned what I have" carries into their thinking when it comes to needing salvation. Until a person sees themselves as hopeless and helpless, they will not call on the Lord for salvation.

*Mt 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

True salvation includes a submission to God. A rich person may find it difficult to submit in such a fashion.

Some say Jesus was talking about a gate in the wall around Jerusalem called the "needle gate". They say this gate was so small that in order to get a camel through, it had to be unloaded, it's saddle removed, it had to get on its knees, and then squeeze through. There is more than one problem with this theory. To begin with, there was no needle gate in the wall around Jerusalem. That alone is enough for us to reject this idea. But, if there was a gate so small, why would anyone use it. The logical thing would be to simply move down the wall and use a bigger gate.

But, the real problem with this theory is it destroys the message Jesus was trying to convey. Even though it would have been difficult for a camel to get through such a gate, it would be possible to do so. But, Jesus said what he was talking about was impossible. There is no doubt, Jesus was talking about a literal camel going through a literal needle. Now, that is impossible. And, Jesus was saying it is impossible for a rich man, or any man, to go to heaven if he is not willing to give up that which he loves. This rich man, in his present condition, could not have been saved.

*Mt 19:25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?*

Jesus' explanation caused his disciples to wonder even more. If salvation is compared to a camel going through the eye of a needle, who can be saved?

*Mt 19:26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

With men "*this is impossible*". It is impossible to be saved apart from the grace of God. It was impossible for the rich man to be saved apart from him turning from that which he loved the most.

It is impossible to get saved when a person refuses to lay aside what they love and what they are depending on. Many times, for those who are rich, it's their money. For the drunk, it's the bottle, for the athlete, it's the popularity.

Jesus said "*With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*". Thank the Lord, what is impossible with man is possible with God. God can open the eyes of the person who does not see their sin, He can draw them to Him, and He can stir in their hearts and bring about a desire to be saved. There are millions of examples in churches around the world, and I am one of those examples.

## THE REWARDS IN THE KINGDOM 19:27-30

*Mt 19:27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

As usual, Peter asked the question, but we can rest assured, the rest of the disciples were wondering the same thing. Peter noticed the contrast between the rich ruler and the poor disciples. He had not been willing to give his all for Christ, but they had. They had given up their homes, their careers, their families, they had lived hand to mouth, there were times they even had to wait for him to create their food before they could eat. They had sacrificed to follow Jesus and Peter wanted to know how they would be rewarded for it.

*Mt 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Jesus' answer showed there is no loss for those who give their all to follow Jesus. Those who truly give their all will not be disappointed.

Peter asked what they would receive for following Jesus. If we are honest, we have asked the same question. We wonder what is in it for us. Most of us are more excited about what we get from Him than what we can do for Him. The fourth verse of Amazing Grace is the favorite verse of most Christians I know.

The word, "*regeneration*" means "new birth". It is the same word used to describe the work done in a sinner that gets saved (Tit. 3:5). It seems that Jesus was making a connection between the new birth of a believer and the new birth of God's creation. Both have been corrupted by sin, and both await a new body. The believer is made anew at salvation, but they are waiting for a new body. Like the believer, this world will be reborn at the millennium but will be waiting for a completely new body (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

The millennium will bring many changes to this world. Though not totally, in many ways, this world will be restored to what it was before the fall of man. The Messiah will rule, Israel will be converted (Zech. 12:10), the Holy Spirit's power will be obvious, the desert will blossom as a rose (Isa. 35:1), the person who dies at 100 will be considered as a child (Isa. 65:20), truth will prevail, joy will be abundant, fruit will grow like in the garden of Eden, the wolf and the lamb shall feed together (Isa. 65:25), a little child will lead a lion (Isa. 11:6), Satan will be bound (Rev.20:2), the curse will be lifted, and peace will be world wide.

And then, the day will come when God will truly make all things new (2 Pet.3:10; Rev. 21:5). There will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1-8).

Jesus said the disciples will be a part of God's new work on His creation. They had followed him in his place of humility, and they would follow him into his place of glory. The same will be true for us who follow the Lord now. We may endure a time of humility for the present moment, but the times of glory are ahead.

*Mt 19:29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

Jesus responded to Peter's question. However, in chapter 20 he will give a warning to all those who are overly concerned about what they will receive for following him.

Jesus talked about those who "*hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake*". That is a pretty exhaustive list. It deals with material as well as human connections.

Jesus should come first in our lives. We should love our brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, but we should not love them as much as we love Him (cf. Lk.14:26).

You shall "*receive an hundredfold*" is talking about value and not kind. Jesus was not saying a person will receive a hundred houses, or sisters, or fathers, and so forth.

God may give us with material blessings but it is not His plan for the Christian be a display of His material treasure. His plan is that we would be a display of His spiritual treasure. Most anyone can earn wealth and own the riches this world has to offer. But, only a Christian can have the joy and peace that comes from giving our all to the Lord.

This verse tells us that serving Him may indeed be a call for sacrifice. However, it is a sacrifice that is not sacrificial because when we serve willingly we reap the reward of joy and peace. Is it not wise to give up the short term treasure that we can not keep that we might receive the long term treasure that we can never lose? Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose".

God does not always promise material rewards for our spiritual obedience. His rewards may come in the form of spiritual blessings. Ask anyone who has enjoyed God's spiritual blessings they will tell you they would rather have the spiritual blessings more than the material blessing. What could be better than the assurance, joy, contentment, peace of mind, and supernatural power that can come from God?

Jesus made it very clear in this verse that it will be worth whatever it may "cost" us to follow him.

In spite of the fact that he promises blessings to those who sacrifice for him, his blessings should not be our reason for serving him. We should not sacrifice just because we will receive, we should sacrifice because we love Jesus. We should serve Him because of what He has already done for us, not because of what He will do for us. God has so been good to us that He deserves our everything.

Jesus' comments to Peter makes one thing clear, those who walk with the Lord are not making a sacrifice, they are making an investment. As I have mentioned, we should never look at serving God as just an investment, but you have to admit, a hundredfold is an awfully good investment plan. The banker who could guarantee that type of return to his investors would be the most successful banker in town.

Jesus said those who forsake all "*shall inherit everlasting life*". He was talking about doing what the rich young ruler was unwilling to do. Those who inherit eternal life are those who are willing to turn their backs on their sin and trust Christ. Again, salvation is more than asking God to forgive you and just waiting for Him to take you to heaven. Salvation is a call to lose your life for Christ.

#### PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD 19:30-20:16

The last verse of chapter 19 goes with the first verses of chapter 20. We should remember, the chapter and verse divisions in our bible is not inspired. These divisions usually help but there are times when they can be confusing.

In the following verses, Jesus gave another parable. Peter had wanted to know what they would receive for following Jesus. So, Jesus gave a parable to explain his comments to Peter. The parable starts and ends with the phrase, "first shall be last; and the last shall be first".

This parable will demonstrate the importance of our actions and our attitudes. What we do is important, but our attitude as we do it is vitally important also.

In this parable, God is the householder, the vineyard is the kingdom of heaven, the laborers are believers, day is time, the evening is eternity, and the steward who gives rewards is Jesus.

*Mt 19:30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

Jesus' statement was a common proverb (cf. Lk.13:30). As we will see, he was letting Peter know that God's way of judging and rewarding is quite different than man's.

#### THE HOUSEHOLDER'S CALL 20:1

In this parable we see a picture of God calling to those who are lost. I am so glad, He continues to call today.

*Mt 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

This parable tells the story of harvesting grapes. When harvest time came they had to be gathered in a hurry before they rotted on the vine. Also, at the end of the growing season storms would bring rain which would destroy the grapes that were left on the vines. This was hard and strenuous work. It was one of the most laborious of all crops because the vines were usually planted on steep hills.

The householder "*went out early in the morning to hire labourers*". Verse three will tell us he went to the marketplace to find these laborers.

There was a marketplace at the gate of most cities where laborers would come in hope of finding work for the day. These laborers would gather and wait for an employer to hire them for the day. The usual work day was from 6 AM to 6 PM.

These day laborers were at the lowest on the pay scale. They worked today to pay for food for today. They literally worked to survive another day.

God protected those who labored in such a fashion. In the Old Testament, He said the wages of the one you hired should not abide with you overnight (Le 19:13). He commanded the boss to give the laborer his wage at end of each day (Dt. 24:15). To refuse do so was sin because he would not have money to eat the next day. On the other hand, God also rebukes those who refuse to work when they are able (2 Th.3:10).

Notice the householder came to the potential laborers. No one can just grab salvation when they decide to. Jesus said, "no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (Jn. 6:65).

#### THE HOUSEHOLDER'S CROP 20:1

Notice, it was "*his vineyard*". He is the one in charge of the crop. It was his vineyard, his business, and his money. Since the laborers had no resources they were totally dependent on land owner. In like fashion, those who labor for the Lord are totally dependent upon Him to supply what they need to do the job He gives them to do.

#### THE HOUSEHOLDER'S CONDITIONS 20:2-7

*Mt 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

He stated his conditions, and they agreed. They agreed to "*a penny a day*". A "*penny*" was a Roman denarius, which was a Roman coin. It was the usual wage given to a common laborer for a days work.

This verse is the key to this parable. These laborers agreed to a certain amount. Remember, Jesus gave this parable immediately after his conversation with Peter. Like Peter, they wanted to know what they were going to get for their service.

It is vitally important that we recognize, this parable is not teaching that we have to work for our salvation. It is demonstrating how the Lord rewards those who serve in His vineyard.

*Mt 20:3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

The householder returned at 9 AM and found others not working.

*Mt 20:4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

There was no set amount promised to these workers. He promised to pay "*whatsoever is right*". So, the amount paid to these laborers was at the discretion of the land owner.

These workers were not like the first group that were hired earlier. They did not ask how much they would be paid.

Unlike those who had the attitude that Peter had demonstrated, these laborers are willing to work for whatever the householder decided to give them.

*Mt 20:5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

He returned at 12 o'clock, and 3 o'clock, and did the same as he had done earlier in the day. Once again, there was no mention as to the amount of pay these workers were to receive at the end of the day.

*Mt 20:6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

He returned once again at 5 o'clock and found some who were not working.

*Mt 20:7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

These men said they were standing idle because "*no man hath hired us*". I can't help but think of the millions of lost people who are hoping to find someone or something to give them a reason for living. They wait in vain because nothing on earth can provide what they need.

Why did the householder keep coming back? He kept coming because there was still room in the field and there was still work that needed to be done. There is always enough room for another laborer in God's vineyard. There is more work to be done than laborers to do it. Jesus said, "the labourers are few" (Mt. 9:37).

I also believe the householder kept coming back looking for laborers because he cared about them. He did not want any of them to go without. That is why God seeks out the lost, He loves them and does not want them to go to hell.

#### THE HOUSEHOLDER'S COMPENSATION 20:8-16

The workers were compensated for their labor. Our labor for our Lord is never in vain.

*Mt 20:8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

The twelfth hour arrived and the work day was done. The time of reckoning had come.

One interesting thing about his reckoning is the fact that he started with those who started working last.

*Mt 20:9-11 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,*

When the first hour workers saw how much the eleventh hour workers received, they expected to receive more. Of course, they had no right to expect more than what they had agreed to in the beginning of the day (cf. v. 2).

*Mt 20:12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

The first hour laborers endured the toil, the temperature, and the time of the day.

They thought they had good reason to complain. They had endured the heat of the day, and they had labored more hours than those who had started working at the eleventh hour.

*Mt 20:13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?*

None of these workers actually deserved what they received. We do not deserve His salvation, we certainly do not deserve His rewards.

*Mt 20:14-15 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

It is obvious that the householder was more than fair to all his workers. They may have worked different amounts of time, faced different difficulties, and endured different hardships, but at the end of the day he had done one thing for them all, he had met their need. They received enough to make it through the day. None of them could rightfully complain.

The householder told these laborers to "*Take that thine is, and go thy way*". Their complaints had no effect on his decision.

*Mt 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*

And so, this parable ends as it began (cf. 19:30).

Those we think will be first may end up at the end of the line.

This parable reveals the fact that rewards are not given merely for what we have done. So much more is considered when God determines our rewards.

When God rewards, He considers what was His will for each servant. A good servant does what he is told. Some who are doing many good things but it is not what God wants them to do. Some of what we are doing may not even be His will. These works, though they be good works, are still works of our flesh, for we did them without the leadership, or the power, of the Holy Spirit. Are we doing what we are doing because He has led us?

When God rewards, He considers faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2). The little lady who stays in her prayer closet might be being more faithful than the evangelist that preaches every night. The person who was saved for five years may have actually done more for the cause of Christ than the one who was saved sixty years.

When God rewards, He considers our motives. He is concerned about what we did, but He is also concerned with why we did what we did. It will be revealed then what "sort" our labor was (1 Cor. 3:13). The well known preacher may be preaching because he wants to make a name for himself. The man who gives large sums of money, may be doing it to impress others. We should ask ourselves, am I doing what I'm doing for His glory, or for my own?

When God rewards, He considers our attitude. Certainly the servant who serves gladly will get a greater reward than the one who serves grudgingly.

When God rewards, He considers how much light we had. The Christian who had easy access to the Word of God will be held to a higher standard than the one who had little access to the bible.

The term "*for many be called, but few chosen*" came from the selection of soldiers for the army of that day. All the candidates were called but only the chosen ones were selected to fight in the war. Those who were not chosen went back home to live productive lives.

All those who are saved have a service to perform for God's glory. However, as is His right, God has chosen to use some in very obvious ministries. Some serve in areas where everyone can see them, some serve in comparatively unknown, and obscure, places.

We are not responsible to choose our area of service, it is our responsibility to be faithful where He put us.

POINTS TO PONDER...WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE VERSES

- Whatever the servants received came from the householder

None of these laborers had a job before the landowner came. They had nothing before he came into their lives. He owed them nothing, and he was not obligated to hire them. Had it not been for his mercy, they would have all been left unemployed and in their poverty.

In like fashion, if it were not for the grace of God, we would all still be lost and heading to hell. Like these laborers, what we have is not really our stuff. Everything I have belongs to Him. I didn't make anything I have, it came from Him, and I don't really own it.

- All the laborers received more than they deserved

This parable emphasizes the grace that is given, and not the worth of the recipient. None of us deserve anything God gives us. We do not deserve to go to heaven and we certainly have no right to complain about the amount of rewards we receive.

Instead of asking "why would they receive same thing I do", they should have asked "why do I get anything at all ". Instead asking what do I get, we should ask why in the world do I even get to go to heaven.

- The laborers should have served the householder

If they did everything the householder asked, at the end of the day all they had done was what they should have done. It was the right thing to do. Serving the Lord with all our hearts is the right thing to do. He deserves it.

- Our motive for serving our Lord should not be rewards

We should serve Him because we love Him, not just for what we can get from Him (Eph. 6:6). He does reward faithfulness, but that should never be our reason for serving Him. In fact, if we serve Him only for the rewards we receive, we will miss out on the greatest blessing, which is the joy that comes by simply serving Him.

- There is no room for idleness in God's vineyard

The crop would perish if it was not harvested. Those working in the vineyard had to work tirelessly. God has gifted every believer to do something for Him (1 Cor. 7:17). We should be doing what He has gifted us to do.

Instead of being overly concerned about how many rewards we will receive, we need to be busy in the vineyard.

- We should not compare ourselves with others

We are all different. We have different backgrounds and different abilities. God has a different plan for each of us. So, comparing ourselves with someone else is absurd. It is like comparing apples with oranges.

- Do not let pride get in your heart

There are some who think they deserve to be first. We ought to simply be thankful God allowed us in His vineyard.

- No believer should feel unnecessary

You may not feel like you have a lot to contribute to the cause of Christ, but you are vitally important. The body needs every member. You may feel like you are one of those who will end up last. Do not be discouraged, you may be first.

- We cannot judge rightly now

This parable reveals how our view is limited. God tells us to not judge before the time because our view is so limited (1 Cor. 4:4). Paul said he did not even judge his own self because he did not even know himself (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

We do not see what our God does. We see only the outward, He sees the heart. Only God has the right, and the ability, to judge properly. Those we think should be first may be last. Those we think will be last may be first.

This would be a good time to ask yourself if you are doing what you are doing for His glory, or for your own?

JESUS FORETOLD OF HIS COMING DEATH 20:17-19

*Mt 20:17 And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,*

Jesus began his final journey toward Jerusalem and the cross. That for which he came to this world was growing closer.

As they traveled toward Jerusalem Jesus pulled the disciples to the side where they could have a private conversation. What he had to say was not for everyone. There are some things only the closest disciples will hear. Are you close enough to hear the personal messages from the Lord?

*Mt 20:18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,*

This was the third time Jesus told his disciples about his death (cf. Mt.16:21 and 17:22-23). The disciples were still confused about Jesus' mission on earth. They were still expecting Jesus to overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom. But, this time he came as a rejected king, not of a reigning king (Jn. 1:11). He came to die, not deliver (Jn. 10:18). He came to suffer, not to subdue. He would wear a crown of thorns, not a crown of gold (Mt. 27:29). He would hang on a cross, not sit upon a throne (Jn.12:27).

Peter had been concerned about how he and the other disciples had given so much for the will of God. So, Jesus demonstrated what real sacrifice was all about. He certainly gave his all for the Father's will.

Jesus told them he would be "*betrayed*" unto the chief priests and scribes. This word means, "to hand over". Little did the disciples realize, one of their own would be the one who betrayed Jesus.

Jesus was trying to warn them of what was ahead, but they did not get it. Luke tells us they did not understand these things because they were hidden from them (Lk.18:34). They could not reconcile what Jesus was telling them with what they had been taught about the coming kingdom (cf. Jn. 12:34). They refused to open their hearts to anything other than what they had always believed. Their minds were so programmed to expect him to set up the kingdom, they could not comprehend anything else.

Also, the Holy Spirit did not at this time open their understanding to these biblical facts (cf. Lk. 24:44-45). The time was not right for them to understand it. There were other times when Jesus wanted to tell them things, but they were not ready to understand it (cf. Jn. 16:12).

Thank the Lord, the day finally came when they did understand (Jn. 2:22). Had they simply opened their hearts and listened, they could have been prepared for the storm on the horizon. God will prepare us for the road ahead if we will listen to Him. How many storms have devastated us because we were not sensitive to the voice of God when the skies were clear?

This ought to be a warning to each of us. We dare not get so locked into what we have always believed that we are not willing to hear what God says. After all, what we have always believed may be wrong. Just because grandma believed it doesn't always make it so.

We should remember, Judas was one of the ones who heard these words. I wonder, what was he thinking, did he know Jesus was talking about him, had he already decided to betray him? It isn't until later that we are told the he made a pact with the chief priests to betray him (Mt. 26:14-16) but we do not know the exact moment Judas made the decision to sell him out.

*Mt 20:19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again.*

The Jewish Sanhedrin would condemn Jesus to death but the Gentiles would crucify him. The Jews would "*deliver him to the Gentiles*" (the Romans) because they did not have the authority to crucify anyone. The Jews wanted him to suffer the worse death possible, and only the Romans had the authority to crucify.

Only Matthew tells us the mode of his death. He was betrayed by Judas (Mt. 26:14-16; 47-50) to the chief priests and the scribes (Mt. 26:57) and they delivered him to the Gentiles (Mt. 27:1-2).

To "*scourge*" means to beat severely with a whip.

They would "*crucify*" him. Crucifixion was developed by the Persians and perfected by the Romans. It was such a cruel form of punishment it was forbidden for a Roman citizen to be crucified. It was reserved for those who committed the worse of crimes.

Jesus' description of the events that surrounded his crucifixion proves that which he was about to go through was the will of God. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (cf. Gen. 50:20). It is amazing how God can take even the evil intents of ungodly men and work it for His glory.

In spite of how Jesus described the events that were coming, the disciples were not prepared when it did take place. They were frightened and ran like scared puppies when he was arrested. They will be totally shocked when these events begin to take place (Mt. 26:56).

However, before we ridicule these disciples we need to take a good look at ourselves. The bible tells us over and over about the condition of the world just before our Lord comes again. Yet, we are still frightened by what we are seeing. The world is falling apart, but God said it would. The church is growing cold, but God said it would. The things we see should trouble us, our hearts should break over the condition of the world, and the church, but we should take hope, for God said it would be this way just before His Son would come to get his bride.

The "third day" he would "rise again" (Mt. 28:6). Death would not hold him. What else would we expect? He was life, raising from the dead was as normal for him as breathing is for us.

Certainly, the death of Christ was far more than just a lesson to us about how to endure hardships graciously. The crucifixion was God's way of purchasing eternal life, however, the way Jesus endured such hardships can be an example to us. To begin with, it shows us we are not to expect a life of ease. Life can be hard, very hard, even for the ones who love the Lord with all their hearts and do exactly what He asks of them.

Mark tells us the disciples were amazed and afraid when they heard this (Mk. 10:32). The scribes and Pharisees had already tried to kill Jesus, and now they were heading to Jerusalem, the place where these groups would be located. They may have not understand all he had spoken to them but they did understand the danger that laid ahead.

They were amazed because he was heading into such danger, and yet, showed absolutely no sign of fear.

They were afraid because they expected there would be trouble when they arrived at Jerusalem. Their anxiety grew as they traveled and wondered what might happen.

However, we must commend these men for they did keep following Jesus. At least at this time, they kept following. As long as we are following Jesus, we do not have to worry about what is ahead.

## TWELVES PROUD DISCIPLES 20:20-28

The following verses make it clear that all the disciples had a problem with pride, not just James and John. Two of the disciples were *asking*, but the others were *aggravated*. Both demonstrate pride. Self ambition has no place in the family of God.

*Mt 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.*

The mother of "Zebedee's children" came with her sons to make a request of Jesus.

The sons were James and John (Mt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19-20; Mk. 10:35). They were two of the three disciples that seemed closest to Jesus, Peter being the third. Jesus called these brothers the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17). This nickname probably came because of their explosive nature. On one occasion they asked Jesus if he wanted them to call fire from heaven and consume those who rejected him (Lk. 9:51-56).

James and John's mother's name was Salome. She may have been the sister of Mary, which would make her Jesus' aunt. We assume this because John tells us "his mother's sister" was present at the cross (Jn. 19:25). Also, Mark tells us Salome was one of the ones at the cross (Mk. 15:40). She was one of the women who followed Jesus and ministered unto him (Mt. 27:55). We are not told how these women ministered to Jesus but we can be certain they were a great blessing to him. There are positions of authority where women are restricted but I cannot imagine what our churches would be like without the women.

No doubt, Salome was a good and godly mother. She must have taught her sons about the Messiah that would come. She was faithful till the end. As already mentioned, she was one to the ones who was at the cross (Mt. 27:55-56). Many of the men had run and hid, but not Salome. She was also one of the ones who went to anoint the body of Jesus after his death (Lk.23:55 - 24:10).

They came "*worshipping*" Jesus. The word in this context means she simply bowed before Jesus and gave him reverence.

*Mt 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.*

The privilege of sitting on the right and left hand of a king was the highest privilege a king could give to anyone. So, her request was something that was significant. What made it bad was the fact that they probably thought they deserved it. It is bad enough that you want the best, it is worse to ask for the best, but it is ridiculous to send your mommy to try to get it for you.

Desiring to be the greatest may be fine in an earthly kingdom, but not in God's kingdom. Mark tells us Jesus said, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Self promotion does not work in the kingdom of God.

Even though her request was somewhat selfish, it did show her ambition for her sons. She wanted them to serve the Lord, and she wanted them to be successful. At least it was a desire for spiritual things. So many parents want their children to be the best ball player, or lawyer, or doctor. No sacrifice is too great for little Johnny or Susie. They must have the best equipment, the best coach, and the best school. Yet, the church, and the things of God, are placed on the back burner. They are so concerned about little Johnny's career they forget completely about little Johnny's eternal soul.



*Mt 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.*

In spite of the many positive aspects about Salome, the timing of this question is astounding to me. Jesus had just been talking about his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, and they immediately ask for the highest seats in the kingdom. How could anyone be so selfish?

They certainly did not know what they were asking. They were seeing only the honor and happiness associated with their request. Little did they realize, there was sacrifice and suffering involved. Our view of God's work can be so distorted. We see things from our point of view. We see things through our human eyes and not as He sees them.

Salome and her son truly did not know what they were asking. To desire a position that is outside of God's will is truly dangerous. To decide on our own what we will do with our lives is a slap in the face of God. We must recognize the fact that our Christian lives deal with the will of God, the work of the Spirit, and eternal souls. It would be better for our children to end up begging on the streets than to be in place where God does not want them. We dare not try to run if God has not sent us (cf. Jer. 23:21).

He spoke of a "*cup*" he would drink of. In essence, a cup is a vessel filled with some type of liquid, which a person drinks. So, the Jews used the word "cup" to describe the circumstances of life. They saw the circumstances of life as being something that was dispersed by God. As Joseph gave portions to those at his table (Gen. 43:34), they saw God as the one who dispensed the good and bad they received in life. The Psalmist accredits the Lord for assigning him his cup (Ps. 16:5). This cup may contain God's blessings (Ps. 23:5; 116:3), consolation (Jer. 16:7), or wrath (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:9-10; 16:19).

Certainly, when Jesus referred to his cup, he was speaking of the suffering he would endure. The disciples wanted a place of authority, but that place came with a price. There would be no crown without the cup.

Jesus also asked, "*Can you be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with*". The word "baptized" has the idea of "plunging into". In this context, it is speaking of plunging into pain, suffering, and death. Afflictions are often described as being plunged into water (Isa. 43:2; Ps. 124:5; Lam. 3:54).

Baptism among the Jews was considered to be a symbol of death. Going down into the water certainly gives us the image of the grave.

With Jesus questions about the cup and baptism, he was in essence, asking if they were ready to endure what he was going to endure. The cup, and the baptism, were both pictures of his suffering and death.

Their hasty response of, "*we are able*" was sincere. They fully intended to follow him wherever he went. However, their response would be proven to be inaccurate (Mt. 26:56). Surely the day came when they would look back and remember how deceived they were at this point.

*Mt 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

They indeed would suffer the same type of suffering Jesus would, though not to the degree he did. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred (Acts 12:1-2) and John, after suffering terribly for the Lord, was the last to die of old age.

Those who would sit on the right and left of Jesus will be determined by the "*Father*". We should have no issue with this statement. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in their divine attributes. However, there are times when one will perform a particular role. There are not three gods, but there is three persons working different functions in perfect harmony.

Either way, Jesus' comments assure us there will yet be a kingdom.

*Mt 20:24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

The other disciples were angry when they heard this discussion. They probably were upset at themselves for not asking first. No doubt, they all had the same desire James and John had.

We see into the hearts of the disciples in these verses. Once again we see their selfishness. They were still wanting the power and prestige which they thought the kingdom would provide. They longed to have the best positions when the kingdom was set up.

*Mt 20:25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

Jesus, seeing the friction in the group, called them all together to discuss the matter. Unchecked friction in a family, or church, can be devastating.

The Jews saw the "*Gentiles*" as pagans who did not follow the true God. They were the type who used their human ingenuity to accomplish their goals.

Jesus said, "*the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them*". The Gentile leaders dominated their subjects. The word, "dominion" means, "to lord over, to control, or to overcome". This type of governing has no place in the family of God, or in the church. The church is to be governed by brotherly love and humility.

*Mt 20:26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;*

It shall "*not be so among you*". The family of God is not to be like the world. We should think different than the world thinks, we should live different than the world lives, we should talk different than the world talks. In other words, we should be different than the world. There are to be no ranks among God's people, all are the same. The rich, the poor, the educated, the uneducated, all are to be equal. Only in a church can you have lawyers with factory workers, doctors with mechanics, astronauts with janitors, and still have harmony.

*Mt 20:27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:*

The greatest in God's kingdom is the one who serves. The world determines it's greatest by how many you have under you. God determines His greatest by how many you have over you. The greatest in the kingdom is the one who has learned to be a servant.

The world uses their authority to rule over those under their control. God's kingdom is drastically different. Those in Christ's kingdom lead instead of ruling, they are examples instead of dictators, and they give instead of taking.

There is no room in the family of God for self-promotion. Jesus reminded the disciples what should truly be important among them. Greatness in God's family does not come from self-promotion, it comes from humility and service. Those who are great in God's kingdom are those who have learned to serve instead of being served. We do not obtain greatness in God's family by demanding our rights or controlling people.

We should try to get into the heads of these disciples. They saw themselves as the ones the Lord of heaven had chosen to assist him in ushering in his kingdom. It would be easy to let a certain amount of pride enter their heart. It would be easy for them to feel like they had the right to dominate the "ordinary" people. Jesus warned them to not let it all go to their heads.

*Mt 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

There is no greater example of this principle than Jesus himself. Jesus came to surrender. He surrendered to the Father's will (Jn. 6:38). He came to serve. He came to minister to others.

He gave his life as a servant. That is not saying he gives himself to satisfy our every whim or desire. It does mean he serves us by giving us what we need to accomplish God's will. He is right now working in your heart and life to provide what you need to do what your heavenly Father desires. When the devil says you can't do it, just remind him he is a liar and rely on the power that is coming from your God.

#### JESUS HEALED TWO BLIND MEN IN JERICHO 20:29-34

The following event is also recorded in Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43.

He healed two blind men. The physical blindness of these two men was a perfect picture of the spiritual blindness we will see in the next few verses.

THE MEN WHO WERE HURTING 20:29-30

*Mt 20:29 And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.*

Jericho was a large city about nineteen miles north-east of Jerusalem. The people of Israel crossed the Jordan River close to this city (Josh. 3:16). It was the first city they conquered after entering the promised land (Josh. 5:13-6:27). Joshua declared a curse on the man who would rebuild the city (Josh. 6:26).

A supposed contradiction has been raised from the words "as they departed from Jericho". Matthew says, as they "departed from Jericho" and Luke says "as he was come nigh unto Jericho". Were they coming to, or departing from Jericho? The solution to this is the fact that there was the Old Testament Jericho that was pretty much in ruins at the time of Christ, and then there was the New Testament Jericho that was inhabited and thriving. It would seem that he was leaving the old Jericho, and entering the new Jericho.

As so many times before, great multitudes were still following Jesus.

*Mt 20:30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.*

These men were two among many who were blind. The harsh sun, the blowing sand, and the lack of medical know-how caused many vision problems. There were many who were blind in that day, especially near the city of Jericho. Jericho was known for balsam bushes. From these bushes was made a medicine that was used to treat certain types of eye disease. So, those with eye problems would flood to Jericho. And among the many, many, who were blind, there were two who wanted to see.

Mark and Luke give descriptions of this event. Their accounts mention only one man (cf. Mk. 10:46 and Lk. 18:35). Undoubtedly, Mark and Luke do not mention the other man because Bartimaeus was the most outspoken of the two. There is no contradiction in these accounts. If Mark or Luke had said there was *only one* man who was healed, that would be a contradiction.

Luke tells us these men were beside the road begging (Lk 18:35). They were "*sitting by the way side*" that they might beg from those passing by. They were certainly in a dire condition.

Hearing the noise of a crowd coming by, they asked what was happening. Someone told them Jesus was passing by (cf. Lk. 18:36).

Jesus "*passed by*". That meant there was a brief moment of opportunity for them to cry out to him. In a moment, Jesus would be gone and so would be their opportunity of getting help. They took advantage of that moment and got help from God.

We also will have these windows of opportunity. There will be brief moments where we will have the opportunity to get help from him, or to serve him in some manner. We dare not slumber and miss these opportunities. While he is near, we should call. When he speaks, we should obey.

The word translated "*cried*" means, "to scream". It was used to describe the voice of a demon possessed man (Mk. 5:5,7). These men were desperate. They realized this was probably their one and only chance to get their sight. If Jesus got out of earshot, they would probably be doomed to darkness the rest of their lives.

These men knew what to ask for. They asked for "*mercy*". They had nothing to offer Jesus, they had nothing to bargain with. Mercy is help for the undeserving. The person who deserves help does not need mercy. The person who can help themselves does not need mercy. Mercy is help for the helpless. Mercy is for the person who has no right to ask. These men knew they were undeserving.

When they cried to Jesus they used the name the Jews used for the Messiah. It had been prophesied that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (Ps. 132:11-12; Isa. 9:7; 11:1-3; Jer. 33:15). So, they had been told about the coming Messiah, and they had believed what they were told.

#### THE MULTITUDE WHO WAS HINDERING 20:31

*Mt 20:31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.*

It is clear that the crowd did not care about these blind beggars. They "*rebuked them*" and tried to get them to be quiet. How could anyone be so hard as to want these blind men to stop asking for help? It looks like they would have been glad if Jesus could have helped them, even if it had been for selfish reasons in that they would be rid of two of the many beggars that lined the roadway.

We aren't sure why they tried to quiet the blind men. Perhaps they did not care because there were so many blind in that area that they had gotten used to them. Their hearts had become calloused to the misery of those around them. Perhaps it was because the cries of these men embarrassed them. They weren't used to anyone getting so excited. Perhaps it was because they realized he was heading towards Jerusalem and they thought he was about to set up his kingdom. They wanted it to happen as soon as possible so they didn't want anything, or anyone, to hinder his progress.

The rebuke of the crowd should remind us of the hardness of the world. The world did not care then, and it does not care now. Your worldly friends do not care near as much about you as they claim to.

However, the blind men would not be silenced. They cried even louder. It would do us well to learn how to ignore what people say about us and our relationship with the Lord. The world will always tell us to quiet down. We should never allow anyone to hinder us from getting help from God.

#### THE MESSIAH WHO WAS HEARING 20:32-34a

*Mt 20:32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?*

Jesus "*stood still*". What a wonderful thought, the God of heaven stopped. He stopped because there were two souls who needed help. Their cry of faith stopped Jesus. Desperate faith always stops God. We must keep in mind, Jesus was taking his final trip into Jerusalem. He was heading towards the cross. Why would Jesus take the time to help these men? I believe the answer is found in verse thirty four where it says "*Jesus had compassion on them*". He cared. He cared about these two men even though there were many who were just like them. He cared for them even though he himself was about to suffer untold anguish. Jesus demonstrated by example what he had just taught in verse twenty six, he served.

It is easy for us to condemn the crowd for being so hard, but I wonder, who of us would have bothered with these two blind beggars? If it was us heading toward misery, pain, and death as Jesus was, I am afraid we would pass them by without a thought.

It would do us well to remember Jesus' compassion. Their pain caused him pain. We should remember it because we need that type of love for others. We should also remember it because it tells us he hurts when we are hurting. Our pain hurts him.

Jesus "*called them*". Mark and Luke tell us Jesus commanded someone to bring the blind men to him (Mk. 10:49 and Lk. 18:40). Mark also tells us the crowd spoke to the blind men and said, "Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee".

Mark tells us Bartimaeus cast off his garment, rose, and came to Jesus (Mk. 10:50). This was a heavy outer garment that kept him warm. It was probably what he used when he begged. A beggar would spread a garment out in front of them for people to toss money into. Perhaps Bartimaeus cast it aside because he was in a hurry to get to Jesus and he wasn't going to let anything hinder his progress. Or, perhaps he cast it aside because somehow he knew that he wasn't going to need it any longer.

Jesus asked, "*What will ye that I shall do unto you*". His question is somewhat strange. Their need was so obvious, no one had to wonder what they wanted. Yet, he asked. I believe he asked to force them to name their need. We will receive no help until we are willing to admit we have a need.

If Jesus asked you the question he asked them, what would be your response? What would be your response if God asked to what you wanted from Him? After all, He is able to give you anything on earth. I am afraid some of us would ask for wealth or happiness. They asked for what they needed.

*Mt 20:33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.*

They put their finger on their problem. I wonder if we can do the same? Can we discern where we are in need? Are we able to point out our own flaws? It is easy to see the faults of others, but it seems like we get far sighted when comes to looking at ourselves.

They simply asked for what they needed. They did not try to dress up their request. We would do well to realize that we do not have to spruce up our prayer. Just ask Him. In your own, simple words, speak to Him. Peter cried, "Lord, save me" (Mt. 14:30). And, guess what, it worked.

THE MINSTERS WHO WERE HELPING 20:34b

These men had relied on others to minister to them. But after Jesus touched them, they would be the ones ministering to others. They followed Jesus, ministering and helping others in some capacity. The helped became the helper.

*Mt 20:34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

Jesus "*touched their eyes*" and instantly they received their sight. Imagine, the first thing they ever saw was the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was not a bad start to their new life of sight.

Thank the Lord for His "compassion". I have little doubt that many had gotten used to those two blind men. They had seen them beg long enough to where they did not care anymore. They had gotten used to seeing them stumble around in the dark. They had become deaf to their cries for help. But, not Jesus, he cared. He was touched by their pain. He saw what all they were missing. They had never seen a sunrise, a flower, nor the face of their mother or dad. Jesus saw what could happen with these men if they could only see.

Once they received their sight, they followed Jesus. We do not know what all they did, but we do know they did more than they could have while they were blind.

Once they were healed, they "followed him". This should remind us how we should use the blessings God gives us to do His will.

We are told nothing about the other man who was healed that day. All we know is, he was healed, and he followed Jesus. There are many unnamed souls who are following Jesus. I am glad that even though they are unnamed to us, they are not to Him. You may feel like you are one of those who are unnamed and unnoticed. Well, just keep following Him and ministering to those He puts in your path. He will use you in ways you never dreamed possible.

Luke tells us all the people praised God when they saw this (Lk. 18:43).

Matthew does not record it, but while Jesus was still in Jericho, he had an encounter with Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

THE KING'S MISERY 21:1 - 27:66

The following chapters deal with the misery of Israel's king. Jesus was still offering the kingdom but Israel as a nation was determined they would not have this man.

## JESUS' ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM 21:1-17

The final days of Jesus' life and ministry had begun. The next eight chapters deal with the last week of Jesus' life. They begin with his entry into Jerusalem, and end with his resurrection.

The last week of Jesus' life began with him riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. This event is commonly called "the triumphal entry of Christ". I honestly believe it is one of the lowest spots of Jesus' life. I believe if we see it for what it was, we will see more defeat than triumph.

The reason for this ride into Jerusalem was to declare the fact that their king had arrived. He was making public his claim to be their Messiah and King. He was no longer telling his disciples to be quiet about who he was (cf. Mt. 12:16 and 16:20). It was time to proclaim it from the housetops. The King had arrived!

This event is one of the few that are recorded in all four gospels. It is recorded by Mark (Mk. 11:1-11), Luke (Lk. 19:29-44), and John (Jn. 12:12-19).

### THE CIRCUMSTANCES WERE WRITTEN 21:1

What we see in these verses had been written in the Old Testament around 500 years before it happened. Zechariah prophesied of a king that would ride into the city of Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey (Zech. 9:9).

God had promised a king and a kingdom. Jesus was the king and Israel was supposed to be the subjects of the kingdom. But, Israel had rejected her king. You cannot have a kingdom without people. In the verses ahead, we will see clearly how Israel had reacted their king.

*Mt 21:1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,*

Jesus and the disciples left Jericho and were approaching the city of Jerusalem from the east. The distance from Jericho to Jerusalem was about nineteen miles. The road consisted of desert, caves, and rocks. It was an excellent place for thieves to lie in wait for travelers. It was this road that Jesus used in his parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37).

Jesus stopped outside the city of "Bethphage". The city of Bethphage was at the foot of the "Mount of Olives". The word, Bethphage means "fig-house". This city was known for its abundance of figs.

Mark and Luke mention two villages, Bethany and Bethphage (Mk. 11:1 and Lk. 11:24). These villages were close together on the outskirts of Jerusalem, so it could have been said that Jesus was approaching either village.

### THE COLT WAS WAITING 21:2-3

*Mt 21:2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.*

There were several problems that had to be taken care of before Jesus could ride into Jerusalem as the Old Testament had predicted.

One problem was the fact that he needed a donkey. Of course, he did not own one, so where would he find one? That certainly was no problem to him. In his infinite knowledge, he knew exactly where the donkey and her colt were. He sent two of his disciples to get them.

Another problem was the fact that this colt had never been ridden (Mk. 11:2). This is another demonstration of the power of Jesus. There are very few animals as hard to handle as an unbroken donkey. They are very unpredictable and dangerous. Yet, the animal offered no resistance to the Lord. This should remind us of how he can handle our out of control lives.

This reminds me so much of the Christian life. The colt had not lost its nature to buck, but that wild nature was under the control of the Savior. So it should be with us. Our old nature was not removed when we got saved, but we are to yield it constantly over to His control.

The donkey was tied and had to be loosed. Like the donkey, we need to be loosed from what hinders us from being used by God. What has you bound? What is there in your life that is restricting you from following Him totally?

*Mt 21:3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.*

Another problem was the fact that this donkey and colt belonged to someone else. A donkey was one of the most valuable possessions at that time because it was used in such a variety of ways. No one would simply allow a stranger to walk off with their donkey without confronting them. Mark tells us the disciples were confronted (Mk. 11:5-6).

Jesus' instruction to these disciples was to simply tell them "*The Lord hath need of them*". And Jesus added, "*and straightway he will send them*". Not only could Jesus calm the nature of the donkey, but he could touch the heart of the owner. If the wind and the sea obey him (Mk. 4:41) certainly a donkey would.

Jesus told his disciples what to say when they were confronted. This should assure us that we can trust our Lord to give us the words we need. We face many situations that require us to say the right thing. Our Father can give us the right words just as Jesus did his disciples.

It happened exactly as Jesus said. The owner did "*send them*". How amazing, he allowed a stranger to take one of his most prized possessions.

*Mt 21:4-5 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

The Old Testament told about a prophet that would come in the name of the Lord. As previously stated, Old Testament prophecy said this king would ride into the city of Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey (Zech. 9:9).

The word "*Sion*" is the Greek name for Mount Zion.

*Mt 21:6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,*

There is little doubt about the disciples' excitement about these instructions given by their Lord. They knew all too well about the Old Testament scripture that said the Messiah would come riding into Jerusalem on a colt. No doubt, the disciples were beside themselves as they went to find this colt.

The donkey and the colt were exactly where they were supposed to be, just *waiting* for Jesus. Anytime we do what he says, he will make sure things work out.

*Mt 21:7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.*

They laid articles of clothing across the colt as a saddle.

Jesus rode a donkey. Horses were seldom used in every day life. Horses were ridden in times of war, and donkeys in times of peace. To ride a donkey was a sign of humility. Jesus was in the habit of using common and ordinary things. That ought to encourage us ordinary people.

Luke gives us information that the other gospels do not. Sometime during his way to Jerusalem, Jesus beheld the city and wept over it (Lk. 19:41-44). He prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem. The fulfillment of this prophecy took some 40 years later when Titus destroyed the city.

THE CROWD WAS WATCHING 21:8-11

*Some of the crowd were celebrating.*

*Mt 21:8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

Some of this multitude were celebrating because they thought the Messiah had finally come.

The city of Jerusalem would have a good size population already, but there were many who had come in anticipation of the Passover. The city, and the area around it, was filling up. This "*great multitude*" followed Jesus and the disciples as they headed into Jerusalem. They were in a frenzy for they believed the time they had dreamed about had come. They could taste deliverance from Roman oppression.

The laying of "*garments in the way*" was a sign of respect to royalty (2 Kgs. 9:13).

Like rolling out a red carpet, the crowds cut down palm branches and laid them in the path.

*Mt 21:9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*

The crowd ran before and followed after Jesus. They cried aloud the words of Psalm 118:25-26. More than likely, they were singing Psalms 113 through 118 as they walked. These psalms were called the Hallel psalms and were sung on the way to Jerusalem during certain Jewish ceremonies. The word, "*Hosanna*" means, "save now". It had come to be a word of praise and petition.

*Mt 21:10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?*

When some of those in Jerusalem saw Jesus, they asked, "*Who is this*". No doubt, many had heard about Jesus but since they had never seen him, they did not know who this man was. Also, Jesus had avoided the actual city of Jerusalem during his ministry, so it is possible that some of them who had no idea who he was.

*Mt 21:11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

Their statement about Jesus was correct. He truly was a prophet (Dt. 18:15). He had come to preach the words of His Father. But, he was much more than just a prophet.

There were three offices spoken of in the Old Testament. These were, prophet, priest, and king. Jesus was the only man who was all three, prophet, priest, and king.

A *prophet* was a messenger sent from God with His message. The Greek word translated prophet means "one who speaks forth". There were times when a prophet would speak what would happen in the future. There were times when they would simply speak what God said for that time.

Jesus certainly was a prophet for he proclaimed God's message.

A *priest* was a person who went to God on behalf of the people. He offered sacrifices to God for the people. He literally stood between man and God. To begin with every man was his own priest, and gave his own sacrifices to God. Then, the head of each family became a priest for his family. Examples of this would be Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (Gen. 12:7), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Jacob (Gen. 31:54), and Job (Job 1:5).

Jesus surely was our priest for he gave himself as the sacrifice.

A *king* was a man who ruled over a group of people. They were to serve as God's agents in ruling nations. They were to observe the Law, and rule the people in justice and righteousness.

Jesus certainly was a king for he, being God, rules the universe.

*Some of the crowd were critical.*

Luke tells us there were some who did not like what was happening (Lk. 19:39-40). The Pharisees, as always, were critical of Jesus, and his disciples. They rebuked the multitude for their celebration. Jesus said if the people did not praise him, the stones would (Lk. 19:40). God will receive praise.

## JESUS' SECOND CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE 21:12-17

### THE COUNTRY WAS WICKED 21:12-17

These next few verses demonstrate to us just how wicked the country of Israel had become.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem included his going to the temple in verses 12 through 16. His "triumphal" entry was not like that of the Romans, who after a great victory, would come into a city with all types of fanfare and take their seat on the throne as a victor. He went to the temple because that would be the one place that would reveal the spiritual condition of the people. In the same manner, the spiritual condition of the New Testament believers can be seen at the church house.

According to Mark, Jesus went into the temple on the day of his entry into Jerusalem, and looked around at "all" things (Mk. 11:10-11). He looked closely. Our God does not miss anything when He does the examination.

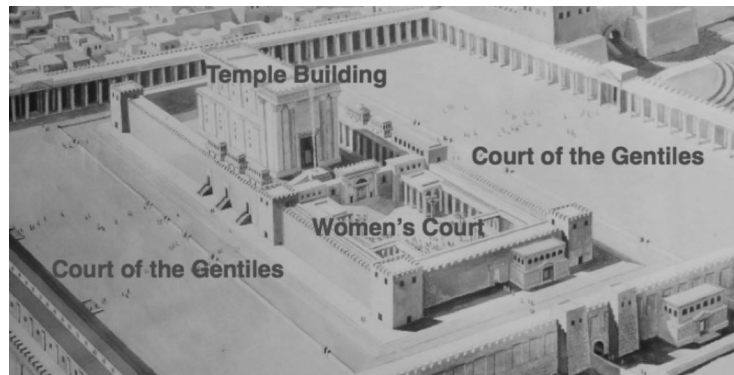
His message had been "repent" since he began his ministry. At the temple he would discover if they had repented. Sadly, instead of finding a place dedicated to the God of heaven, and people who loved Him, he found them using the holy temple grounds for their financial profit.

*Jesus cleansed the temple.*

John gives us more details about this cleansing (Jn. 12:12-19).

*Mt 21:12 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,*

Jesus "*went into the temple*". Mark makes it clear that Jesus spent that first night in Bethany, and returned to the temple the next day (Mk. 11:11-20). Still seeing no sign of repentance, Jesus cleansed the temple (Mk. 11:12). This was the second cleansing of the temple. Jesus cleansed it early in his ministry (cf. Jn. 2:11-12).



It was the temple "*of God*". It was God's house, it was supposed to be dedicated to Him, to His will, to His worship, and to holiness.

Instead of a place of holiness, he found a place of sin, and selfishness.

To begin with, they were disrespecting the temple terribly. Mark tells us Jesus would not allow anybody to carry any vessel through the temple (Mk. 11:16). The eastern gate was near the temple. People entered that gate all the time carrying items. Instead of going around the temple area, they had made a shortcut through the courtyard of the temple. Jesus put a stop to this.

Jesus "*cast out all them that sold and bought*" in the temple.

They had made the house of God into a house of merchandise. They set up a type of market place where they could sell items to those who came to worship in the temple. They bought and sold items in the court of the Gentiles that was within the walls that made up the temple (notice picture).

That was one of the problems with these merchants. They set up their merchandise in the court of the Gentiles. Their "religious market" took up the room that was set aside for the Gentiles to come and learn about the one true God. I wonder how a Gentile felt when he came into the temple area and found himself pushed aside by these "business" men.

Jesus overturned "*the tables of the moneychangers*".

The Jews had to pay a half-shekel annual temple tax (Ex. 30:13-16). This tax was used in the operation, and upkeep of the temple. The priests would only accept Jewish shekels for this tax. So, they set up moneychangers to exchange the money brought by the people coming to the temple. The problem was, these moneychangers charged a large fee. Historians tell us they charged as much as 25% to exchange this money.

Jesus also turned over "*the seats of them that sold doves*".

They kept animals of sacrifice on hand to provide for those who came to the temple. Some were coming from great distances and it was not feasible to bring an animal so far. So, buying an animal at the temple made good sense. Some did bring their own animal but every sacrifice had to be approved by the priest before it could be offered. Since there was money to be made selling these animals, it was very unlikely that the priest would accept the animal they brought. So, they would have to buy an animal to sacrifice. Selling these sacrificial animals was not wrong within itself. The problem was the priests would charge astronomical prices for the animals. There were times when they had to pay ten times what the animal was actually worth. They were robbing the people blind, and all in the name of religion.

So, Jesus went into the temple and cleaned house. Imagine what this scene must have been like. John tells us Jesus made a whip of cords to use when he drove them out of the temple. If we see only the meek and tender Jesus, we do not know him fully.

This was a chaotic scene. No doubt, Jesus was speaking loudly as he walked about the temple area, he was using the whip, and overturning tables as he went. The animals were running around free, and the birds were flying in every direction. No doubt, those at the tables were smitten with fear. Their money was flying everywhere, and they were trying to scoop what little they could gather before they ran out the door.

We dare not misunderstand Jesus' actions that day. He was not out of control with anger. What he did, he did with absolute authority and was totally in control of himself. Every detail of his actions was within the will of His Father. We may lose control when we get angry, but he never does.

*Mt 21:13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

A greater than the temple had come (cf. Mt. 12:6). Jesus called the temple "*My*" house. We would do well to remember the church is his also (Mt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Rom. 16:16).

The phrase "*house of prayer*" came from Isaiah 56:7.

Jesus explained why he did what he had just done. They had violated the house of His Father. God does not play games when it comes to His house. We should not worship the church house, but we should respect it as the very house of the Almighty God of heaven and earth.

It was not just the actions of Jesus that struck fear into those people that day. It was his words. He spoke, and his words were words of authority. The same one who spoke the world into existence, spoke that day. The words that caused diseases to leave the bodies of the sick, caused them to leave the temple.

Jesus' statement tells us a good bit about what he desires from a church. A church is supposed to be a place where God's people can meet with Him. It should be a place where we hold sacred.

Notice Jesus' wording when he rebuked those who were abusing the temple. He said, "*ye have made it a den of thieves*". The word "*den*" actually means a place where thieves hide. They were trying to hide their sin in plain sight.

Jesus was their Messiah. However, the Jews were so far from God there was no way he was going to set up his kingdom. So, he went to the temple to see if there were any signs of them repenting of their sin. Instead of seeing signs of repentance, he saw signs of selfishness and ungodliness.



This is why I believe his ride into Jerusalem was not a time of triumph. He could have easily conquered Rome, set up his kingdom, and delivered the people of Israel. But, he would not at that time because of their sin. God does not bless sin.

A note of interest before we move on. There needs to be a balance when considering the lesson Jesus taught us about the house of God. We dare not take what he did to such an extreme as to where we worship the church building. The church building and property should be respected as God's property, but it is just a building.

#### THE CRIPPLED WERE WELCOME 21:14

The Jews had rejected him as their Messiah and he had run them out of the temple, yet those who were hurting were welcome to come.

*Mt 21:14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.*

He kept serving and helping those in need even though it is abundantly obvious that he has been rejected by his own people.

This is the last recorded healings of Jesus.

For the first time in a long time, the temple was clean. It may have been messy from the items tossed around by the Lord, but it was cleaner than it had been in a long time. It had become what God had intended it to be, a place where people could get help from God. That which had hindered the power of God from working, was gone. I wonder, what might God do at our churches, if we would clean them up?

#### THE CHILDREN WERE WEeping 21:15-16

*Mt 21:15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,*

The children got involved. With tears of joy, they rang out in praise. If the adults are not interested in God, He will turn to the young. Many of the greatest works of God has been through the young people.

And so we see, in the house of God there was power, prayer, praise, and peace. Sounds like the kind of church we should desire.

It is difficult to comprehend how these people could see the "*wonderful things that he did*", and still refuse to believe him to be who he claimed to be. They not only refused to believe who he was, they were "*sore displeased*". They got angry. It proves that it would not matter what God did to reveal Himself, there are some who will not believe.

*Mt 21:16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*

The chief priest and scribes asked Jesus if he was hearing what was going on with these children. The implication is, they were wanting Jesus to stop these children. They asked, are you going to allow these children to continue to cry out? And, Jesus said, yes, I am going to allow it. In fact, he not only would not stop it, he was pleased about it.

*Mt 21:17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.*

Jesus' response was, "*he left them*". There is no greater judgment than God leaving. When He leaves, with Him goes the chance for forgiveness, insight, strength, joy, peace, and power. When God leaves, we are in trouble.

Jesus went to "*Bethany*" and stayed there. Some believe he spent the night with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

He left in person, but he left them in reality. The next day he was teaching in the temple, the chief priests and elders asked him by what authority he was speaking (v. 23). In essence, he refused to answer their question. He had said all he was going to say because they would not listen to him anyway.

Luke tells us Jesus would return to teach in the temple and the chief priests and scribes sought some way they might destroy him (Lk. 19:47). They refused to give up their attack on him.

And so, his triumphal entry was not so triumphal. They wanted a deliverer from their difficulties but they had no interest in a Savior from their sin. The cries of "Hosanna" would soon be replaced with the cries to "crucify him" (Lk. 23:20-21). When he refused to lead them in a revolt against Rome they turned on him like a mad dog.

This event can be a mighty lesson to those who are believers. We should remember our Savior as the One who, even though He was Almighty God, came in humility and peace. He did not come to conquer by force, he came to conquer by love, mercy, and grace.

He did not come to conquer the nations, he came to conquer the heart. We would do well to follow his example. They expected a mighty warrior, and they got one. But, the enemy he came to conquer was sin, not Rome. He went after the false religious beast of Israel.

Israel was looking for a social giant to overcome their oppression. They still are. That is why they will accept the Anti-Christ so readily. He will seem to be all they are looking for. They discover just how wrong they are, but it will be too late.

## JESUS CURSED A FIG TREE 21:18-22

Jesus not only *cleansed the temple*, he *curled the tree*. There is a connection between the two. Both pointed to the condition of the people of Israel.

Matthew describes the event with the fig tree as a whole. He was not as concerned about the chronology, as the facts of the event. Mark gives us more detail as to the timeline. Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey, left and spent the night in Bethany (Mk. 11:1-11). The next day, he came back to Jerusalem. On the way, he cursed the fig tree. He went to the temple, cleansed it, and went back to Bethany to spend the night (Mk. 11:12-19). The next day he returned to the temple the third time. On the way, they noticed the fig tree was dried up (Mk. 11:20-21).

*Mt 21:18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.*

He must have gotten up early to return to Jerusalem since he had not eaten. Once again we are reminded of the human side of Jesus by him getting hungry. He truly humbled himself and experienced the difficulties related to life on earth.

*Mt 21:19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.*

Jesus saw a fig tree along the road and went to it to satisfy his hunger. This tree was "*in the way*". It was growing beside the roadway so he was not taking figs that belonged to someone. I love how the Holy Spirit added this phrase just to make sure everyone knew Jesus was not doing something wrong.

When he got to the tree he saw there were no figs, but "*leaves only*". Mark tells us the "time of figs was not yet" (Mk. 11:13). Some have said this means the time of *harvesting* figs had not yet come. Fig trees produce fruit first, and then leaves. So no matter what the season, this tree having leaves suggested there would be figs growing on it. However, when Jesus examined the tree, there were no figs.

Finding no fruit, Jesus cursed the fig tree. He cursed the tree in such a fashion that it would never produce fruit again (cf. Mk. 11:14). He killed the tree with his words. The word, "*withered*" means to shrivel. The word "*presently*" means instantly. It dried up by its roots that instant even though it would be the next day before they would notice.

This fig tree was a symbol of Israel (cf. Hos. 9:10; Joel 1:7). The leaves were a symbol of Israel's empty, external, religion. Their religious system was all show, and no fruit. Proof of genuine faith is fruit, not leaves, not branches, but fruit. Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them (Mt. 7:20). He warned about those who bore no fruit (Mk. 4:13-20).

No doubt, Jesus was attempting to reveal the future of Israel. Like this tree, they had the leaves of profession, but none of the fruit of life. Just like the tree, Israel would be judged.

We dare not miss the message to us in the New Testament. A mere profession is not sufficient. Fruit is always the evidence of real salvation. Looking good is not enough. A fruitless life grieves the Lord. A fruitless life offers no help to those in need. A fruitless life will suffer the judgment of God.

This was the only destructive miracle Jesus ever performed. The perishing of the swine was destructive but their death was the result of the demons and not a direct act of Jesus (Mt. 8:32).

Some have found Jesus' treatment of the tree to be inappropriate. After all, it did have leaves. We must consider the facts involved. First, Jesus never does wrong. Secondly, since Jesus was God, he could do with it as he pleased. Thirdly, the tree was not doing what it was created to do. It had been created to bare fruit, not leaves. Fourthly, Jesus took this opportunity to teach a lesson to Israel. If using this one barren tree could open the eyes of even one person, it would be worth it.

*Mt 21:20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!*

This took place the morning after he cursed the tree (cf. Mk. 11:20). Mark tells us it dried up from the roots (Mk. 11:20). Undoubtedly, it looked as though it had been dead for years.

The disciples "*marvelled*" when they saw how soon the tree had dried up. It is amazing to me that the disciples were still being amazed at his miracles. We should never get used to God's work, but we should come to the place to where it does not surprise us to see Him do the impossible. From what Jesus said next, he must feel the same way.

*Mt 21:21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.*

As he had done so many times, Jesus used the circumstances at hand to teach a spiritual lesson. He used this opportunity to teach about faith.

His comments in verses 21 and 22 were in response to the disciples being amazed at his power to curse the fig tree. The fact that they marveled shows they were still doubting his power.

The word "*Faith*" in this verse means believing. But, it specifically means believing that which what God has said. The miracle of the fig tree was accomplished when Jesus spoke. What he spoke, came to pass. And, this is the type of faith Jesus was referring to in this verse. This is the type of faith that is based on what God has said. When God says it, we can believe it no matter how impossible it might be. We can believe everything God said in His Word. If He said it, we can believe it without doubt or fear.

Just as the word faith deals with us believing what God has said, the word "*doubt*" deals with us refusing to believe what God has said. Even though God has shown us clearly in His word, we still refuse to believe. I suppose nothing grieves God worse.

The "*mountain*" Jesus referred to was figurative, and speaking of any problem too big for us to handle. He was simply saying that with faith we can overcome any difficulty. I am glad real faith can move mountains. The key to seeing things done, is truly believing what God said.

*Mt 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

Jesus was not saying we can ask for ridiculous things and expect God to answer. However, he was saying we can ask, expect, and receive anything we need. If we have a promise in the Word of God, we can expect to receive. When we pray with the type of faith described in these verses we can rest assured that God will do what we ask. The reason, if we are asking according to what His Word says, we can be sure we are asking according to His will.

Jesus also spoke here about the importance of forgiveness (cf. Mk. 11:25-26).

*Mt 21:23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?*

Jesus went into the temple again.

Notice, he went to the temple even though it was clear that he was not pleased with what was happening there (cf. 21:13). This shows how patient God is with man. It shows how He is willing to go to extreme measures to give man an opportunity to repent.

However, the day would come when his patience would run out. Instead of calling the temple "my Father's house", he would call it, "your house" (Mt. 23:38). When he would leave the temple at that time, the glory of God would leave with him, and judgment would be declared (Mt. 24:1-2).

The chief priests and elders asked "*By what authority doest thou these things*". Their question was not an unreasonable question. The temple was a place that should have been protected from anyone who might come in with heresy.

The word "*authority*" means "to have the right". They were asking him who gave him the right to do what he had been doing, and saying what he had been saying. The Jewish rabbis got their authority from the rabbis that came before them. Today's rabbi got their authority from yesterday's rabbi. Yesterday's rabbi got their authority from last week's rabbi. Last week's rabbi got their authority from last year's rabbi. And last year's rabbi got their authority from the rabbi of ten years ago. And so it went on and on. They had to be approved by the Sanhedrin before they would be accepted.

But, Jesus had not sought their permission. And the Jews hated that because they thought they were the authority of the day.

Imagine, Jesus, being God, had the authority to say whatever he wanted to, and it would be binding upon mankind. He had authority raise the dead, to cast out demons, to give eternal life, and authority to judge. Had Jesus not been who he claimed, his actions would have been blasphemous. But, he was who he claimed to be. He was God, and God needs the approval of no man.

*Mt 21:24-25 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?*

Jesus answered their question with a question. Their question did not deserve an answer. Imagine, mortal men demanding from God an answer to their question.

He responded to their question by asking a question they could not answer. He asked them where they thought John the baptist got his authority to preach his message, and to baptize. Did God give him that authority, or did it come from man?

They knew if they said John's baptism was from heaven, Jesus would ask them why they refused to believe him.

*Mt 21:26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.*

They knew the people believed John to be a prophet, so they could not say his baptism was of man. If they did, the people would turn against them. Luke tells us they actually feared being stoned by the people (Lk. 20:6).

*Mt 21:27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

The chief priests and elders decided it would be best to not answer Jesus' question at all. Jesus had trapped them in their own web. You do not corner the God of heaven. Jesus was not willing to answer those whose minds were already closed. What good would it do, they were not going to believe him no matter what he said.

They, no doubt, were trying to set Jesus up for a fall. Had he simply said his authority came from God, there was a good chance they would have tried to put him to death on the spot. They had already tried before (Jn. 5:18).

## THE PARABLE OF TWO SONS 21:28-32

Jesus gave a series of three parables to describe the condition of the Jewish leaders. The first one was about two sons. In this parable, the father represents God, and the two sons represent the Jews.

### THE RESPONSIBILITY

*Mt 21:28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.*

Notice, the parable was about a father and his two sons. As with any family, these sons had a responsibility to their father. They were obligated to do his will. And, so it is with Israel (and all of God's creation). All of Israel had enjoyed the earth God created, ate the food He provided, breathed the air He made, and living the life He had given. They were responsible for how they treated the God who had been so good to them.

### THE REQUEST

The father asked one of his sons to go and work in his vineyard for the day. This was not an unfair request. The son lived in the father's house, ate at the father's table, and wore the clothes the father provided.

### THE REFUSAL

*Mt 21:29 He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went.*

This son refused to do as his father requested. He said flatly, "I will not". He not only refused, but he was abrupt in his refusal. You can hear the hostility in his answer. We are not told why this son had such a rebellious spirit, but it was not because he had a bad father. If he was angry, it was not the father's fault.

### THE REPENTANCE

After some time, this son "*repented, and went*". Perhaps he realized how harsh he had been to his father. Perhaps he remembered how good his father had been to him. Whatever the reason, he changed his mind, and did what his father requested.

This is a perfect picture of repentance. Repentance is a change of attitude that results in a change of action. Had he merely told his father he was sorry for his rebellion, that would not have been repentance. Repentance involves a change of conduct.

### THE RESPONSE

*Mt 21:30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.*

The father asked his second son the same thing he had asked the first. This son responded quickly by saying he would go. This son responded just as quickly as his brother. His answer was, "*I go, sir*". Perhaps he saw it as his duty since his father had provided for him.

He promised to go the vineyard, but he "*went not*". We are not told why he did not go and it really does not matter. The fact is, he did not do what the father asked him to do. And while he lounged in the house his father had provided, the fruit in the vineyard was perishing.

## THE REBUKE

Jesus revealed the reason for his parable. In no uncertain terms, he told the Jewish leaders they were like the first son in the parable. They said they were obeying God, but they were not.

*Mt 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

Jesus had set the trap. He asked which of the sons had done the will of his father. That is the question. What did these sons do? They had no option but to say the "first". And by their response, they were caught in Jesus' trap.

What Jesus said next cut these people to their heart. He said "*the publican and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*". Nothing he could have said would have cut them deeper, or made made them more angry.

He mentioned two of the most hated groups of people of that day.

The "*publicans*" were some of the most hated of all men at that time. They were tax collectors for the Roman government. Most of them were crooks who demanded more money from the people than they actually owed for taxes and kept the extra for themselves. To make matters worse, many of these publicans were Jews that had been hired by Rome. So, the Jews saw a publican as a traitor.

Of course the "*harlots*" were a despised group. They were the outcast of society. Even those who used their services despised them because their conduct was so disgusting.

*Mt 21:32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

Jesus explained the meaning of his parable in this verse. The scribes and Pharisees heard and rejected the message of John the baptist. John's message pointed to Jesus (Jn. 1:29). The religious bunch rejected Jesus just like they rejected John.

However, many of the publicans and harlots heard John's message, and believed.

The message of the parable is clear. The worse of sinners (tax collectors, harlots, etc.) were like the first son. They had lived their lives refusing to obey the will of God. But, many of them had heard John's message, and repented.

On the other hand, the Jewish leaders who claimed they were keeping God's law, had rejected John's message. A righteous man came with a righteous message, and they rejected him and his message.

Those sinners that the scribes and Pharisees despised so much would enter the kingdom, while they themselves would not. The scribes and Pharisees thought they were so close to God but Jesus told them they did not even know God.

To make matters worse, the Jewish leaders saw the repentance of the sinners, and still refused to repent themselves. Seeing the dramatic change in the lives of those sinners should have convinced the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus' was God. Seeing a drunk stop drinking and become a good father, should have had an impact on them. Seeing a harlot leave her business and become a model citizen should have been proof enough. Yet, they continued in their self-righteous traditions instead of accepting the message of John and Jesus.

## PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS 21:33-46

### THE SERVANTS WERE SENT

The second parable was about a householder and his son. In this parable, I believe the householder represents God, the vineyard represents the city of Jerusalem, the fence represents the law, the winepress represents the holy of holies, the tower represents the temple, the husbandmen represent the religious Jewish leaders, the servants represent the prophets, the fruit represents a righteous life, and the far county represents heaven.

The situation Jesus described in this parable was a common practice in that day. The owner of a farm or vineyard would allow laborers to live on his property and work the land. The laborers would do the work, the owner would get a certain portion of the harvest, and they would keep the rest. They could do very well as long as they worked as they should.

Even though this parable is dealing with Israel, much of it can be applied to the church. Our Lord has returned to heaven (Acts 1:9-10) and has left us to work his vineyard. While He is gone, we are to do in the vineyard what He would do if He were here. While we are working, He rewards us daily, but the day will come when He will return. At that time, He will exam our labor, and reward us accordingly (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

*Mt 21:33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:*

This homeowner planted a vineyard. There is one reason to plant a vineyard, to produce grapes. The grapes in this parable represent works of righteousness. God asks one thing of His people, to live right. He wants a people who will obey Him. He has been so good to us, that is not too much to ask.

He "*hedged it round about*" means he built a fence around it to protect it. This fence may have been made of wood, stone, or thorns. A fence was vital for a vineyard because of the abundance of thieves and animals that would steal or destroy the crop. God protected his vineyard. He protected Israel with the law. The law separated Israel from the sin of the world around it. The truths of God's Word (Old and New Testaments) still protect His church today.

He "*digged a winepress in it*". The winepress consisted of two parts. First, a trough placed above where the grapes were put to be trodden by the feet, and then, a smaller trough below to catch the juice as it flowed out. These wine presses were commonly hewed out of solid rock.

We can determine from the winepress that this was to be a place of blessing. This wasn't a factory designed simply to make the owner a profit. It was a place where laborer and Lord could be blessed.

He built a "*tower*". This was a place where the vine dresser might lodge and watch the vineyard. Like the fence, the tower was vital for a vineyard's protection. The tower was for security, shelter, and storage. The vine dresser needed security because of the thieves that would come in and rob him, and the animals that could injure him. He needed shelter to protect him from heat, cold, wind, and rain. He needed storage for the tools and such he needed to do his job in the vineyard.

He "*let it out to husbandmen*". He employed laborers to work the vineyard and to oversee its production. As mentioned already, this was a common practice. These workers were to treat the vineyard as their own. They were to care for it, protect it, and gather and guard its harvest for the owner. They were to provide a certain portion of the harvest to the owner for rent, and they would enjoy the rest of the produce for themselves.

And so, God entrusted his beloved nation of Israel to the care of the priests. It was their responsibility to produce and protect the harvest God expected.

He "*went into a far country*". After seeing to all the necessary details of his vineyard, he traveled to a far country. Luke tells us he would be gone a "long time" in the far country (Lk. 20:9). This implies he will return to determine the state of his vineyard, but no specific return date was given.

From this description, we can see the householder's desire that his vineyard produce well. He was sparing no expense or labor. God has provided everything necessary for a good harvest.

*Mt 21:34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.*

As described, the husbandmen were to work the vineyard and give to the householder a portion of the harvest as rent. The time of harvest was close, so the householder sent one of his servants to the vineyard.

The "*time of the fruit drew near*". From time to time the householder would send one of his servants to check up on the laborers in the vineyard. This time of reckoning was a wake up call to the laborers. It caused them to evaluate their labor in the vineyard and their faithfulness to their master. Without this time of reckoning, it would have been easy for the laborers to become slothful and not do what they should be doing.

In like fashion, God sent His prophets to the people of Israel. He did so in an attempt to call them back to purity. It was truly, a wake up call to Israel. The Lord desired the fruit of love, obedience, dedication, and right living, from the people of Israel.

*Mt 21:35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.*

Instead of welcoming the servants of the householder, the husbandmen mistreated them. They beat, killed, and stoned them. This is absolutely amazing. The owner had been nothing but good to them. They had a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear, and a future they could depend on, because of the goodness of the owner. And, after his goodness to them, they mistreated the servants he sent.

So it was with the religious leaders of Israel. God sent prophets to them, but they ignored, abused, mistreated, and killed them. The religious bunch refused to acknowledge their sin or listen to anyone who dared to suggest they were not right with God. There is no doubt about the truth of this statement (2 Chr. 24:21; 36:16; Ne. 9:26; Mt. 5:12; 23:34,37; Acts 7:52; 1 Th. 2:15; Heb. 11:36-37).

Many of the Old Testament saints were mistreated. A few of those who were either mistreated or killed are Abel, Amos, Daniel, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Isaiah, Meshach, Shadrach, Abednego, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah.

*Mt 21:36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.*

The householder sent more of his servants and they were mistreated as the first. He not only sent other servants, but he sent "*more*" than he had before.

How patient this householder was. It shows the longsuffering of God and His desire to see Israel right with Him. The messengers kept coming. They kept warning the unfaithful of the expectations of the householder. And they simply continued to close their ears.

Someone might say no one would keep sending servants to these people when they treated them so horribly. But, there is one who would. God would. And, that is the point, only God would do such a thing.

#### THE SON WAS SLAIN

*Mt 21:37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.*

Luke shows how personal this was to the householder. He said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him" (Lk. 20:13).

He could have sent an army to destroy them. Instead, he sent his own son. God could have destroyed Israel, and been right doing so, but He sent His Son.

He sent His Son for the same reason he sent the servants. He was seeking fruit from the vineyard. God simply wanted Israel to live right, and give Him the glory He deserved.

*Mt 21:38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.*

They recognized him to be the son of the householder. From the evil recesses of their hearts came a plan that was so wicked it defies imagination. Instead of honoring the son, they would kill him and then the entire vineyard would be theirs.

The motive of their evil plot was that they might cease being servants and become the boss. That is man's problem still. He wants to be in control. The sinful nature of man longs to be able to do what it wants to.

The obvious question is, what about the householder? Did they actually think he would allow them to kill his son, take the vineyard, and not do anything about it? They may get rid of the son but they would never possess the vineyard.

Notice, they knew who the Son was, and they killed him anyway. They did not care about the truth. And so it was with the religious leaders of Israel. After Jesus' resurrection, they bribed guards to lie about his body (Mt. 28:12-15). Many today acknowledge who Jesus is, but they still refuse to obey Him.

*Mt 21:39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.*

They "*caught*" the son in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:47-54). They "*cast him out of the vineyard*". Jesus was taken outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified (Heb. 13:12). And they "*slew him*" (Mt. 27:35).

They refused to honor the son. Only those on earth choose to ignore the Son of God. Those in heaven adore Him, those in hell hate Him, but only those on earth ignore Him.

We dare not miss the fact that Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God here. This is one of the most clear instances of him claiming to be deity.

Jesus looked them straight in the eye and told them that he knew they were going to kill him.

*Mt 21:40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*

The time would come when the householder would return from his journey. The husbandmen knew he would be returning. They also knew when he returned they would be held accountable for how they had taken care of vineyard during his absence.

Jesus asked them what the householder should do to the wicked husbandmen. At this time, they did not realize they were talking about them. Jesus looked into the face of those were guilty and asked them what their sentence should be.

Notice, the owner did come. The time of reckoning will come. No one escapes the Lord. The day will come when we will face the results of how we served Him.

*Mt 21:41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*

The chief priests and elders were quick to say the householder should do two things. He should destroy the "*wicked men*", and he should give "*his vineyard unto other husbandmen*". Little did they know that they were predicting their own doom. God did exactly what they said the owner should do.

The words "*miserably destroy*" are emphatic. They suggest the chief priests and elders were infuriated about how the husbandmen had treated the servants that had been sent to them. At this point, they were still missing the fact that that Jesus was talking about them. No doubt, they uttered these words in pride and arrogance. In their self-righteousness they saw themselves as flawless and others as failures. It is amazing how we can get so upset about something someone else is doing, when we are doing the very same thing. How quick we are to cast the first stone.

But, they were right. To miserably destroy such wicked men would be a fit punishment. They certainly deserved such punishment for how they had treated the householder.

God did give His vineyard to another. He had intended to use Israel to reach the world. But, Israel refused to obey God. That was the problem when Jesus came. Israel was in sin and refused to repent. However, God did not abandon His plan. He simply found someone else to carry it out. He turned to the Gentiles. What He tried to accomplish through Israel, He is attempting to do now through the church.

And so, the householder chose one who would "*render him the fruits in their seasons*". He found someone who would be more likely to do what they were supposed to do. The problem is, the Gentiles are not doing any better than Israel did.

There came a point when the chief priests and elders realized Jesus was talking about them. Luke gives us their response when this happened. Luke tells us, "And when they heard it, they said, God forbid" (Lk. 20:16). The words, "God forbid" mean, "let it not be so". Once they realized he was talking about them, they were begging that they not be judged. They had been quick to pronounce judgment on those in Jesus' parable, until they realized he had been talking about them.

And so, Jesus added another thought in response to their comment. He spoke about a stone that had been rejected by a builder.

#### THE STONE WAS SET

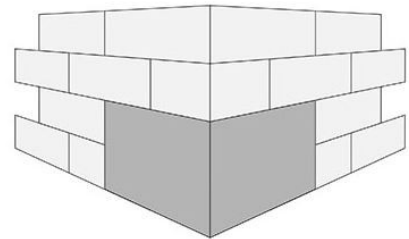
It seems like Jesus changed the subject in the next couple of verses, but he did not. As mentioned, the chief priests and elders had said, "God forbid" when they realized Jesus had been talking about them in his parable. So, Jesus' comments about this stone are connected to the parable he had just given.

These religious hypocrites should have been glad to hear what Jesus was about to say because he is going to give them another chance to repent and accept the way of forgiveness.

*Mt 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*

Once again, Jesus asked these religious bunch if they had not read the scriptures. This had to touch a nerve with them since they thought they were experts in the scriptures.

The scripture Jesus referred to here is from Psalms 118:22-23. Since the land of Israel had an abundance of rocks they used stones to build with. The stones had to be chosen carefully in order that they might fit together properly. Through the process of choosing the next stone, many would have to be rejected by the builder. Jesus was the stone that the Jews had rejected. He simply did not fit into their religion.



The stone at the "*head of the corner*" was called the cornerstone. It was the stone that was placed in the corner of the foundation of a building.

A cornerstone was the most important stone in a building. It was important because it was the most important part of the foundation.

This stone had to be strong because much of the weight of the building rested on it. It was important because the angles to the rest of the building depended on it. It had to be perfectly shaped or the entire building would be out of square.

So, the cornerstone is the most carefully chosen stone. It had to be cut exactly for it to fit properly. Because of this, many stones were rejected before one could be found that would work.

God took the stone the Jews had rejected and made it the cornerstone of His building. The stone the builders rejected has "*become the head of the corner*". And, this was "*the Lord's doing*". Only God could do such a thing.

This was "*the Lord's doing*". It was God's work. He placed the rejected stone as the cornerstone. Luke tells us, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner" (Acts. 4:10-12). God raised him from the dead (Mk. 16:6), brought him back to heaven (Acts 1:9-11), and sat him on His right side (Ps. 110:1; Mt. 26:64; 1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 1:3; 10:12).

*Mt 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

If there was any doubt in their minds about what Jesus had been talking about, this sentence cleared it up. The kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to another.



God put them in His vineyard so that He might bless them. A vineyard was a place of blessing. But, they had abused His goodness, used it for their pleasure, and refused to give Him the glory.

They never used what God had given them in the way He desired. They devoured what He gave them without even as much as a thank you. They never gave Him the fruit of a righteous life. Therefore, God would set Israel aside. He would graft in the Gentiles like a wild branch being grafted into an olive tree (Rom. 11:17).

As He does so many times, God will use what seems to tragedy into triumph. By temporally turning to the Gentiles, the way of salvation was opened to the world. Now whosoever, Jew or Gentile, may be saved (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 10:13; 1 Jn. 5:1).

Also, God will use His turning to the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to turn back to Him. Romans tells us this will "provoke them to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11). Seeing how God is working with the Gentiles will cause the Jews to want a relationship with Him.

Eventually, the Jews will get the kingdom He promised them. God promised a kingdom. The day is coming when Israel will see her error, and repent (Zech. 12:10). God will keep His promise to Israel by setting up His kingdom for a thousand years (Mt. 24:31; Rev. 20:1-3).

*Mt 21:44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Whosoever "shall fall on this stone shall be broken" was referring to a person being broken by conviction and falling at the feet of Jesus. Nothing touches the heart of God like a person broken over their sin. The Psalmist tells us, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps 51:17).

Notice, Jesus said "whosoever". It does not matter how wicked the person has been, they will find forgiveness at the feet of Jesus. It does not matter how moral the person is, they need this forgiveness.

Jesus was giving these religious leaders another chance to repent and get right. As his comments about the stone suggest, had they simply fallen at the feet of Jesus in contrition, they could have been forgiven and escaped the judgment to come.

The words, "*whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder*" refer to those who refuse to repent and suffer the judgment of God as a result. They could have been forgiven, but they refused to repent. The stone they rejected will fall on them and will grind them to powder. If people continue to reject him, the same power that could have saved them, will become their destruction.

The thought is, they will be ground to dust and the wind will blow them away. That is exactly what happened to Israel. Judgment did come. Titus came into Jerusalem in 70 AD, destroyed the temple and much of the city of Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says there were 1.1 million killed. the majority being Jews, and 97,000 captured during this siege.

#### THE SINNERS WERE STUBBORN

*Mt 21:45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.*

They finally got it. They recognized he was talking about them.

So, these religious hypocrites knew Jesus was talking about them. Would they give heed to his warning and repent? No, the next verse will show us this simply caused them to be even more determined to do away with him. Recognizing their future did not bring them to repentance. So it is with many today.

*Mt 21:46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.*

Even knowing the truth, "*they sought to lay hands on him*". These are some of the most unbelievable words in the bible. After all Jesus said, they still wanted to kill him. He told them plainly that they were about to kill the Son of God, and they went straight into their plan to do it.

Luke tells us they sought to lay hands on him "the same hour" (Lk. 20:19). They wanted to take him immediately but were afraid of how the people would react. Mark tells us they "left him, and went their way" (Mk. 12:12). This reveals their attitude of wanting nothing to do with Jesus and wanting to do things their way.

### THE PARTY THAT WAS INCREDIBLE

Jesus spoke of a wedding ceremony that was beyond our imagination.

*Mt 22:1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,*

Jesus was still talking to the chief priests and elders in these verses. He gave the third parable in an attempt to show them how they were making the biggest blunder of their lives. They were about to reject their Messiah and their only means of salvation.

Jesus gave another parable that is recorded in Luke 14:16-24. Though these parables are quite similar, they were spoken at a different time, and for a different purpose.

*Mt 22:2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,*

Of course the king in this parable represents God the Father and his son represents Jesus. The wedding of a king's son was a big deal. There was more involved than just a wedding ceremony. There was a week long feast with all types of celebration.

This invitation represented the prepared blessings that come from God to those who accept His way of forgiveness. God has prepared the way for us to experience forgiveness, joy, comfort, peace, power, and then we get to go to heaven.

### THE PEOPLE THAT WERE INVITED

For the wedding ceremony to be all it was meant to be, there had to be guests.

*Mt 22:3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come.*

This father wanted to share his joy with others. One of delights of a wedding is the guests who are able to share the joy.

Those who were "*bidden to the wedding*" refers to the Jews in general. They had been invited before but now was the time to respond to the invitation. As has been mentioned many times, God came to the Jew first.

The "*servants*" sent out refer to the Old Testament prophets. For many years God had sent His messengers inviting the people of Israel.

This is an astounding invitation. It is astounding because of who was extending the invitation. The invitation came straight from the king himself.

It was astounding because of who the wedding was for. It was for a king's son.

It was astounding because of what it was. It was not an invitation to come by for cheese and crackers. It was a wedding. There would be seven days of feasting and festivity.

We must remember, this was a royal wedding. It was as privileged an invitation then as it is now. To receive an invitation to such a wedding would be an honor indeed. No one in their right mind would refuse to come to such an event. To reject such an invitation would be an insult to the king. And yet, some did refuse. They "*would not come*". At this point, we are not told why they refused, but simply, they refused to come. Likewise, the Jews rejected God's invitation (Mt. 23:37; Jn. 1:11).

*Mt 22:4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.*

Another invitation was extended. The custom was to send an invitation and a second invitation near the time of the wedding. But, some of those he had already invited had not responded. Since they had neglected his first invitation, he was under no obligation to contact these people again. Yet in mercy, he did.

The "*other servants*" is probably referring to John the baptist (Mt. 3:2) and the disciples (Mt. 10:6; Lk. 9:1-11; 10:1). John came saying, the kingdom of heaven is "at hand" (Mt. 3:2). The time spoken of by the Old Testament prophets had arrived. The Messiah had come. It was time to answer the king's invitation.

This king had invested a great deal in the wedding. He had killed his "*oxen*" and "*fatlings*". A wedding of this size would require a large amount of food. This involved a great expense and effort on the part of the host. It certainly cost God a lot to provide salvation.

This invitation indicates the fact that the host had provided all that was necessary. He said, "*I have prepared my dinner*". Those invited were not asked to bring anything, they were simply asked to come. God has prepared the way to forgiveness, nothing has to be added. In fact, nothing can be added. The death and resurrection of Jesus paid the total payment of our sin. Jesus' work satisfied the holiness of God (Isa. 53:11). We come to Him empty handed.

The second invitation was even more urgent than the first. This was not the time for delay. He said, "*all things are ready*".

We should remember, they did not have refrigerators. There was no way to save the food that had been prepared. If the guests did not come, all the food would ruin. Indeed, this was an urgent invitation. The bible says "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

The invitation also gave the necessary instructions. All they had to do was "*come*". The king had done all that was necessary for the wedding and the festivities. The guests had to do nothing but come. That simple invitation has not changed. Jesus is still asking people to come (Mt. 11:28).

The "*fatlings*" the king spoke of refers to the animals he had fed well with the wedding in mind. These animals had received the best of his grain. He had prepared the best of his stock for this feast. What could be better than being able to enjoy the splendor of heaven for eternity?

*Mt 22:5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:*

The second call was rejected as the first had been. They made "*light of it*". These words mean, "to be careless of, or to neglect". They simply did not pay any attention to the invitation. A person does not have to curse God openly to reject His way of salvation. Ignoring His invitation is rejecting His invitation.

Some simply, "*went their ways*". They had other things they thought were more important. One went "*to his farm*", another "*to his merchandise*". The country folks had their farms and the city folks had their businesses. The personal affairs of these people were not wrong within themselves, but they should not come before this great invitation. They simply wanted to do what they wanted to do. It doesn't make much for the devil to distract some people. Those who refused the invitation choose the mundane affairs of every day life over the joy and delight of the wedding festivity.

*Mt 22:6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.*

For some merely neglecting the invitation was not enough. They mistreated those who the king had sent. Some went so far as to kill the king's messengers. John the baptist lost his life for speaking God's message (Mt. 14:3-12). Stephen was the first martyr after the cross (Acts 7:54-60). So many of God's messengers have been mistreated, or even killed, for simply delivering the message from the king (1 Th. 2:15).

Some of those invited to the wedding treated the messengers "*spitefully*". They treated the messengers in such a manner because they despised the king. How could anyone have this type of attitude about such a wonderful king? In like fashion, how could anyone hate the God who loves them.

*Mt 22:7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*

Understandably, the king was angry when he heard of how his servants had been mistreated. The word, "*wroth*" carries with it the idea of exasperating. The king had become weary of their abuse. He had done nothing but good to them, and they had ignored, rejected, and mistreated him, and his messengers.

Those who rejected the king's mercy would learn about the king's wrath. God is patient, but His patience runs out. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God (Heb. 10:31). The wrath of God awaits those who refuse His mercy.

As in the preceding parable, God is seen as sending His armies and destroying those who reject His Son. Part of this judgment took place when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. It could also be referring to the judgment on Israel during the Tribulation Period spoken of in the book of the Revelation.

Notice, the king sent "*his*" armies. This is clearly speaking of Titus invading Jerusalem. Titus was an ungodly man, yet God refers to him and his army as one of "*his*" armies. This reminds us of how God is God over all. There are times when He uses the ungodly to accomplish His will.

*Mt 22:8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.*

The wedding "*is ready*". The wedding would take place in spite of the many who refuse to be a part of it.

Those who had been invited were deemed "*not worthy*" because they had rejected the invitation.

When we think of the word "worthy" we usually think of someone who has done something that makes them deserving of a reward, or benefit. The fact is, none of us will ever truly be deserving of God's salvation. However, God declares us worthy when we come to Him repenting of our sinful condition, and accepting the finished work of Calvary as our only hope of forgiveness. There is no other way.

*Mt 22:9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.*

The word, "*highways*" speaks of an intersection where two or more roads meet. At such a spot there would be all types of people coming and going. They were to go to anyone they could find. And so, the invitation that was rejected by most of Israel, was extended to the Gentiles.

*Mt 22:10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

The servants were obedient to the instructions of the king. We should not take this thought lightly. Most of those sharing the gospel at that time were Jews. They loved their beloved nation. It was not easy for them to go to the Gentiles. The Jews considered the Gentiles as unworthy of the things of God (Mt. 7:6; 15:26; Jn. 4:9). Peter struggled over this but ended up carrying the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-48). Paul loved his people (Rom. 9:3) but was willing to obey the Holy Spirit and preach to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6).

It is amazing that those who saw themselves as worthy, Jesus called "unworthy". And, those they thought were unworthy, God considered worthy.

The invitation went out to the "*bad and good*". Some were morally corrupt, living wicked lives. Some were morally good, living clean and productive lives. But, whether corrupt or clean, all were sinners and in need of the forgiveness God was offering.

#### THE PERSON THAT WAS INTRUDING

There was a man who tried to be a part of the party without the required wedding garment.

*Mt 22:11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:*

The man in this verse was a picture of those Jesus was talking to. The chief priests and elders thought they would certainly make it to heaven. They thought their good deeds was sufficient to provide them a place in heaven. Jesus was about to show them otherwise.

One of the highlights of such a royal wedding was when the king made his appearance. It did not matter how beautiful the decorations, how delicious the food, or how amazing the music, the wedding was not complete until the king made an entrance.

When this king came in he saw a man who was not wearing the proper attire. It was customary for the host to supply all the guests with a garment to wear for the wedding. Remember, these folks were found on the streets and by-ways. They had not been prepared to go to a wedding. They did not have garments that were acceptable. They had to depend on the host of the wedding to provide the necessary attire.

But, what exactly is the wedding garment? What was Jesus referring to? As always, we find the answer to bible questions in the bible itself. Isaiah tells us this garment is the robe of righteousness that God provides to the repentant sinner. Isaiah said, "He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). The saints described in Revelation were wearing white robes (Rev. 7:9,14). And so, we see this garment speaks of a life of righteousness.

We need His garment because of our sin. Like Adam, we are naked before God (Gen. 3:10). And, like Adam, we need the garment that will satisfy a holy God (Gen. 3:21). Our garments of self righteousness are not sufficient. Only God can provide a garment that satisfies Him. And, He does provide such a garment (Isa. 61:10).

There was a vast difference between those who were wearing their wedding attire and the man who wore his street clothes. Is your life different than the world? Do the people around you notice a difference in you? How can we claim to know Him if we do not display a righteous life?

Before these guests could put on the new garment, they had to remove their own attire. In like fashion, we must lay aside our own good deeds before we accept His righteousness.

There are some who profess, but do not possess. They claim to be saved, but they are not. They may deceive the church, but they will not deceive Christ. Jesus knows his sheep (Jn. 10:14). The Lord knows who are His (2 Tim. 2:19).

*Mt 22:12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

For most of those at the wedding, the appearance of the king was a delight. But, for this man, the king's appearance brought fear.

The word, "*friend*" was a word that was used when addressing someone whose name is not known. The king did not know this man. Jesus will say to many, "I never knew you" (Mt. 7:23).

The king spied the impostor immediately. His lack of a wedding garment gave him away. He could not hide himself among the crowd.

Since a wedding garment was provided by the host, we know this man was offered one, but refused to accept it. To reject the provided garment would be disrespectful of the king. He was saying his garments were as good as the king's.

We are not told what this man was wearing. It may have been the best he had, but it was not what was required of the king. The best we can do is not sufficient (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

He seemed totally satisfied with his own garment, until the king came in. When the king came to him, suddenly he saw his condition. Many are content with their lives until the all seeing eye of God examines them. Our Lord walks among the candlesticks and knows the truth (Rev. 2:1).

The man was "*speechless*". There was nothing he could say. The presence of the king took all his excuses and explanations away. Like a criminal caught red handed, there was nothing he could say. No doubt there had been many of the other guests that had looked at him and it did not bother him in the least. But, when the king looked him over, he trembled.

*Mt 22:13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The wording of this verse makes it clear that Jesus was referring to hell.

The king's instructions was, "*Bind him hand and foot*". The hands that should have been used to the glory of God, were bound. The feet that should have been used to walk with God, were bound.

The "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" are words that refer to the agony of hell. Jesus used this term often (Mt. 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30, 46).

Weeping signifies a place of great sorrow. The emotional torment of hell is horrible. To know you are in a place you will never get out of. To hear the screams of torments souls all around you. And, what is probably the worse thing, to know you did not have to go there.

The weeping in hell is different than the weeping on earth. The weeping in hell produces no tears. Those in hell would love to have a few tears to cool their parched lips. The weeping in hell produces no relief. A good cry can actually help to cleanse our system and relieve our stress. But the weeping in hell only makes the torment worse.

Gnashing of teeth is referring to grinding one's teeth together because of severe pain. It signifies the untold agony of hell. The pain of burning forever would be indescribable.

This man was to be cast into "*outer darkness*". This place of darkness marks a contrast of the bright and cheery celebration of the wedding. This darkness may speak of the absence of God in hell. Since God is light (1 Jn. 1:5) the absence of God will be darkness. This darkness may speak of the wickedness in hell. Darkness is viewed in the bible as ungodliness (Ps. 82:5; Pro. 2:13).

As horrible as the casting into outer darkness was, it is made worse by the fact that he was taken away from a wonderful feast. Hell is bad because of all that is there, but it is equally bad because of what is not there. There is no joy, peace, or love in hell.

*Mt 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.*

Those who "*are called*" are those who received an invitation to the wedding. In the case of this parable, that speaks of all of Israel.

Jesus said, "*many*" are called. There is a general call of God to sinners who hear the gospel which invites them to the wonders of salvation (Mt. 11:28). Certainly God desires that all be saved (Ezk. 33:11). He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus told us to go into *all* the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature (Mk. 16:15).

However, this call can be resisted (Acts 7:51; Rom. 10:21; 2 Th. 2:10). The king's invitation could be accepted, or rejected. Those who go to hell will go because, like those in this parable, they reject the gospel message. They do not go to hell because they were not chosen.

God calls those who have received salvation His "*chosen*". This does not mean that God has predetermined some to heaven and some to hell. It simply means He determined to save those who would come to Him believing and repenting.

This does not mean God calls some but does not chose them to go to heaven. Certainly God would not extend a call to someone and then refuse to save them when they ask.

This verse does not teach limited atonement. Jesus died for all (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Jn. 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1) Salvation is available to all. In other words, there is no one on earth who could not be saved if they will repent and believe.

The only thing that stops a person from getting saved is their own refusal to accept the gospel. Jesus said, "ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (Jn. 5:40). He was speaking to people who could have been saved, but they would not come to him.

We cannot deny the fact that salvation is a work that God does in the heart of a sinner. At the same time, we cannot deny the fact that man has a responsibility to accept, or refuse, that work. Paul explains both of these aspects of salvation when he wrote to the Philippians (Phil. 2:12-13).

Jesus' enemies understood his parables were speaking against them. Yet, the truth he proclaimed brought no conviction to their hearts. There was no fear of the things that were to come. In fact, hearing Jesus' warning seemed to enrage them even more. They were even more determined to do away with him.

#### THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS CONFRONTED JESUS ABOUT TAXES 22:15-22

##### *THIS QUESTION DEALS WITH THE RECEIVING OF THE REVENUE*

Rome had conquered the Jewish nation, along with many others. The Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus and asked if they should pay taxes when it helped finance the evil country of Rome.

*Mt 22:15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*

Once again we see how there were people who hated Jesus so much that they were willing to ignore the facts. The Pharisees met together to discuss how they might trick Jesus into saying something they could use against him. The fact that what he was saying was true did not stop them from attacking him.

The word, "*entangle*" is a word that was used to describe setting a trap while hunting. They were hoping to trick him into saying something they could use against him with the Roman government, the Jewish Sanhedrin, or even the common people themselves. They were about to learn, you can not trap God.

They tried to trap him by his words because they had not been able to trap him by his works. He had done nothing they could use against him. Later, Pilate would have to say, "I find in him no fault at all" (Jn. 18:38).

*Mt 22:16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.*

The Pharisees sent some of their disciples to Jesus. Undoubtedly, they thought their attack on Jesus would be less obvious if their disciples went instead of themselves. They probably thought Jesus would think these disciples in training would be searching for truth and it would cause him to talk more freely.

The disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians teamed together in their attack of Jesus. As their name suggests, the Herodians were a Jewish political group that supported Herod and Rome. They looked at Herod as their deliverer from Roman oppression, so they saw Jesus as a threat to their plans. They were a political group and not a spiritual group. Jesus had already warned about them (Mk. 8:15).

The Herodians and the Pharisees were total opposites, and usually incompatible. However, a common enemy can always bring enemies together.

Luke called this group "spies" and let us know they were pretending to be "just men". As already stated, their intentions were to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him and then they would report it to the Roman government (Lk. 20:20).

They tried to use flattery on Jesus hoping it would cause him to be freer in his speech. Their little speech was pathetic. How sincere they sounded, yet their flattery of Jesus was completely hypocritical.

Notice what they said of Jesus. They gave the characteristics that would be vitally important for any person claiming to be speaking for God. First, that he was "*true*". That means, he was genuine. He really had been sent by God. Second, that he taught "*the way of God in truth*". That means, what he was saying really did come from God, and therefore could be trusted. Third, that he did not regard the "*person of men*". He did not allow himself to be partial. He was willing to speak to the truth to any person, no matter what their standing in life. It is sad that the Pharisees spoke these words in hypocrisy, and really did not believe them.

*Mt 22:17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?*

The "*tribute*" they asked about was referring to the annual tax of one denarius that every person had to pay to Rome. They were actually asking Jesus if he thought it was right to pay taxes to the Roman government.

There could not have been a subject where these two groups would be in more disagreement. The Pharisees were absolutely opposed to the taxation of Rome, and the Herodians were totally for the tax.

The Jews hated this tax because it made them feel like Rome had complete control of them. The Romans had no regard for the God of Israel. Many of the Jews believed it was wrong to pay taxes to a government that did not believe in their God. They opposed this tax because part of it would be used to finance Herod's army.

Also, some of the Jews opposed paying these taxes because the Roman coins had the image of Caesar on them. The Jews considered this to be a violation of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4). Simply using such a coin was bad enough but to have to pay taxes to the Roman government with it made it even worse.

On the other hand, the Herodians favored this tax because it aided Herod. As previously stated, they were proponents of Herod and were for aiding his agenda.

So, if Jesus answered one way, he would be breaking the Jewish law, and upsetting the Jews. If he answered the other way, he would be breaking the Roman law, and upsetting the Romans. Either way, he would be in trouble. These men were hoping this would lead to Jesus being arrested. And so we see why the Pharisees brought the Herodians.

It seemed as though there was no way for Jesus to get out of this dilemma. They thought they had Jesus backed into a corner. However, they had not considered who they were dealing with.

*Mt 22:18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?*

These men had praised Jesus, but their words were not sincere. Jesus was not fooled by their false flattery. He knew they had wicked hearts, and he knew they were trying to trick him. The word, "*hypocrites*" is a word that means "stage player". It was speaking of a person who played a part on stage. An actor pretends to be someone they are not. This group knew how to play the part. They were not who they claimed to be.

*Mt 22:19 Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.*

They brought him a Roman coin called a denarius. A denarius was a silver coin with the image and inscription of the emperor:

*Mt 22:20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?*

Jesus asked one of the most simple, yet profound questions that has ever been asked. The "*image*" was a stamp of the reigning Caesar's head on one side of the coin. This would have been Tiberius Caesar at that time. The "*superscription*" was on the other side of the coin, and were the words that declared Tiberius to be the son of a god.



*Mt 22:21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

The name Caesar was a name used for all Roman emperors at that time. Tiberius Caesar was the Roman emperor from 14 AD to 37 AD, so he was reigning at that time. He was a very ungodly man.

Jesus told them to "*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's*". The word, "*Render*" means, "to give away". It also has the idea of "repaying". This gives us the thought of paying a debt. The Roman government had provided them with security, good roads and other public services, so paying taxes was a way of repaying the government for these services. The same is true today in our country.

Jesus also told them to render to "*God the things that are God's*". If they were to pay their taxes to the country that took care of them, certainly they should give to the God who gave them their very lives. The giving he was referring to dealt with more than money, we should give God our all.

Christians are citizens of two countries, an earthly country and a heavenly country. So, a Christian has a duty to his God to be a good Christian, and to his country to be a good citizen. In essence, Jesus was telling them to pay their taxes, but give their lives to God. If we owe our country our taxes, certainly we owe to our God our hearts. If Caesar can expect taxes, certainly God can expect worship. He wants our heart more than our money. But, if He truly has our heart, He will also have our money.

We should note that, even though the Roman government was ungodly, Jesus never told his disciples to rebel against it. There are times when God's people will be under governments that are wicked and cruel. God will determine how long that ungodly government will oppress His people. No matter what, we are instructed to be good citizens of the country we live in (Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Christians are to be subjected to the government as long as that government does not require them to violate biblical principles. If our government demands we do something that would violate biblical principles, we should obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

*Mt 22:22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

Both groups, Herodian and Pharisee were amazed at Jesus' response. They should have been amazed. The first part of Jesus' response dealt with the Herodians, the second part dealt with the Pharisees. In one sentence, Jesus had put them both to silence. Neither group could use what he said against him.

Dejected and disappointed, they "*left him, and went their way*". Even though Jesus once again had defeated their arguments, they refused to follow him.

THE SADDUCEES CONFRONTED JESUS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION 22:22-33

*THIS QUESTION DEALS WITH THE RESURRECTION OF THE RELATIVES*

The Sadducees asked Jesus what happened to a relative after death.

*Mt 22:23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,*

The "*same day*" another group came to attack Jesus. The Sadducees were Jewish but they did not believe in the resurrection, and completely denied life after death. They did not believe in miracles, angels, demons, or the spiritual world (Acts 23:8).

They, like the Pharisees and Herodians, had a question to ask of Jesus. Their question had as evil a motive as the Pharisees and Herodians. Since they did not believe in the resurrection, they posed an issue that they hoped would trap Jesus.

*Mt 22:24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.*

Their question had to do with an Old Testament custom. If a man died not having children, his brother was instructed to marry the widow (Dt. 25:5-10). This was done that the family name might continue. The Jews considered their name to be something of great honor. God gave instructions to the brother that did not desire to marry the widow. Ruth and Boaz are example of this custom.

*Mt 22:25-26 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.*

They told of a woman who outlived seven husbands. It is highly unlikely that these men actually knew of someone in this state. It is more likely they gave him a hypothetical case. I agree with the old preacher who said it looks like husband number seven would have been a little suspicious about a lady who had six husbands die before him.

*Mt 22:27 And last of all the woman died also.*

After living with seven husbands, it is no surprise she finally died.

*Mt 22:28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.*

They thought the teaching of the resurrection was ridiculous, so they devised a question that they thought was just as ridiculous. They gave a fictitious example in an attempt to trick Jesus and disprove the resurrection at the same time. They were asking, after the resurrection, which of the seven men who had been married to this woman would be her husband?

*Mt 22:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*

They were in error because they did not know the scripture. Once again we are reminded that all truth comes from the Word of God. Only what we find in the bible can be trusted. If is not in the bible, we have no ground to stand on. Anytime we believe anything other than the Word of God, we are doomed for error.

Jesus' comments remind us how important it is for us to get in the Word of God. Not knowing the truth leads us into all types of error.

They also had not recognized "*the power of God*". The resurrection of the dead was probably the greatest example of God's power. If He had power over death, nothing else would be a problem for Him. Yet, they denied this great power.

*Mt 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.*

The rabbis taught that heaven would be a continuation of this world, only without sin or death. But Jesus let us know heaven will be more than an improved earth. Heaven is more than creation being restored to its original form. It will far surpass what has ever been experienced here. It will truly be a new, and better existence.

In heaven no one will "*marry*" or be "*given in marriage*". Those who are husband and wife will not be known as such in heaven. There are no married couples in heaven. Everyone will be a part of the heavenly family.

For some, that may a depressing thought. They have a such relationship with their mate to where they cannot imagine life, even in heaven, without that relationship. No matter what, we will not be disappointed when we get to heaven. When we get to there, it will not be about us, it will be about Him.

Jesus was not indicating that Christians become angels when they die. One of the biggest misconceptions of our day is that those who die become angels. Those who die in the Lord will eventually receive a glorified body, but they will not become angels. Since the Sadducees did not believe in angels, Jesus was confronting that issue also.

*Mt 22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,*

Once again, Jesus asked if they had not read the scripture. God had "*spoken*" but they had given Him no heed.

*Mt 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*

God had said, "*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*". The word "am" implies He was their God right then. This refers to the time when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6). When He spoke these words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead a long time. Yet, His words implied they were all very much alive. They may not have been living on earth, but they were very much alive in heaven.



*Mt 22:33 And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.*

As the Pharisees and Herodians had failed in their attempt to trip up Jesus (v.15-22) so did the Sadducees. Notice, the multitude accepted what Jesus said, but the Sadducees still rejected it. As flawed as their question was, they continued to deny life after death. This is a perfect example of how little it takes to convince someone of error when they do not want to believe the truth.

The multitude was "*astonished at his doctrine*". Jesus was more than just another great teacher who spoke about the Word of God. When others had spoken, they always said what someone else had spoken before them. There was something more to what he said than the ones who had come before him. Of course there was, he was more than a teacher of the Word, he was the author of the Word. When Jesus spoke, he spoke his own Word.

THE PHARISEES CONFRONTED JESUS ABOUT THE COMMANDMENTS 22:34-40

*THIS QUESTION DEALS WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE RIGHTEOUS*

The Pharisees asked Jesus which was the first and greatest commandment. They were asking what God required of man for him to be right with Him.

*Mt 22:34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

When the Pharisees heard how the Sadducees failed to trap Jesus, they came to try. They may have been misguided, but they certainly were persistent. They simply refused to give up.

The word, "*silence*" is the same word used back in verse twelve where the man was speechless. It means, "to muzzle". It has the idea of putting someone to silence, or striking someone dumb. The Sadducees were absolutely at a loss for words. They could not think of one thing to say.

*Mt 22:35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

The Pharisees chose one man to represent them. This man was not a lawyer in the way of our modern day lawyers. Mark tells us this man was a scribe (Mk. 12:28). The scribes were men who had the responsibility of studying and interpreting the law. So, this man should have known what the law said. He was supposed to be the expert. That is probably why the Pharisees chose him to confront Jesus.

He came "*tempting*" Jesus. He was not coming to gain knowledge or to be enlightened. He was coming in an effort to trap Jesus. Like those who had come before him, he was trying to get Jesus to say something that could be used against him. This shows us just how ignorant he was. His head was full of man's knowledge, but he refused to accept the truth. He is the perfect example of the cold hearted scholar. His head was full but his heart was empty.

*Mt 22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

This man was asking more than just which of the ten commandments was the greatest. The Jews had added to many of their man-made traditions they had muddied the water about what God expected. They had established over 600 commandments. They had rules to explain their rules. This system of rules and regulations had become so confusing, it is no wonder this man asked the question he did.

One thing was certain, if Jesus answered in a way that did not satisfy them, he would be in trouble.

*Mt 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

Jesus' first response was from Deuteronomy 6:5. It says, "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might".

The word Jesus used for "*love*" is a word that means, to love dearly. To love God with *all* of our heart means to love Him more than anything, or anyone. It means He comes first. To love Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind means we love Him with a total submission to His will.

To love the Lord in the way Jesus was talking about means we submit totally to him. It leaves no room for half-hardheartedness.

*Mt 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.*

Jesus said loving God was not just the greatest commandment, it was also the "*first*" commandment. In other words, loving Him was the command He gave to Adam and Eve. Even in the garden of Eden, He simply wanted them to love Him. He never wanted a bunch of robots who have no option other than obey His every command. He wants a people who love Him sincerely and serve Him gladly because they love Him. The command to love Him comes before all others. For, if we love Him, we will want to keep the rest.

*Mt 22:39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

The second command is like the first. It deals with love also. Jesus' second response was from Leviticus 19:18. A portion of that verse says, "but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

Our "neighbour" is the one who is near us. It speaks of any person we come in contact with. The Jews considered their neighbors only as their fellow Jews. They believed the commandment to love their neighbor meant they should love their fellow Jews but despise those outside their Jewish heritage.

Jesus enhanced the teaching of the Jews by saying we should love everyone (Mt. 5:43-44; 10:37-39; Jn. 13:34). Part of the purpose of the parable of the good Samaritan was to demonstrate this truth (Lk. 10:25-37).

Jesus was simply saying, we should treat others like we would want them to treat us.

There is a love of self that is sinful. This type of self-love is selfish and puts me before others. We should avoid this at all costs. What Jesus spoke of was the type of love for self that means that we care about ourselves in a godly way. It means I do not want to go to hell. It means I want to live in a way where God can bless me. I'd rather have God's blessings instead of His judgment. It means I want to live in a way to where I can really enjoy life.

Loving others means I want the same for others that I want for myself.

*Mt 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

The "law and the prophets" is speaking of the entire Old Testament. The first five books were referred as the law, and the rest were referred to as the prophets (cf. Mt. 5:17).

So, Jesus summarized the entire law in one statement, love God and love others. These two aspects of the law form a cross. Our relationship with God, up and down, and our relationship with mankind, side to side, forms a cross.

The entire law could be summarized by the word love. Take love away and you have nothing but a bunch of empty rules. All we do comes up short if we do it for any reason other than love.

Mark tells us more about this conversation. Jesus told this scribe, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk. 12:34). That tells us this man was not in the kingdom. He had all the facts. He knew there was one God (Mk. 12:32). He knew there was more to the law than just a bunch of rules (Mk. 12:33). His problem was, he had never acted on the facts he knew. Having the facts in our head is not enough. Most people believe the facts about Jesus, but that does not save them. We must repent of our sin and believe on the Lord to be saved (Acts 16:31).

Jesus' statement to this man tells us that being near the kingdom is not the same as being in the kingdom. We are either in or out. Being near does us little good if we do not enter. Judas kissed the door to heaven, but he went to hell. Like Agrippa, almost is not good enough (Acts 26:28).

We have no idea what happened to the man. It is possible he was one of the many priests who were obedient to the faith on the day of Pentecost (Acts 6:7). And, it also possible that even though he was near to the kingdom, he never entered.

JESUS CONFRONTED THE PHARISEES 22:41-46

*THIS QUESTION DEALS WITH THE REPLY OF THE REDEEMER*

What Jesus had said put them all to silence. It was his turn to interrogate those who were opposing him.

*Mt 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,*

Jesus never let an opportunity slip by. While the Pharisees were there, he took advantage of the situation. They had asked questions of him, now it was his turn.

*Mt 22:42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.*

Jesus had used the phrase, "What think ye" before (Mt. 17:25; 18:12; 21:28; 26:66). He used it when he was about to put someone to the test.

Jesus could not have asked a more important question. What we think of Christ determines our life on earth and our destiny for eternity. Many of those who had seen and heard Jesus had given their opinion of him. Their opinion of him varied from being demon possessed, to a good man, to him being the Son of God and their Messiah. What others think of him is not what is important. What is important is what do you think about him?

The "Son of David" was title for the Messiah the Jews used most often. It dealt primarily with his national and political standing. As usual, they were focused on the political aspect and were missing the spiritual part of the Messiah.

The Pharisees answer showed they believed the Messiah would be no more than a man. They had missed the fact that he would be God also. They believed the Messiah would be from the lineage of David, but there was more to him than just the human aspect. He was not only the Son of David, he was the Son of God. He would be more than just a great man who would come and free them from the Roman oppression.

*Mt 22:43-44 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?*

Jesus quoted Old Testament scripture (Ps. 110:1). The "*LORD said unto my Lord*" means, God the Father said to God the Son.

Jesus was trying to lead them into full recognition of who the Messiah was. His human origin was important but that meant nothing if they do not see him as God. He was God and the day would come when He would be exalted to the right hand of the heavenly Father.

The Father told the Son to sit on His "*right hand*". Sitting on the right hand was a place of honor. Jesus was telling the Pharisees the Messiah would be exalted to this place of honor. Again, this Messiah was more than just a man.

A "*footstool*" is that which is under the feet of one sitting. It implies something is under the control of the one sitting. Not only would the Messiah be allowed to sit in the place of honor beside God the Father, but the day would come when he would be the victor of all his enemies.

Jesus did sit down on the right hand of the Father after he finished his work of redemption (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). He sat down because his work was finished. The Old Testament priest never sat down because his work was never finished. But, our Great High Priest finished His work.

*Mt 22:45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*

In the Jewish society it would have been unthinkable for a father to call his son lord. That is, unless the son was somehow greater than the father. And, Jesus was greater than David. He was God.

Christ as man was David's son. Christ as God was David's Lord.

How could the Messiah be the son of David and his lord at the same time? Humanly, he was born of the seed of David. But divinely, he had always existed.

The Father's work is not yet finished. The "*enemies*" must be dealt with.

Making his enemies his footstool speaks of the fact that all of those who opposed Christ will eventually bow at His feet and proclaim that He is Lord (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The day is coming when God will defeat sin, sickness, death, and the devil. The enemies that have caused so much pain will be placed under the feet of Jesus.

The Pharisees real problem with what Jesus said was the fact that if the Messiah was David's Lord, he was their Lord also. And if Jesus was the Messiah, that meant he was their Lord, and they could not handle that.

*Mt 22:46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.*

Jesus put them to silence. There was not any thing else they could say.

#### JESUS COMMENTS ABOUT THOSE WHO REJECTED HIM 23:1-12

In the next three chapters Jesus would speak to the crowd (chapter 23) and then to his disciples (chapters 24-25). He would speak a woe to the Pharisees and a warning to his disciples. His speech would be severe, but just. This would be the last time he addressed the Pharisees before his death.

This is Jesus' last public sermon. He used the opportunity to warn the believers. He not only warned those who were following him but he blasted the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus spoke against these hypocrites publicly, and in their very presence. The people were hearing what he said to the Pharisees, and the Pharisees were hearing what he said to the people. His message was clear and direct. He pulled no pushes. He called them hypocrites and everyone heard him say it. And, when he was finished, no one wondered what he had said.

*Mt 23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,*

#### JESUS' WARNING TO THE PEOPLE

Jesus spoke to his disciples in the presence of the multitude. As we will see, the scribes and Pharisees were still present also.

Jesus was very direct with what he said about the scribes and Pharisees. We must remember, he was talking to these people about their religious leaders. He was dealing with what meant the most to them. He was not merely warning these people about their corrupt leaders, he was telling them to avoid them. He was telling them about the change that was coming. They were to reject the doctrine of the Pharisees and embrace his doctrine. He had been preparing his disciples to be the ones who proclaimed this new message. Many of them would receive the disciples' message for at Pentecost there were three thousand (Acts. 2:41) later five thousand (Acts 4:4) and then multitudes (Acts 5:14) accepted the gospel that came through the disciples of Christ.

Jesus not just leaving the people in limbo. He was setting up this new movement. He was denouncing the Pharisees and their doctrine and introducing his disciple who would bring his gospel. In verses 8-12 he told his followers to not be like the Pharisees.

That type of confronting heresy is frowned upon in our modern day. People believe we are to simply love everyone. We are taught that confronting error is being judgmental and it is wrong to speak out about anyone else's beliefs. Some even go so far as to say that Jesus would not have done such a thing. Well, news flash, Jesus did do it. He attacked the heresy of the scribes and Pharisees without compromise or apology.

Why was Jesus so harsh? Why did he attack with such zeal? As we will discover in this chapter, the people he was attacking were refusing to enter the kingdom themselves and keeping others from going in also. They were sending people to hell, and Jesus refused to sit by quietly and let it happen. Error must be exposed if truth is to be believed.

If a spiritual leader fails, the results are astronomical. There is no one condemned more in scripture than those who are teaching error. God exposes the false teachers and confronts their error. He encourages us to do the same. Here are just a few scriptures that warn us about false teachers and how we are to deal with them (Mt. 7:15-20; 24:24; Acts 20:29-31; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:12; Gal. 5:8; Eph. 5:11; 1 Th. 5:21; 1 Tim. 2:16; 3:5-7; 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:16; 4:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:4; 4:1; Jude 4). This, by no means, is an exhaustive list.

*Mt 23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:*

Jesus would soon withdraw from the crowds, so before he withdrew, he warned them one more time about the scribes and Pharisees.

The phrase "*sit in Moses' seat*" was talking about the authority Moses had to teach the law. God had given Moses the responsibility of giving the law to the people. The scribes and Pharisees had taken the place of Moses and were supposed to speak the truth of God. Whether they actually had been given this authority or if they had simply assumed it upon themselves is debatable. Either way, they had failed miserably in giving out the truth of the law.

The Jewish teachers sat to teach, and stood to read the Scriptures. They stood to honor the Word because they saw it as God Himself speaking. They would never stand to teach because it would appear as they were putting themselves in the place of God.

*Mt 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

Jesus certainly was not saying they should obey *all* the scribes and Pharisees were teaching. Certainly Jesus was not intending his disciples observe the many man-made traditions the Pharisees had added to the law. He had condemned their teaching in Matthew chapters six and fifteen. The key to understanding what he meant is in verse two, where he spoke about Moses' seat. He meant, when they spoke what Moses spoke, the people were to listen. When they spoke the truth from the law, those who heard them speak were to give heed. This shows us how we should listen to the truth of God no matter who is speaking it. There may be times when we hear the Word from someone who is unqualified, but we should still give heed to the truth. The truth is truth no matter who is speaking.

Jesus said for them to listen to what the scribes and Pharisees say, but do not do what they do. The reason, they "say, and do not". They did not do themselves what they were telling others to do. They did not practice what they preached. This is one case of do what I say, not what I do, that was a good thing. Since the scribes and Pharisees were in a God given position that which they taught which was biblical should be obeyed.

The scribes and Pharisees spoke one thing and did another. That is a problem that is still prevalent today. It is easy to talk about what we should do, but doing it is a different matter entirely. Someone has said, "As we grow older, the gap between what we say and what we do should be narrowing, not widening".

If we are to do what God wants us to do, we must have enough discernment to know what the truth is. The lies of the Pharisees can be very convincing. We must know the truth so we will know what is *not* truth.

Jesus' statement teaches us the truth is more important the position. The position of a religious teacher was a place that was greatly respected in Jesus' day. The same is true today (Lk. 10:6; Acts 28:8; 1 Cor. 9:7-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7).

No position on earth is more celebrated, respected, and honored than the man of God that delivers the Word of God as it is written. However, no position on earth is more severely judged than the person who mishandles the Word of God.

No position on earth is more dangerous than that of the person who delivers God's Word. It is dangerous because how they handle the Word will either please or displease God. It is dangerous because someone will hear them, and follow. They hold the eternal souls of men in their hands.

*Mt 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

The scribes and Pharisees had taken the law and added so many of their man-made rules it had become something no one could obey. They had added so many of their instructions to the law their man-made rules actually filled fifty volumes. The Pharisee's rules placed a burden on the people that they could not carry, but God's truth relieves us of our burdens (Mt. 11:29-30). It certainly does not lay a heavy load on us. The commands of God are not grievous (1 Jn. 5:3).

The people Jesus was speaking to knew well the burdens of the scribes and Pharisee's teachings. For the most part, that was all they had known all their lives. But, the scribes and Pharisees had no answer for their burdens. All they could do was lay more burdens upon them. They did not know the God who carries our burdens (Isa. 40:11; Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:6-7), or the shepherd who makes their sheep lay down in green pastures (Ps. 23:2). They had not been introduced to the God who could give rest (Ex. 33:14; Mt. 11:28).

Some still believe the only way God communicates is through something heavy. Many preachers think they must be harsh or they are not really preaching. Most young preachers go through a phase when they preach nothing but hard messages. There are times when the truth will hurt, there are times when the preacher should preach it straight, but even when it is straight, it should be done through a heart of love.

*Mt 23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*

Jesus revealed one of the major flaws of the scribes and Pharisees in this verse. They did what they did to be seen of men. They wanted to be honored. Anytime we want to be recognized of man, we can be sure that attitude comes from Satan (Isa. 14:13-14). Jesus warned us about doing what we do to be seen of men (Mt. 6:5).

The "*phylacteries*" were leather boxes that contained parchment with scripture (Ex. 13:1-10; 11-16; Dt. 11:6:4-9; 11:13-21) written on them. They strapped these boxes on their hand or forehead. The male Jews would start wearing these at age fourteen. The idea of these phylacteries came from a misunderstanding of Old Testament scripture. God had told them bind the Word of God for a sign upon their hands, and frontlets between their eyes (Ex. 13:9; Dt. 6:8). God did not mean this literally. He was simply saying He wanted their minds (between eyes) and their actions (hands) to always be directed by the Word of God. He certainly did not intend they make these little boxes.

To make matters worse, they allowed these phylacteries to become a type of competition between themselves. They started making larger boxes and broader straps to make them more noticeable. Their thinking was, if a one inch phylactery is a sign that the wearer is spiritual, a two inch phylactery must be a sign the wearer is even more spiritual.

Jesus also said the Pharisees enlarged "*the borders of their garments*". God had instructed the Jews to sew blue borders to the hem of their robes (Num. 15:38-39). The blue was to remind them of all the commandments of the Lord and how they should obey God. As with the phylacteries, they began to widen these borders in an attempt to appear more religious than the next person. Again, their thinking was, if you have a two inch border, you are way more spiritual than someone with a one inch border.

Jesus summarized this issue when he said they do this "*to be seen of men*". The phylacteries and borders did nothing to make them more spiritual. They were nothing more than an outward show.

*Mt 23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,*

The Jewish rabbis were supposed to be held in high esteem. They were supposed to be God's men and were to be respected as such. But, the scribes and Pharisees had made a mockery of their positions. They had disgraced the position that should have been honored greatly.

These religious hypocrites loved the honor and respect that came with their position. They loved the places of honor and recognition. The "*uppermost rooms*" was speaking of the place of honor at the dinner table. They did not sit up at the dinner table as we do. They reclined on couches with their feet away from the table. These hypocrites loved being sat at the place of honor. It is the equivalent of us sitting someone at the head of the table.

They loved sitting in the predominate "*seats of the synagogues*". Somewhat like how we honor men by sitting them on the platform of our churches, these men loved to have the places of honor, especially in the place of worship. It is ironic that they especially wanted this attention in the place where God was supposed to be the one who was being recognized.

*Mt 23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*

As with all those who love to be seen of men, these scribes and Pharisees loved the marketplace. They loved to be recognized in public.

These flaws revealed how impure their motives were. They were not doing what they were doing for the glory of God. Since they were doing it to be seen of men, as Jesus had said before (cf. Mt. 6:2, 5, 16) when they were seen, they had their reward.

*Mt 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

The word "*Rabbi*" means "master".

They loved the religious titles. But, these titles had become a wall between them and the "ordinary" people. They looked down their long noses at the poor little people who were not as "special" as they were. There is the same type of pride among some of God's people today. These modern day Pharisees love to include their titles when they introduce themselves. They love to be called "Reverend" or "Doctor". They are proud of their position in the Christian community and are quick to let everyone know it.

Jesus should be our only master.

Those in God's family are "*brethren*". That means we are all on the same level. There should be no big I's and little U's in His family.

*Mt 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*

Jesus was certainly not telling us to never refer to our earthly dads as "father". The way Jesus was using the word "*father*" here is speaking of a person who has authority over us. He was simply saying God himself is the only one that deserves type of respect. We should give no man that place of authority over our lives.

The eternal Father resides in heaven, referring to His authority over all His creation. An earthly father resides over the affairs of his household. The heavenly Father resides over the affairs of the universe.

*Mt 23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.*

The word, "*masters*" in this context was speaking of one that has control over another. Even though we should show respect to those in positions of authority, we should never allow any person to control us. The only one who should hold that position, should be "*Christ*".

*Mt 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*

Jesus taught the same lesson he had mentioned earlier (Mt. 20:27). The quickest way to greatness in God's family is to be a servant. There is little doubt as to whether this is true. Look at those who are most admired in the family of God and will see those who have become servants to God, and to others. The greatest example of this is our Lord and Savior.

*Mt 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

The word, "*exalt*" means, "to elevate or lift up".

The word, "*abased*" means, "to bring low, to humble, or humiliate". There is no quicker way to humiliate ourselves than to try to exalt ourselves. God will see to it.

Jesus' statement proves who has the control over the promotions or declines in our lives. He was saying, those who humble themselves, He will make sure they are exalted. And, just as certainly, those who exalt themselves, He will see to it that they are abased.

The process of promotion has always been different in God's kingdom. The world tells us if we want to get ahead, we have to promote ourselves. God says, if we want to be promoted, we humble ourselves. God is the One who does the promoting in His family (1 Pet. 5:6).

## JESUS COMMENTS TO THOSE WHO REJECTED HIM 23:13-39

### JESUS' WOE TO THE PHARISEES 23:13-36

In this chapter, Jesus first spoke *about* those who were rejecting him. In the next verses, he was speaking *to* those who were rejecting him.

After Jesus warned the people about the heresy of the Pharisees, he spoke about the woes that would come to the Pharisees because they had refused to hear him. The word "*woe*" itself speaks of grief, sorrow, dissatisfaction, and pain. Jesus was not just degrading the scribes and Pharisees. He was literally pronouncing these eight woes on the scribes and Pharisees. He had the authority to pronounce judgment on them and was doing so. These were the most severe of any words spoken by the Lord while he walked this earth. God has the ability to bless, but He is also able to curse.

Even though his words were harsh, he still spoke them in love. Even though he uttered them from an enraged heart, they came also from a broken heart. God has no pleasure in punishing.

These verses will teach us that standing on truth is more important than getting along with others. There may be times when we have to confront those who are teaching heresy. Like Jesus, we should do it from a loving heart, but at the same time, we should pull no punches when dealing with false doctrine.

#### THE FIRST WOE 23:13

The first woe had to do with *shutting*. They were shutting people out of the kingdom.

*Mt 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*

Woe number one dealt with the scribes and Pharisees shutting up the way to the kingdom. This was truly a slap in the face of the scribes and Pharisees for they considered themselves to be the authority when it came to the way into the kingdom. They considered themselves the gate keepers, as it were. And now, Jesus was telling them that not only were they not leading people in, but they were not entering themselves.

Imagine, the ones who were supposed to be helping people into the kingdom were actually keeping them from it. The idea of Jesus' statement was there are people getting ready to enter the kingdom but they shut the door on them. They not only would not enter the kingdom themselves, but they were actually an obstacle to others who would go in. How horrible to realize the biggest obstacle to people entering the family of God was not the drunks and harlots, not the renegade outlaws, but the religious bunch who claimed to be right with God.

The people Jesus was talking to were dangerous. They shut the way into the kingdom with their false doctrine. They also discouraged people from accepting the truth by persecuting those who had believed.

Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. The word "*hypocrites*" is found fourteen times in the book of Matthew. Of those fourteen times, half are found in chapter twenty three. As we have discussed before, a hypocrite is like an actor on a stage. They are pretending to be to be something they are not. However, before we criticize the Pharisees we should take a good look at ourselves. Are we guilty of talking the talk without walking the walk? How often do we talk about the importance of doing something when we are not doing ourselves?

#### THE SECOND WOE 23:14

The second woe had to do with *stealing*. They were stealing from those who believed in them.

*Mt 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

Woe number two had two accusations connected to it.

First, they "*devour widow's houses*".

When a husband died, he left more than just a grieving widow. Since most women did not work outside the home and had no means of income, many widows were left in desperate need. For this reason, God instructed that a widow receive assistance (Ex. 22:22; Dt. 27:19; Ps. 68:5; 146:9; Pro. 15:25; 1 Tim. 5:5; Jam. 1:27).

Even with though the Word of God gave such clear instruction that widows be protected, the scribes and Pharisees were abusing them in the worse way. Through manipulation of the elderly, they gained control over the property of some of the widows. The worse part of this situation was the fact that this was done in a way that was undetected by the general population. Undoubtedly, the scribes and Pharisees deceived the widows into thinking they were doing God's will. After all, did not God tell us to give freely? Did He not instruct His people to trust Him and put Him first? Sadly, a widow who loved the Lord and wanted to please Him would be an easy target for the scribes and Pharisees.

Some of the biggest crooks in this nation are hiding behind the bible. They convince those who have little to give to their "so called" ministry. Their modern day counterpart still does the same type of thing. They have their holy water and prayer cloths. They live their extravagant lifestyles off the backs of those who are convinced they are genuine. Many of these charlatans convince older folks to leave everything they own to them when they die. As in Jesus' day, those who love Jesus and want to please Him are easy prey.

Second, they "*for a pretence make long prayer*".

Jesus certainly was not condemning long prayers. He prayed all night at times (Lk. 6:12). Much is said in the bible about praying long (Gen. 32:24; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 12:16; Ps. 30:5b; 63:6; 119:62; Acts 16:25). The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was their prayers were for show. The word "*pretence*" means, an outward showing. It has the idea of wearing a cloak. They prayed long and loud in public simply to be heard of men. Jesus said earlier of this type of prayer, "they have their reward" (Mt. 6:5). They prayed to be heard of men, they were heard, so they got what they were wanting. That means, none of their actual prayers would be heard by God.

It seems as though Jesus was connecting his comments about them devouring widow's houses with what he said about their long pretentious prayers. If this be so, Jesus meant they prayed their long public prayers in order to convince the widows, and others, they were worthy of their financial support. They were hoping this would cause people to give more to the treasury, of which they would benefit. If this be the case, how heartless these hypocrites were.

The scribes and Pharisees would "*receive the greater damnation*" for their actions. The word, "*damnation*" had the idea of a defendant going to before a judge to be tried for a crime. They certainly deserved the judgment Jesus said they would receive.

#### THE THIRD WOE 23:15

The third woe had to do with *seducing*. They were seducing people into believing their false doctrine.

*Mt 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

A "*proselyte*" was a person that was converted from one religious belief to another. The scribes and Pharisees would gladly "*compass sea and land*" to make just one convert to their belief system.

They were not convincing people to follow them into the truth, they were convincing people to follow them into their error.

So many times, the proselyte would become "*twofold the child of hell*". That means, they would be more zealous about spreading their doctrine than the one that converted them. That is still the case so many times. The person who is saved out of a wicked lifestyle will, many times, be more zealous than the person who was raised in the church environment and saved at an early age.

#### THE FOURTH WOE 23:16-23

The fourth woe had to do with *swearing*. They had their own way of making, and breaking promises.

*Mt 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!*

Jesus called them "*blind guides*". What could be worse than the person assigned to leading others to safety being blind themselves? What hope would there be for their escaping danger? In the process, both would perish. Both, guide and follower would fall in the ditch (cf. Mt. 15:14).

The swearing Jesus was referring to had to do with a practice connected with making a promise, or an oath. In order to emphasize the fact that they fully intended to keep their promise they would swear by something that was important to them. Jesus was talking about them saying something like, "I swear by the temple that I will do what I say". We do the same thing today. Someone may say, "I swear on my mama's grave that I will do what I say", or we may say something like, "I swear on a stack of bibles, I will do this".

The problem with this practice was it suggested there were times that the person speaking was not telling the truth or not planning to keep their promise. After all, if they always spoke the truth there would be no need to swear.

Simply swearing was not enough for the scribes and Pharisees. They devised a method whereby they could make an oath or promise and then fail to keep it. They taught that being bound by your promise depended on what you swore on. It "*is nothing*" meant the promise was not binding and they did not have to keep their promise. He "*is a debtor*" meant the promise was binding and he did have to keep his promise. In their mixed up way of thinking the Pharisees had said if a person swears by the temple, they could break their promise ("it is nothing") but if someone were to swear by the gold in the temple, they could not break their promise ("he is a debtor"). Jesus blew this theory out of the water.

We have our way of getting out of the promises we make. Most of us will remember saying, "I had my fingers crossed" when we were young.

The sad thing about this issue is the fact that even when they made a promise they had no intentions of keeping it. This was nothing short of lying.

Making a promise while planning to not keep it is nothing less than lying. If we want to know what God thinks about lying we need to ask Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). God tells us to keep our vows (Ps. 50:14; 53:14; 56:12; 61:8; 66:13-14; 76:11; 116:14; 119:106; Ecl. 5:4-6). Jesus dealt with making promises in Matthew chapter five where he said to not swear at all (Mt. 5:37-37). We should let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no" (Jam. 5:12). In other words, say what you mean. If you mean "yes", then say "yes" and if you mean "no", say "no".

*Mt 23:17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?*

Jesus called them what they were, "*fools and blind*". The word, "*sanctifieth*" means, "to make holy". The gold had no holiness about it. The only reason it was special was because it was in the temple. If it was any where else, it would not be special. The only reason the temple was special was because God was in the temple. Without God, it was nothing more than stone and marble.



*Mt 23:18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*

The "altar" Jesus spoke about was the altar on which the sacrifices were placed when offered by the priests.

The "gift" Jesus spoke of was the sacrifices that were brought by the people and offered by the priests.

The word "guilty" is the same word translated as "debtor" in verse sixteen. It has to do with being under an obligation. They had determined if someone swore by the altar in the temple, that promise could be broken. However, they said, if someone swore by something that had been placed on the altar, the promise could not be broken.

*Mt 23:19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?*

The "gift" or offering was a common thing until it was placed on the altar. The altar, that had been dedicated to the Lord, gave the value or holiness to the offering that was placed on it. Therefore, the altar was the greater.

The word, "sanctifieth" means, "to make holy". Being placed on the altar is what made them holy.

*Mt 23:20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.*

Jesus made clear they could not separate the altar from that which is on the altar.

*Mt 23:21-22 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

The temple and that which is in the temple could not be separated. Even more so, heaven and the throne of God could not be separated. God sits on the throne of heaven, everything under heaven is within His realm of authority.

#### THE FIFTH WOE 23:23-24

The fifth woe had to do with *straining*. They strained a gnat and swallowed a camel.

*Mt 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

The "*mint, and anise, and cummin*" were spices they used to cook with. They paid "*tithe*", a tenth part, even of these minute spices. The scribes and Pharisees were so careful in following their concept of God's law that they meticulously measured out a tenth of the spices they used to cook with and gave it as their tithes to the Lord. They literally would sit down and count out a tenth of these tiny leaves or seeds.

Yet, while they were so careful dealing with these small matters, they were ignoring those things that truly mattered to God. They ignored the matters of the soul.

Jesus mentioned three areas where they were failing. He mentioned "*judgment*". This speaks of justice, or giving others what they deserve. He mentioned "*mercy*". Mercy was having compassion for the poor and needy and assisting them in their need. He also mentioned "*faith*". Faith was having confidence in God and living as He directed.

Jesus did not just grab three things out of the air. The Old Testament told them what God desired of them. He desired them, to do justly (judgment), to love mercy (mercy), and to walk humbly (faith) with thy God (Mic. 6:8).

We dare not miss the fact that Jesus said, "*these ought ye to have done*". He was not teaching that they stop doing the smaller things, including the giving of tithes, he was simply saying they should consider the spiritual matters.

*Mt 23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

Once again, Jesus called them "*blind guides*". Imagine a blind man stumbling inside a maze, trying somehow to find his way out. What a sad picture. But, imagine that blind man while he is stumbling around trying to find his own way, he is calling to other blind folks and claiming to be able to lead them out. That is what was going on with these blind guides.

He gave an illustration that revealed the ridiculous actions of the scribes and Pharisees. He talked about a man who strained out a "*gnat*" that had fallen into his glass and then swallowed a "*camel*" without even noticing it was there. Who would refuse to swallow a gnat and then gulp down a camel without even noticing? Yet, that is exactly what the scribes and Pharisees were doing spiritually.

Again, Jesus did not just grab a couple of examples that meant nothing. According to Levitical law both gnats and camels were unclean and should not be eaten (Lev. 11:2-4,41). Also, an unclean carcass made a drink unclean (Lev. 11:32-35).

To add to the reasoning of why Jesus used these two examples, a gnat was the smallest unclean animal and a camel was the largest. This served to illustrate his point even more. They truly were concentrating on the smallest and ignoring the largest matters.

#### THE SIXTH WOE 23:25-26

The sixth woe had to do with *show*. They were concerned about the outside of the vessel but cared little about the inside.

*Mt 23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

The scribes and Pharisees were very careful to practice all the washing and ceremonial cleansing prescribed by the law and by their man-made traditions. But, they gave no concern to the inward purity that was the reason for those cleansings pointed towards. God had given instructions to His people as far as ceremonial cleansing, but He did so to point them to the fact that they needed to be clean on the inside. The scribes and Pharisees had ignored the inside and prioritized the outward.

As with the vessels we drink from, the cleanliness of the outside is important, but the cleanliness of the inside is most important.

The scribes and Pharisees had the outside looking pretty good, but the inside was filthy.

The word, "*extortion*" means, "robbery" and has the idea of greed. The Pharisee's living was obtained by extorting others. Their outside appeared clean, but their hearts were filled with such greed that they did not hesitate to pillage the widows and needy.

As previously mentioned, their modern day counterpart still does the same type of thing. These modern day Pharisee offer their holy water and prayer cloths to those who are willing to believe them.

*Mt 23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

Jesus certainly was not implying that the outside did not matter. The bible is full of instructions that deal with the external things of our lives.

If they would clean the inside first, the outside would naturally be clean. If we get our heart right, our actions will be right (Pro. 4:23; Mk.7:18-23). Where the heart goes, the habits will follow.

What good is it for the outside of a vessel to be clean, if the inside is dirty? Who would drink from such a vessel? What good is it to act spiritual if the heart is corrupt? What good is it to act like we love someone if we hate them in our heart? It does no good to clean up habits or conduct if the heart is corrupt. God is not fooled by such behavior.

#### THE SEVENTH WOE 23:27-28

The seventh woe had to do with sepulchres. Jesus said they were like the whited sepulchres.

*Mt 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

Touching a dead body or a grave made a person ceremonially unclean (Num. 9:6; 19:11,13; Lev. 5:2). For this reason, everyone avoided graves as much as possible, especially during the time of Passover. The cemeteries were outside of the cities and could be easily avoided. However, when a dead body was found along the road, or in a field, it was to be buried at the spot where it was found. This made it easy for someone to happen upon a grave and touch it before they realized what was happening. This was especially true during Passover when hundreds of thousands of Jews would be heading towards Jerusalem.

Therefore, at least once a year, they went throughout the land white-washing all the graves they could find. It is said they did this every year about a month before Passover. The bright white color made the grave or tomb easy to see and avoid.

Jesus compared the scribes and Pharisees to these white washed tombs. They looked so good on the outside, but the inside was polluted. We can only imagine the filth and smell on the inside of a tomb once the body started decomposing. The outside of the tomb was painted, but the inside was polluted. The outside of the Pharisees may have been white, but their inside was wicked.

The word, "*uncleanness*" means "impurity". To say the least, the inside of those graves were filled with impurity. So, were the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees.

*Mt 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

What we show on the outside may not be an indication of what is on the inside. Their outward righteousness seemed genuine to men, but it did not fool God for a second. We must remember, Jesus was not talking to the neighborhood drunks. He was talking to those who were living, what we would call, a clean life.

They prayed (v. 14) persuaded (v.15) paid (v.23) and practiced (v.25) but Jesus said they were still polluted. How about you, are you washed white or white washed? Have you simply cleaned up the outside, or have you let Jesus wash you on the inside?

#### THE EIGHTH WOE 23:29-36

The eighth woe had to do with *stoning*. Jesus talked about the stoning of the prophets that came before him.

*Mt 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,*

They pretended to have a high regard for the Old Testament prophets and holy men. They build monuments in their honor, decorated their tombs with all types of ornaments.

*Mt 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.*

Their fathers killed the prophets that God had sent. And these scribes and Pharisees proudly declared they would not have done as their fathers did. And, even as they were speaking these very words, they were devising in their minds how they could kill the very Son of God. How hypocritical. It is amazing how hypocrisy blinds the person. They actually begin to believe their own lies.

*Mt 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.*

Their actions were proving they were their father's children. Even though they would not admit it, they were acting just like their fathers. As goes the father, goes the sons. They were doing exactly what their fathers had done.

*Mt 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*

When Jesus said "*Fill ye up*" he was talking about the judgment that would come from God (cf. Gen. 15:16). Their fathers had angered God by their treatment of His prophets. Now, the scribes and Pharisees were taking up where their fathers had left off. Soon, the wrath of God would be full against those ungodly people. When God's cup of wrath becomes full, judgment is coming and nothing can be done to stop it. He carries that thought into the next verse.

*Mt 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

The answer to Jesus' question is simple, there was no way they could escape the judgment of hell. In their present condition, there was no hope. Jesus' words were harsh and cutting, but true and needed. Part of God's message hurts.

How could they "*escape the damnation of hell*"? In their present condition, they could not. There was no hope for them. There is no hope for those who refuse Christ and His message.

*Mt 23:34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:*

Jesus mentioned "*scribes*" in this list of people he was sending to proclaim the truth. This tells us not all of the scribes were bad. There were some who were real and loved the Lord.

*Mt 23:35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*

As his parables had foretold (Mt. 21:33-41), they had shed the blood of God's messengers.

Abel was the first righteous person to lose his life because he stood by God's instructions (Gen. 4:8).

Zachariah (Zacharias) was the last to lose his life that is recorded in the Old Testament (2 Chr. 24:20-22).

The Old Testament does not record how he died. Jesus' comments about Abel and Zachariah span the entire Old Testament, from beginning to end. Through the many years, God's people and prophets were mistreated.

*Mt 23:36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

The word, "*generation*" is often used when referring to a race of people, especially of the Jews (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 37:2; Ps. 73:15; Mat. 1:17; 3:7; 24:34; 1 Pet. 2:9).

However, Jesus was probably referring to the generation he was speaking to at that time. They certainly saw the judgment Jesus spoke of for within forty years Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Titus.

Jesus was lamenting over Jerusalem and the coming judgment, and the removal of God's blessing from this nation, its land, and its temple.

The blood of those who died for God would not be forgotten.

*Mt 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

*These words remind us of how His compassion is sincere.*

These words reveal the heart of our God. He was speaking to the ones who mistreated and killed the prophets and were about to kill him. Yet, we hear the words of someone who is broken about their condition. He saw them as helpless chicks in a barnyard.

The words found in the last three verses of this chapter were the last words Jesus spoke to the nation of Israel. His last words were words of judgment, he told them goodbye.

By these words, Jesus reminded those of Jerusalem of his attempt to call them to himself. He made sure to mention their response to his call.

Jesus was not speaking to an actual city when he spoke these words, he was speaking to the people of the city. When he addressed the city of Jerusalem, it was as though he was speaking to the entire nation. Jerusalem was supposed to be the spiritual capital of the Jews. Unfortunately, instead of being the spiritual capital, it had become a spiritual wasteland. As a whole, the Jews had rejected their Messiah.

As with all people, their spiritual condition could be determined by taking a look at how they lived. The fact that these people had killed the ones God had sent to them shows us how wicked they were.

The same one who just laid woes upon these people was the one who was broken hearted over them. Jesus likened himself to mother hen who cares for her little ones. When a mother hen sees a storm coming, or a beast of prey moving in, she sounds an alarm to her chicks, and left her wings. Upon hearing the call of their mother, these little ones, run under her wings and find protection and peace. The frightened chicks are protected by their mother.

*These words remind us of how His closeness is seen.*

Jesus did not say he offered his help one time. He said, how "*often*" would I have helped you. I see in those words the fact that he had been close to them through those years. He was close enough to where he could have helped them, had they simply asked. We have a Savior who is always close.

*These words remind us of how His comfort is shunned.*

They "*would not*". They refused his help. He longed to comfort them, but they would not come to him.

The words, "would not" mean, "to chose" or "to delight in". In other words, they simply chose that which they wanted most. Every day, millions of people do the same thing. They simply would rather have the world, than Jesus.

The word "would" in "would I" is the same word as in "would not". Jesus would, but they would not.

The words, "*gathered*" and "*together*" are the same Greek word. Both words mean the same thing. Both words mean, "to collect in one place". This reminds me of how there is only one place of safety in this dangerous barn yard, called earth.

Jesus did not coldly pronounce judgment on the scribes and Pharisees. His heart was broken. He longed for them to repent and turn to him. Yet, they would not.

These words remind us of how there are times when that which God desires does not come to pass (Gen. 6:6; Dt. 5:29; Ps. 81:13; Is. 48:18).

Before we move on to the next verse, I would like to thank the Lord for the protection of His wings. Through the many storms of life I have been able to find that safe place. Like David, I have asked Him to hide me under the shadow of His wings (Ps. 17:8-9).

*Mt 23:38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

*These words remind us of how His curse is severe.*

He had been longsuffering to these rebellious people. But, His patience would run out. Judgment was coming and it would be severe. The eight woes he spoke of in the first part of this chapter were on the way.

Their decision had consequences. Jesus had called the temple "my" house earlier because it was the house of God. He had visited that place and His presence had been obvious. But now, Jesus called it "*your*" house. They had so abandoned the Word and will of God that He had vacated the premises. The same can happen in our churches.

The word, "*desolate*" means "deserted and desolate". It actually has the idea of a wasteland. The old west ghost towns come to my mind. The word desolate carries with it the idea of there being a loneliness involved. When God moves out, an emptiness moves in. In their blindness they still wait for their Messiah to come.

Israel is still cursed today. They are preserved, but they are not blessed because they are still rejecting their Messiah. They are living right now in constant fear because of their enemies.

Jesus told them their house was "*left unto*" them. The temple was still there. It would be there for around forty more years. They could still go in and do their ritualistic gymnastics but they would do it without God. I am afraid there are more churches scattered across our land that are doing that very thing, and they do not even notice the fact that God does not visit with them any longer.

Jesus said, your house is left "*unto you*". I see in those words the fact that God was giving them what they wanted, to be left alone. From this time forward, it would be up to them to handle their problems. When they needed help, He would leave them to find it the best way they could. When they were afraid, He would let them find their own courage. When they felt lonely, He would leave them to weep alone. After all, is that not what they had asked for?

Very few things are more sad than an old church building that has been deserted and is crumbling. But, even worse than that is the church that continues to operate without the presence of God. They have their meetings, they sing their songs, they pray their prayers, and they preach their sermons, but the Spirit is God is absent. That church is just as desolate as the one where the building is about to topple over.

*Mt 23:39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

Jesus said, "*Ye shall not see me henceforth*". God would honor their desire for Him to leave them alone. This was the last message Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees. He would turn and walk away from the Jews as a nation.

*These words remind us of how His commitment is steadfast.*

Jesus' words "*till ye shall say*" make it clear, the God of heaven is still committed to His chosen people, Israel. He will not give up on them.

I am so glad He is still working on me. He will not quit working on those who belong to Him (Phil. 1:6).

The words, "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*" is a phrase that was connected to the coming of the Messiah.

The little word, "*till*" is gigantic. From the gloom of his promise of destruction comes a ray of hope. He would leave the Jews, they would be desolate, but that was not the end of the story. He would be coming again. And, when he comes this time, the people of Israel would welcome him.

*These words remind us of how His coming is sure.*

The words "*he that cometh*" assures us of the certainty of His return to this earth. In spite of how Israel had treated Him, He would return, and He would restore them.

On one hand, he said their house was left unto them desolate, on the other hand, he said he would restore it again. On one hand he said he was leaving, on the other hand he said he was coming back.

The disciples heard Jesus say this. I am sure it thrilled them to no end. They undoubtedly thought this meant he would return any day. It is quite possible they expected him to start setting up the kingdom within a few days or a couple of weeks at the longest.

Luke tells us of a parable Jesus gave in an attempt to settle the disciples. He gave this parable in an attempt to show his disciples that his coming would not be as soon as they were hoping (Lk.19:11-27). Verse eleven says, "And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."

*These words remind us of how His covenant is secure.*

God will keep His promise with the Jews. The day will come when Israel will turn to the Lord (Jer. 23:3-8; Acts 5:31; Rom. 11:23, 26-27).