

THE KING'S MONOLOGUE  
THE OLIVET DISCOURSE 24:1-25:46

A monologue is a long utterance by one person who does not give anyone else an opportunity to speak. These next two chapters are just that. If my calculation are correct, there are 2,042 words in this sermon. Jesus took the floor and did not give it up until he was done.

This monologue is commonly called "The Olivet Discourse". It is so called because it was a sermon Jesus delivered on the Mount of Olives. Parallel passages of this sermon can be found in Mk.13:1-37 and Lk. 21:5-36.

As we look at these next two chapters it is important that we remember the fact that Matthew was writing primarily to Jews. The prophecy is relating to Israel. Certainly New Testament believers can learn a great deal from this sermon, but we must remember, it was meant for Israel and not the church. Jesus was speaking of God's future plan for Israel.

As we will see, some of the most misused verses in history are found in this sermon. This sermon was not about the rapture, it is about the second coming of Jesus. The rapture is when Jesus comes to take his church to heaven (Jn. 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Th. 4:13-18). The second coming is when Jesus comes back to earth and sets up his kingdom (Zech. 14:4; Mal. 3:2; 2 Th. 1:7; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-21).

In the following verses, Jesus will be describing the events that will take place during the Tribulation Period. The church will not go through the Tribulation Period. There are several reasons why I say this.

First, this is a time when God will be dealing with Israel, not with His church. Jeremiah called this time, the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). The name, Jacob is certainly speaking of the Jews.

Second, the tribulation period is the seventieth week of the prophecy spoken of by Daniel the prophet. These seventy weeks are dealing with Israel, and only Israel. Daniel said, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Dan. 9:24). If the church was not a part of the first sixty nine weeks of this prophecy, why would we think it will be a part of the seventieth week?

Third, Jesus promised to keep His church from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (Rev. 3:10). The only temptation that will ever come upon the entire earth is the tribulation period.

Four, the church is seen in the first three chapter of the book of the Revelation. She is called up in chapter four and is not seen on earth during the Tribulation Period.

Five, God does not give the church one word of instruction about how to live faithfully through the Tribulation Period in the epistles. Certainly our Father would have instructed His people as to how they should live if they were to go through such a terrible event.

This chapter gives some of the most clear prophecies in all of scripture. The disciples wanted to know the future. They are not alone. It is amazing to me how many people are interested in end times events. People who would never darken the doors of a church will spend hours looking into the subject of prophecy.

The people of Israel longed for their deliverer. They hungered to be free of the Roman oppression and they knew the Old Testament scripture had promised one would come to deliver them. This Messiah would come and fix things, and things really needed fixing. The Old Testament promised them a bright future and they were hoping beyond all hope that it would happen soon.

However, before the Messiah comes to deliver Israel, there will be a time of great trouble. This time of trouble is commonly called the Tribulation Period, or Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). Jesus explained some of the circumstances of this terrible time in this chapter.

Daniel tells us the Tribulation Period will be a seven year period of time that will be divided into two parts (Dan. 9:27). Jesus dealt with the first half of this period in verses 4-8, and the last part in verses 9-14 of this chapter.

*Mt 24:1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.*

Jesus had been in the temple when he pronounced the woes on the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23:13-36). The word, "*departed*" carries with it the idea of leaving for good. Jesus was leaving and would not come back. He had given Israel so many chances to repent, but they refused. As we will see, he did not leave his true disciples. They would be the beginning of the church and Jesus had a plan for them.

The temple mentioned here is what is commonly called Herod's temple. The disciples were quite impressed with the temple and all the buildings connected to it (cf. Lk. 21:5, Mk. 13:1). The truth be known, the temple was a majestic sight. There were 10,000 stone cutters and setters working on it during the years of its construction. There were also 1,000 priests working as stone workers and carpenters because only a priest could build a sacred place. The main part of Herod's temple was completed before he died but the work continued for more than sixty years after that. Sadly, it was totally destroyed in 70 AD.

*Mt 24:2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

The disciples expected Jesus to be as impressed with the temple as they were. To their surprise, he was not. Jesus called it all "*things*". The temple and all the structures included with it was truly magnificent. The disciples may have been impressed with those structures but buildings do not impress God? Jesus certainly would never have degraded any structure designated for the glory of God, but he wanted his disciples to realize it was still something that was temporary. As wonderful as the temple was, it was temporary as all things are. Everything in this world shall one day perish.

This should remind us that our church building is not to be worshipped. We should have great respect for the buildings we worship in for they are dedicated to the God we worship. But, we dare not take that respect too far. After all, the true church is the people who attend, not the building.

Also, as magnificent as the temple structure was, it was still stained with the sin of those who were supposed to be the keepers of it. The priests had contaminated it.

Jesus foretold of the destruction of the temple. He went so far to say "*There shall no be left here one stone upon another*". What a prediction. This prophecy was unthinkable in Jesus' day. The massive building was so huge, no one could imagine it being torn down. Also, they could not imagine anyone ever wanting to destroy the building that they considered to be holy. Yet, it did happen just as Jesus had predicted. It was torn down, stone by stone with not one stone left upon another, just as Jesus said it would.

The temple was destroyed in 70 AD when Titus overthrew Jerusalem. However, much of what Jesus will say in this chapter did not take place at that time (cf. v. 4-30). This has caused a good bit of confusion. Some have gone so far as to say Jesus was wrong. They say he admitted to not knowing everything about the events that were to take place (v. 36) so the fact that he was incorrect is not so important. However, there is a vast difference between not knowing something and being wrong about something. If Jesus was wrong here, he could be wrong in other places.

Jesus' prediction about the temple must have confused the disciples. They were still expecting him to set up his kingdom and they did not know how a destroyed temple could fit in with a king and a kingdom.

*Mt 24:3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

Jesus ascended the Mount of Olives from which they could overlook the city of Jerusalem, including the temple.

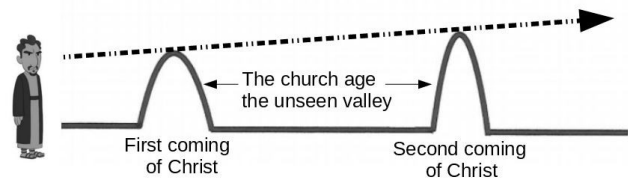
The disciples that came to Jesus and asked these questions were Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk. 13:3). They were expecting the end at any moment.

These disciples asked Jesus three questions. Jesus answered their question with the longest answer given anywhere in the bible.

They asked, "*when shall these things be*". They were referring to the destruction of the temple that he had just mentioned.

They asked, "*what shall be the sign of thy coming*". They were talking about his coming when he would set up the kingdom they had been looking for. They wanted to know what to look for so they could be certain about the timing of his coming. No doubt, they expected Jesus to overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom at any moment. So, one of the most important reasons he said what he did in chapter 24 was to get them to understand that it was not yet time for his kingdom. It would come, but not then.

We must recognize one very important fact. The Old Testament saints did not see the church age. They did not see the two comings of Christ. All they knew was the Lord was coming. It was like looking at two mountains from a distance (notice illustration). It looks like one peak when there are actually two with a valley between them. The valley between his two coming is the church age.



So, their question, and his answer, was not talking about when Jesus comes in the rapture. It was dealing with the time when he comes to set up his kingdom. As previously stated, this is called the Second Coming and it happens at the end of the Tribulation Period. Jesus will return to the earth, defeat his foes, and set up his kingdom.

And, they asked, what will be the sign "of the end of the world". The word "end" used here means completion. The Jews believed the coming of their messiah would start a totally new age.

The answer Jesus gave his disciples can be confusing if we miss one fact. When dealing with prophecy, it was not uncommon for the prophecy to have a short term and a long term prediction. This has been called "dual prophecy". The idea of this concept is that some prophecy has a short-term and long-term fulfillment. That means, the prophecy has a fulfillment in the relatively near future, and another fulfillment in the distant future.

Part of the reason for the short-term and long-term prophecy was to confirm the accuracy of the prophet. For the message of a prophet to be believed, he had to be right 100% of the time (Ezk. 33:33; Jer. 28:9). If he prophesied something that did not come to pass, he was to be regarded as a liar and considered a heretic (Dt. 18:22).

So, many times God would give His prophet a message that had a short-term and a long-term fulfillment. That way, if the short-term prophecy came to pass as he had said, they could be sure the long-term prophecy was accurate also.

This is true of the prophecy Jesus gave in answer to the disciples questions. Some of the events he mentioned would take place within a few years of his prediction. The destruction of the temple and the persecution Jesus spoke of would be examples (cf. v. 9). However, there are many things Jesus' predicted that did not take place during the lives of the disciples.

Therefore, we must be careful in interpreting the words of Jesus in order to determine when his prediction will actually come to pass.

One thing is certain, Jesus said there was coming a time of horrible tribulation. The events he spoke of seem to line up with what John wrote in the sixth chapter of The Revelation. Please consider the following.

Events in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 that seem to coincide		
False Christs and false prophets	Mt.24:5 and 11	Rev.6:2
Wars	Mt.24:6-7	Rev.6:2-4
Famines	Mt.24:7	Rev.6:5-8
Pestilences	Mt.24:7	Rev.6:8
Persecution	Mt.24:9	Rev.6:9-11
Earthquakes	Mt.24:7	Rev.6:12
Disturbance in the heavens	Mt.24:29	Rev.6:12-14

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISCIPLINE 24:1--51

After Jesus takes his church out of this world in the rapture there will be a time of peace and safety (1 Th. 5:3). And then, everything begins to fall apart. There will be a seven year period of trouble. This seven year period is called "The Tribulation Period". Jesus gave some details about this period in chapter 24.

We are about to look at one of the worse times this earth will ever endure. We will see the devil unleash every weapon in his arsenal in an attempt to overthrow God and His people. We will see the demons reeking havoc, the earth, and the solar system, will go into convulsions, disease, war, famine, death, and devastation will be rampant. Yet, in all this calamity, we must not miss what is probably the most important fact, that being, this is God's wrath being poured out on a people who wanted their way (Isa.24:1; 26:21; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:18; Rev. 6:15-17; 11:17-18; 14:7,19; 16:1,7,19). God will be dealing with those whom He loves. He will be disciplining His beloved Israel.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DECEPTION 24:4-5

*Mt 24:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.*

The first thing Jesus mentioned was the importance of not being deceived during this time. The word, "*heed*" means, "to look at" or "beware". His warning was serious. Anytime we follow a deceiver the consequences can be tragic. That will be especially true during the time Jesus was about to discuss. When the world is coming unglued, you had better know who you are following.

He said, let "*no*" man deceive you. The thought is, some of those who lead you wrong may be the ones who are closest to you and someone you would least expect to be a deceiver.

Notice how Jesus said "*you*" in this verse. He will say, "*you*" and "*ye*" in many of the following verses. Did Jesus mean the disciples he was speaking to at that moment would be the ones who would suffer these things? Of course not. We know none of those disciples would be alive when these troublesome times came. So, how could Jesus say "you" and "ye" when he was speaking to people that would not be alive when those things took place? This is a common occurrence with biblical prophecy. When God speaks through a prophet, there are times it is as though He transports that prophet into the time he is prophesying.

So, it is as though the prophet is speaking directly to those who are living in that time period. As an example, if God speaks through a prophet living in 580 BC about something that will happen in 2017. He will word the prophecy as though he is living in 2017. There are examples of this practice in other passages (Isa 13:6, 66:10-14; Zech. 3:10). So the "ye" and "you" applies to those who will actually be living in that time Jesus was speaking of.

*Mt 24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

The reason it will be so important to not be deceived is because there will be many claiming to be the messiah. The dream of every Jew had been that their messiah would come. Since they longed for that day of deliverance, they will be an easy target for a deceiver.

Notice, Jesus said "*many*" shall come claiming to be the Messiah. It will not be a few here and there who claim to be the Messiah. This is another reason to think Jesus was not referring to the events that took place when Titus attacked Jerusalem. There is no record of many claiming to be the Christ at that time.

Some of these false messiahs will "*deceive many*". They will be very convincing because they will be empowered by the devil himself. The devil has always been excellent at deceiving. How sad. At the time when people need direction more than ever, they will be following those who are leading them away from the truth.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISAGREEMENTS 24:6-7a

*Mt 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

There shall be "*wars and rumours of wars*".

The second seal judgment during the Tribulation Period will be war (Rev. 6:3-4). The Antichrist comes with peace to begin with. He will make all sorts of promises. For a while it will look as though his plan is working. This explains why so many will follow him. It will seem as though he has to answer to many of the problems that will plague the world at that time. But, that peace will be replaced with war and violence.

The word "*shall*" implies a continual action. In other words, there is more than just an occasional mention of war. It is something that will happen so often that it becomes the norm. War will constantly be breaking out. Before one ends, another begins. And during it all, there will be talk of the possibility of another war.

Since Cain got upset at Abel, conflict and war have been a part of life on earth. However, during the time Jesus was speaking about conflicts and wars will multiply tremendously. Without the Holy Spirit's restraint upon man, their hatred and anger will explode. The amount of war will escalate to an alarming rate. It will be like nothing ever seen on earth. That is an alarming fact considering the death and devastation this world has already seen in previous wars. There were 20 million killed in World War I, 620,000 in the Civil War, 60 million in World War II, and between 1 and 3 million in the Vietnam conflict. The danger of such conflict is staggering. America alone has enough nuclear fire power to wipe out the entire human race four times. Yet, in spite of it all, God will not allow man to destroy the entire world.

In the midst of this message of gloom, Jesus tells those who are his disciples "*be not troubled*". The word translated "troubled" means "to cry aloud, or to wail". It is found only three times in the bible and all three are in reference to this time of tribulation (Mt.24:6; Mk.13:7; 2 Th.2:2). This indicates the severity of the circumstances during the time Jesus was speaking about. It will truly be a time like none other.

Yet, God tells His people to not be afraid. What an amazing message. God always tells His people to not be afraid, to not be alarmed, and to not be affected by the circumstances they are faced with (cf. Dt. 20:1; Josh. 1:9; Isa. 26:3; Mt. 14:27; Mk. 4:40; Jn. 14:27). Even in the midst of extreme danger, our heavenly Father is still in control and can be trusted completely.

All these things "*must come to pass*". There is nothing man can do to keep this from happening. There is no peace plan, no new invention, no new technology, that will keep this calamity from coming. We may not understand it but it is God's plan for Israel. They must be purged. They must learn their lesson. God tried loving them to Him and they rejected Him. So, this will be the time for God's discipline.

Jesus said "*but the end is not yet*". These first calamities are just the beginning. There is a long road ahead and a lot more on the way.

*Mt 24:7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

Entire nations will act like madmen. This will lead to all out war.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DEARTH 24:7b

Famine will be wide spread. Many of the nations of the world are dependent upon other nations for their food supply. There will be such a hatred throughout the world, the cooperation that makes trade possible will be discontinued. This will cause famine in many nations.

Some of the judgments that take place during the Tribulation Period will contribute to famine. For instance, the third seal judgment during the Tribulation Period will be famine (Rev. 6:5-6). Also, the trumpet judgments will bring famine because a third of vegetation is burnt up (Rev. 8:7-10).

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISEASE

The word, "*pestilences*" means, "disease" or "plague". Disease will be rampant. Uncontrollable plagues and epidemics will break out.

The AIDS epidemic is a good example of the diseases that could infest the world during the Tribulation. Since the beginning of the AIDS outbreak there have been more than 70 million people who have been infected. About 35 million have died. There were 36.7 million living world-wide with HIV at the end of 2016. In 2016, in Africa alone, there were 7.1 million who had AIDS. There were 270,000 new cases, and 110,000 died.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISTURBANCES

There will be "*earthquakes*". The entire earth will be go into convulsions.

The sixth seal judgment will be a devastating earthquake (Rev. 6:10-14). The seventh seal judgment will bring about another earthquake (Rev. 8:1-6). The seventh vial judgment includes an earthquake (Rev. 16:17-21). This earthquake will be so violent it will divide, or totally level, entire cities.

*Mt 24:8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

If war, famines, disease, and earthquakes are just the beginning, what might be expected before this time of turmoil will end? It will get much worse before the end comes.

The word, "*sorrows*" it an interesting word. It means, "pain, sorrow, or travail". It has the idea of the pains of travail that come before child birth. Those pains do not come at the first, or in the middle, they come at the very end of the pregnancy. When the pains start, they start slowly, then build in severity and frequency. So, it will be with the calamities Jesus spoke of. There will be some difficulties throughout the Tribulation but the closer it gets to the end, like birth pains, they will get worse and closer together.

Paul says the same thing when he says, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Th 5:3).

Jesus did not chose the travail of childbirth inadvertently. As the pains of travail bring about the birth of a new life, so the travails of those days will bring about a new age. Those pains usher in the kingdom. Jesus had this new birth in mind when he spoke earlier of the "regeneration" (Mt. 19:28).

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISCORD

The Tribulation Period will be a time of hatred like this world has never seen.

*Mt 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

When considering this verse we must first realize there will be a vast number of Jews and Gentiles saved during the Tribulation Period. There will be 144,000 Jews saved and set apart to proclaim the gospel (Rev. 7:4). Many Jews will be saved through their preaching. There will also be an innumerable number Gentiles saved (Rev. 7:9-14).

The opposition to these believers will be headed up by a man the bible calls the Antichrist.

*The Antichrist will be powerful.* He will get his power from Satan. Daniel says his power in "not by his own power" (Dan. 8:24). Paul tells us he will have all the power of Satan and will have the ability to do miracles (2 Th. 2:9).

*The Antichrist will be wicked.* He will be the ultimate embodiment of evil. He will be so wicked that Paul calls him the "man of sin" (2 Th. 2:3-4).

*The Antichrist will be influential.* By the power of Satan, and his own charisma, he will convince much of the world to follow him (Rev. 13:5). He will be the greatest political leader in the history of mankind. His rise to power will be quick, dynamic, charismatic, and brilliant. He will appear to have the answer to the problems of the world. But, he will be an ego-maniac without integrity who cares only for himself and his agenda.

*The Antichrist will oppose God and that which pertains to God.* He will oppose God, and His children, like none before him (Dan.7:25; 2 Th. 2:4; Rev.13:6-7). . The word "Antichrist" actually means, "an opponent of the Messiah". Paul says he "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God". He will be against God and everything He represents).

*The Antichrist will claim to be the one true God.* He will go into the temple of God and claim to be God (2 Th. 2:4). He will exalt himself above everything that is called God. That refers to the true God but it also means all the false religions of the world. He will claim to be the one true God.

*The Antichrist will seek world domination.* He will claim to be the Messiah and seek to dominate the world. His primary goal will be to annihilate the nation of Israel and all true believers.

*The Antichrist will be defeated.* He will wage war on God's people but Jesus will return and defeat him with the word of his mouth (2 Th. 2:8). God will finally cast him into the lake of fire where he will suffer with all those who rejected Christ (Rev. 20:10).

But, to begin with, the Antichrist will appear to be the Jew's best friend. He will make a seven year covenant with them (Dan. 9:27a). John tells us this man has a bow, but he has no arrows (Rev. 6:1-2). This speaks of a peace that will not last. This man is given a crown, and he goes forth conquering, and to conquer. To begin with, he will conquer by his charisma and persuasion. Daniel said he went forth conquering, and to conquer. He is not satisfied. He conquers one nation, and then goes to conquer another. He will have an overwhelming power over people. They will gladly follow him. Revelation tells us the entire world, except the believers, will worship him (Rev. 13:8).

The Jews may believe this man is their long awaited Messiah, or they may merely see him as a powerful world leader. Either way they will follow him without reservation. Jesus spoke of this man who would come in his own name (Jn. 5:43). In fact, if you ask a devout Jew living today how they will know the Messiah when he comes, there will be one answer they will always give. He will tell you they will know their Messiah because he will let them build the temple again. Sadly, that is exactly what the Antichrist will do.

However, the time will come when he will show his true colors (Dan. 9:27; 11:36-37; Mt. 24:15; 2 Th. 2:4). He will declare open season on all true believers. He will declare war on the saints (Rev. 13:7). His followers will search out the believers with a hatred worse than any this world has ever seen. Hitler hated the Jews and proved it by killing approximately six million of them. But, Hitler will be a kindergarten teacher compared to the Antichrist.

The word, "*deliver*" means, "to betray". Mark gives us more information about what Jesus said here (Mk. 13:9,11). Jesus said believers would be delivered to the judicial system of that day. It is likely, the Antichrist will declare Christianity to be illegal. The officials will have such an allegiance to the Antichrist they will be excited to try believers.

They will be "*afflicted*". Old Testament law said those found guilty should be beaten with forty stripes (Dt. 25:2-3). For fear of someone miscounting the stripes given and inadvertently violating this law, the Jews applied only thirty-nine stripes. Believers will be beaten in the synagogues for their stand for Christ (Mk. 13:9). The place designated for worship will be used to abuse God's people.

Jesus said these believers are to trust the Lord to give them the words to say (Mk. 13:11). They were not to plan ahead about what they would say, God will give them the words when the time comes. Luke records that Jesus said, "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist (Lk 21:14-15).

The followers of the Antichrist "*shall kill you*". These trials against believers will not be the only form of punishment or execution. There will be an out and out slaughter of believers. No doubt, it will be open season on all believers. The two witnesses, for example, will be slain in the streets (Rev. 11:3-11).

All believers, especially Jewish believers, will be "*hated of all nations*". Israel has very few friends now, but she will have fewer then.

Jesus said this hatred for believers will be "*for my name's sake*". They hate believers because they hate Jesus.

Jesus' prediction of believers being mistreated came to pass with his own disciples. (Acts 4:1-21; 16:23-24; 18:12-16). Ten of the remaining eleven disciples (Judas being an impostor) were martyred for their faith. However, the persecution of saints during the Tribulation Period will be even worse.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DEFECTION

*Mt 24:10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

Many will be "offended". Many will abandon the faith during the Tribulation Period. This speaks of those who had professed to be saved but were not really born again. It will be a time that reveals who is genuine. As was seen while Jesus walked the earth, many who profess to be saved, are not really believers (Jn. 6:66). We must remember, the cost of believing will be higher than ever during the Tribulation Period. Believers will be starved, hunted, beaten, and killed. So, only those who are truly saved will be willing to pay such a high price.

This verse truly amazes me. It tells us many who professed to be saved will abandon the faith. But, it tells us much more than that. It tells us these who had claimed to know the Lord will be some of those who devote their lives to the Antichrist and his attempt to wipe out all believers. They not only defect themselves, but they become an ally of the enemy of Jesus.

There will be some who "betray" one another. The authorities will be on the constant look out for those who profess to be saved. Some of those questioned will betray the Christians they know by giving the authorities their names and addresses.

They do this because they "hate" believers. Without the Holy Spirit's restraint, hatred will be the norm. This hatred will be so deep that it even destroys the natural love for family and friends. Mark tells us brothers will betray their brothers, fathers will betray their sons, and children will betray their parents, and cause them to be put to death (Mk.13:12).

*Mt 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*

The power of Antichrist will convince many to follow him. But, many of his followers will become his messengers. The sad thing is these false prophets will be able to "deceive many". Many will believe the lies. It seems even now, people are much quicker in accepting a lie than the truth.

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISOBEDIENCE

*Mt 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

The word, "iniquity" means, "violation of law" or "wickedness". The breaking of God's law, and the law of the land, will be rampant. Ungodliness will be the norm.

Imagine this world when man's nature is allowed to run free without any restraints. God will let them do as they please. Add to that the fact that the devil will influence most of humanity to do his bidding.

This will give us a little idea of what it will be like during this period. Jesus likened these days to the days of Noah and of Lot (Lk. 17:26-28). Both of those times when ungodliness was rampant.

The word, "abound" means, "to increase". The vileness of sin will explode. This should be no surprise considering the following facts. First, the Holy Spirit will not be restraining the fleshly desires of man (2 Th. 2:7). Secondly, the evil influence of the Antichrist. Thirdly, there will be a vast number of demons let loose on earth (Rev. 9).

The love of many will grow "cold". The abundant sin, the persecution, and the defecting of false disciples will take its toll even on true believers. Love for the Lord, for people, and for godliness will diminish. The influence of ungodliness had always been strong, but it will be worse then. We think it is difficult to walk with God in our day. But, what we endure is nothing compared to what believers will have to endure then.

*Mt 24:13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

In the midst of the turmoil, there is one ray of hope. God will still be speaking to those who will listen. There will be a way of deliverance.

There are two ways to look at this verse.

First, we can view it spiritually. In this view we see those who endure till the end of the Tribulation are the ones who are truly saved. The bible clearly teaches, those who are really saved will persevere because God is working in them (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:23). This will still be true during the Tribulation Period. Those who are really saved will endure unto the end of the Tribulation. Those who abandon the faith will prove they were never really saved to begin with.

Secondly, we can look at this verse physically. Looking at it this way we see Jesus as referring to physical life and the ones who endure are the ones who make it to the end of the Tribulation Period without being killed by the Antichrist. This means, if a believer can somehow stay alive until the end of the Tribulation Period, Jesus will come and rescue them. He will save them from death.

Luke spoke of this when he said, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Lk 21:27-28).

THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DECLARATION

The gospel will be declared throughout the world during the Tribulation Period.

*Mt 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

The "*gospel of the kingdom*" will be preached "*in all the world*". Many say this verse is teaching the gospel must be preached throughout the world before the Lord can return in the rapture. Some go so far as to tell believers they should "hasten" the coming of the Lord by telling others about Christ. Actually, the ultimate fulfillment of the gospel of the kingdom being preached in all the world will be accomplished by an angel, and not by man (cf. Rev. 14:6).

To begin with, in this verse, Jesus was referring to his second coming and not the rapture (please refer to our comments at the beginning of this chapter).

Also, I do not believe there is anything we can do to hasten the Lord's return. The time of His coming is in the control of the Father (Acts 1:7b). I personally believe the time of the rapture is already set. Jesus will return at the precise moment the Father has determined whether people are ready or not.

It is a blessing to realize, the abundant ungodliness, the spread of false doctrine, nor the severe persecution, will be able to stop the preaching of the gospel message.

The gospel of the kingdom will consist of the message of the cross being the way to forgiveness. It will include the good news that Jesus will come to rescue those struggling in the Tribulation Period, and will set up his kingdom, as he had promised. That is why it is called the gospel of the kingdom.

The message of forgiveness will be declared by many. God will seal 144,000 Jewish converts and will send them out to preach the good news (Rev. 7:4). There will be the two witnesses that God will use greatly (Rev. 11:3-11). The angel who preaches the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6). Another angel will proclaim, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. 14:8). Which means, man's kingdom is over, you had better get right with God.

Perhaps this is God's one last call to those living. Many will accept this message and be saved. But, many will reject it just like those who lived in Noah's day.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DESECRATION

*Mt 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)*

Some say this verse is speaking of Titus and the Romans. However, it is quite obvious that everything Jesus will speak of in the next few verses did not take place when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Remember, Jesus was answering the disciples' question about the sign of his coming (cf. v. 3). This is one sign that should be too obvious to be misunderstood. It stands out more than the other signs Jesus spoke of (cf. vv. 6-7). Unlike wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes, this was a one time event. When a man stands in the temple of God as verse fifteen describes, they will know it is the sign Jesus spoke of.

There are four factors that are clear in this verse.

First, Jesus was referring to that which Daniel had prophesied. He said it was something that was "*spoken of by Daniel*". Daniel wrote of a man who would desecrate the holy place (Dan. 8:13-14; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

Second, the fact that Jesus used the word, "*stand*" reveals he was referring to a real person. Some teach this to be a system of evil but Jesus' wording shows us he was talking about a real man.

Third, this man shall stand "*in the holy place*". That obviously is referring to a temple that will be standing at the time this event takes place. Some believe the holy place is referring to the entire city of Jerusalem but the temple is that which is called the holy place (Acts 6:16; 21:28).

Fourth, Jesus was referring to a very specific event. His words were not some general comments that are difficult to comprehend. He was talking about an event that is so unusual, there will be no question about it when it happens. It will be an event that will change the world.

The words, "*abomination of desolation*" mean, an abomination that makes desolate (cf. Dan. 11:31). The word, "*abomination*" means, "detestable". It speaks of an act so vile that it desecrates the temple of God.

Of course, the man Jesus was talking about is the man the bible calls the Antichrist (please refer to the comments in these notes for Mt. 24:4 for more information about the Antichrist). As previously stated, the Antichrist will establish a seven covenant with Israel. But, after approximately three and one-half years, he will break that covenant, and stop the Jews from offering sacrifices (Dan. 9:27). He will begin an all out attack on the Jews who have accepted Christ, and all true believers (Lk. 21:20; Rev. 13:7). This entering into this covenant is the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-27).

Some believe Jesus was referring to Antiochus Epiphanes when he spoke of the abomination of desolation. Antiochus Epiphanes was a king who reigned over Syria from 175 BC until 164 BC. He named himself Epiphanes, which means "illustrious one" or "god manifest". However, because of his wicked behavior he was given the nickname of "Epimanes", which means "mad one".



In 168 BC, Antiochus and his army surrounded and attacked Jerusalem, killing 80,000 Jews and selling 40,000 Jews as slaves. He went to the temple and proclaimed it to be the temple of Zeus. He put an image of Zeus in the temple and demanded it be worshiped. He stopped the Jews from their daily sacrifices and sacrificed a pig on the altar. This act defiled the temple.

Though Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of the temple was similar to what Jesus spoke of in verse fifteen, we know he was not referring to Antiochus. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple around 200 years before Jesus spoke these words. Jesus made it very clear that what he was referring to was yet in the future. Also, some twenty years after Jesus spoke these words, Paul would write about this man as being yet in the future (2 Th. 2:3-4).

The words, "*whoso readeth, let him understand*" are meant to get the attention of those who hear or read these words. The word, "*understand*" means, "to exercise the mind". The message was too important to take lightly. The Antichrist's act of abomination will bring about a vast change in the events of the Tribulation. Things are about to go bad in a hurry. Jesus' admonition in the next few verses will indicate this change.

And so, we see the importance of the abomination of desolation. It is the sign mentioned by Daniel (Dan.9:27). It is the sign foreshadowed by Antiochus Epiphanes mentioned by Daniel (Dan.11:31). It is the precise marker of number of days left mentioned by Daniel (Dan.12:11). It is the revelation of the man of sin mentioned by Paul (2 Th.2:3). And, it is the warning to the believers to flee (Mt.24:16).

*Mt 24:16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:*

Things are about to get real bad for those who believe. When the Antichrist shows his true colors it will be a time like this world has never seen. He will wage an all out war on the Jews and all true believers. Luke tells us about the armies of the Antichrist surrounding Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20). These times will be so severe that Jesus had one word of advice to the Jews. He tells them to flee immediately when they see the abomination of desolation. They are not to wait, to fight, or to resist. They are to run, and run as quickly as they can.

Jesus tells us why it would be futile for them to resist the Antichrist and his army. He said it is actually God's punishment on the Jews (Lk. 21:22). They will learn something we all need to learn, that being, you cannot win when you fight against God.

Jesus said to flee to "*the mountains*". The rocks and caves in the mountains provide a natural defense for these fleeing people. Many believe the city of Petra will be one place of refuge for these fleeing believers. It is totally surrounded by mountains of solid rock. The only way into this city is by a passage so narrow that a horse and rider can barely get through. It would be a perfect place to hide from the Antichrist and his army.

*Mt 24:17-18 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

The housetops were flat so they used them like outdoor patios. Jesus said those who are on their housetop should not even take time to go in their houses to get supplies for their journey. Those working in the fields are not to take the time to run to their house to get clothes. This may be referring to the outer garments they used to keep warm and dry.

Jesus knew the natural reaction would be for them to run to their houses to gather supplies for the journey. He warned them to resist that inner tendency. They are to run immediately. The three or four minutes it would take to gather supplies may mean the difference between life and death. Their only hope of survival, is to get away from the Antichrist and his army.

Imagine having to flee your home without a coat to keep warm or clothing to keep dry. Think of how traumatic it would be to flee your home not knowing where you were going, how long you would be gone, or if you would ever return.

*Mt 24:19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!*

The unborn, infants, and children would cause significant problems.

First, the quick flight and travel would be much more difficult for those expecting babies, and for those with small children. Once again, we see the imminent danger. Anything even hindering their flight may cost them their lives.

Second, food will certainly be difficult to attain. Expectant mothers, infants, and children, need the nutrients of a healthy diet.

Third, I believe Jesus had in mind the danger children will have to endure during this time of tribulation. These circumstances will be terrible for the adults, but they will be even worse on the infants and children.

*Mt 24:20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:*

The concern about their flight being in winter is involving more than just the cold weather. The rivers flood during the winter time. This floods the roads and would certainly would hinder their flight.

Jesus' comment about the "*sabbath day*" reminds us how this is a prophecy that pertains primarily to the Jews. The Jews could only travel a short distance on the "sabbath day". This distance was commonly called a "Sabbath day's journey". This concept originated from where God instructed His people to use the Sabbath as a day of rest (Ex. 16:29). The Old Testament law did not give any specific distance that could be traveled, but the rabbi's determined the distance allowed to be 2,000 cubits. They later doubled that distance to allow a journey of 2,000 cubits, and the return trip home. We should remember how important this is to a devout Jew. In their minds, they would be breaking God's law by traveling further than their rules allow.

Another reason spoke of the Sabbath is because there are certain groups dwelling in Israel who will stone anyone driving through their lands on the Sabbath day. This would cause even more danger for those fleeing the Antichrist.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DEVASTATION

*Mt 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

Jesus called this horrible time, "*great*" tribulation. This probably marks the beginning of the last three and a half years of the Tribulation Period. The last half will be much worse than the first.

Saying this is the worse time mankind will ever see is not something to take lightly. People will live in constant fear. For some, it will be more than they can endure. Luke tells us it will eventually get so bad that men's hearts will be failing them because of the fear (Lk 21:26). They literally will be scared to death.

Some teach Jesus was referring to Titus and his attack in 70 AD. But, the words, "*then shall be*" indicate these events were yet in the future when Jesus spoke about them.

Titus' attack on Jerusalem was terrible, but it was by no means the worse time the world have seen.

*Mt 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

Unfortunately, many will be killed or captured during this horrible time. Luke tells us, "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk 21:24).

Zechariah tells us two-thirds of Israel will die, but God will bring the other third through safely (Zech.13:8-9). John talks about believers who will be willing to die during this time (Rev.12:11). John says the Antichrist will make war with the saints, and *overcome* them (Rev.13:7 emphases added). He also talks about the blood of the martyrs (Rev.17:6). The hatred of the Antichrist will be so extreme he will do all he can to find and kill those who have gotten saved.

The circumstances will become so severe that no one will survive unless God intervenes. He does so by shortening the days. But, what did Jesus mean by "*those days should be shortened*"? It is doubtful that he meant the number of days will be less because it seems like the numbers of days are set. The bible teaches the last part of the Tribulation Period will be three and a half years. John tells us the Antichrist will have control for "forty and two months" (Rev. 11:2; 13:5).

Also, the bible goes so far as to even number the days of the last half of the Tribulation Period. It speaks of a period of 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6). No where in the bible is this time less than three and a half years, or less than 1,260 days. So, what did Jesus mean when he talked about the days be shortened? I think we find our answer by looking at the word Jesus used. The word, "shortened" literally means, "to shorten". From that, we may assume that Jesus meant exactly what he said, the actual days will be shorter than the usual twenty four hours.

Notice also how Jesus worded what he said. He did not say, "except that *day* be shortened", which would imply the day of judgment. Instead, he said except "*those days*" be shortened. This points to the actual days (24 hour period) involved.

In considering this, we must remember the reason these days are being shortened. Jesus told us the reason. He said, "*for the elect's sake*". They are shortened that the believing Jews, and all true believers, might escape the hand of the Antichrist. I believe God will supernaturally alter the length of days in order to protect His children from the attack of the Antichrist.

But, how will God shortened the days?

First, the sixth seal brings a judgment that has a catastrophic effect on the universe. The sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair (Rev. 6:12). That means there will be less sunlight. Less daylight means it is more difficult for the Antichrist and his army to find the believers who are hiding. The sixth seal judgment also has a traumatic effect on the universe itself. The heavens will roll back like a scroll (Rev. 6:12). This could certainly effect the length of daylight. What a blessing. This tells me, God will alter the universe if He has to in order to protect His people.

Second, the fourth trumpet judgment will effect the length of days. John said this judgment smites a third part the sun, moon, and stars. It goes so far as to say, "the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise" (Rev. 8:12). So, once again, we see the length of sunlight be lessened.

The "elect" is not referring to the church as some have supposed. The church will be in heaven with the Lord while this is going on. The elect is a reference to the Jews who come to faith during the Tribulation Period. We can be certain about this because of the Jewish terms used in this chapter. For example, the gospel of the kingdom (v.14), the holy place (v.15, the Sabbath (v.20), and the Messiah (vv.23-24) are all terms relating to the Jews.

A note of interest before we leave this verse. John talks about a period of 1,260 days (Rev.12:6). That 1,260 day period begins when the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and commits the abomination of desolation. But, Daniel speaks of a period of 1,290 days (Dan.12:11). We are not told what happens during these extra 30 days but some have speculated this time will be used to clean up the carnage left behind from the Tribulation Period and the battle between Jesus, the Antichrist, and his army (Dan.7:21; Zech.14:14:1-2).

Also, Daniel speaks of a 1,335 day period (Dan.12:12). This is 45 more days than the 1,290. As with the 30 day period, we are not told what will happen during this time. Perhaps this 45 days is the time it will take to judge the nations and do that which is necessary to prepare the earth for the kingdom.(Mt.25:31-46). Daniel said the person who makes it to the end of this period is blessed (Dan.12:12). This is speaking about the blessing being one of those who go into the Millennial kingdom (Rev.20:3-6).

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DECEIT

The Tribulation Period will be a time of deceit. Many who claim to be of God will be liars. The fact is, many will be deceived themselves.

*Mt 24:23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*

Through all this turmoil the only hope the believers have is that the real Messiah might come and deliver them. The devil will understand this fact and do all he can to deceive as many as he can. For this reason, Jesus warned the believers who would be living in that day to not believe anyone who claimed the Messiah had come. Jesus was very emphatic, he said, do not believe those who claim to know where the Messiah is. Those who make such a claim can not be trusted.

*Mt 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

Those who claim to have information about the Christ cannot be trusted is because the devil will plant his impostors throughout the land. The devil has always been an imitator of that which God does. These impostors will tell people the time for the kingdom has arrived and they should follow them to where the Messiah is (cf. Lk.21:8). However, they are liars and should not be believed.

Imagine how tempting it will be to believe these announcements about the Messiah being present. By this time their lives will be a constant terror. They will realize their only hope of surviving is the arrival of the Messiah. Therefore, resisting these rumors will be very difficult?

These liars will be very persuasive because they will have the ability to do great miracles. They have the ability to do "*great signs and wonders*". However, their power will come from the devil and not from God.

Some believe these signs and wonders will be fabricated or fake. Perhaps the reason they believe this is because Paul says the work of the Antichrist will be with signs and *lying* wonders (2 Th.2:9 emphasis added). However, the word, "lying" means, "to have falsehood for their aim". In other words, Paul calls them "lying" wonders because the Antichrist will claim to be doing his miracles by the power of God, when in fact, his power will come from Satan.

Though his power is limited, the devil does have power to do the miraculous. We certainly see this demonstrated in the book of Exodus (Ex.7:11,22), and in the book of Job (Job 1:15, 16,17,19; 2:7).

The devil does this to deceive those who will listen to him (Jn.8:44). He appears at times as an angel of light (2 Cor.11:14). He goal is to draw people away from God.

Also, John tells us the false prophet (the assistant of the Antichrist) will be able to call fire from heaven. His miracles will deceive those who dwell on the earth (Rev.13:13-15). John says nothing about these great wonders being fake.

Jesus tells us what these false prophets will say and do will be so convincing that many will be deceived. Their works and words will be so convincing they would deceive even God's people, "*if it were possible*". The implication is that is it will not be possible for the elect to be deceived. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice" and "they follow me" (Jn.10:27. God will give His children an ability to discern the error of the deceivers. True Christians may have periods of fear, and even measures of doubt, but they cannot be swayed from their faith in Jesus Christ.

*Mt 24:25 Behold, I have told you before.*

Mark's record of this makes it even more clear. Jesus said, "But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things" (Mk 13:23). Jesus spoke these truths before the trouble came. Thank the Lord for warning us about our future battles before they come. God gives us the information we need for the battles ahead. That is why it is so important that we listen intently to His voice. God wants us ready when the battles comes so we will not be overcome by them.

*Mt 24:26 Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*

We must not forget, the Antichrist will want to kill every believer. The devil will attempt to lure the believers out of their hiding place (cf. v.16). What better way to do that than to spread a rumor about the Messiah being seen at a specific place and then being ready to ambush them when they come searching for him? But, God will protect those who follow Him and stay in His prepared place of safety.

*Mt 24:27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

Like lightning, his coming will be sudden, public, visible, glorious.

Jesus made it clear, the arrival of the Messiah will be something they do not have to wonder about. The appearance of the true Messiah will be such a public display there will be no doubt about it. There is no reason to look for the Messiah in some secluded room, or in some spot in the desert, because His coming will be as obvious as the lightning that fills the sky. The Messiah will not hide in some secluded room, or in some remote part of the desert, he will come in power and with a display like none before him. He will not have to rely on any of the news networks to broadcast the fact of his arrival, he will announce his own arrival.

We must remember, Jesus was not referring to the rapture in this verse. He was speaking of His second coming when He comes at the end of the Tribulation Period (Rev.1:7; 19:11-16). Every eye will see Him when He comes in the second coming (Rev. 1:7). No one on earth will not see it (Rev. 1:7). No one will say, "Oh, did he come, I must have missed it, I haven't even heard about it".

*Mt 24:28 For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

These words were in response to a question the disciples asked Jesus. They asked him, "Where Lord?" (Lk.17:31). They wanted to know where the events he spoke of would take place.

The word, "eagles" can be translated as an eagle, or as a vulture. In this context, "vulture" would seem to be the better word. A vulture is carnivorous. It seeks for that which is dead, or dying. Vultures gather in groups, ready to devour any dead carcass they can find.

In this verse, Jesus was still dealing with the fact of the Messiah's coming be obvious (cf. v.27). When he come, part of his work will be to deal with the rampant sin of mankind. When He comes, his judgment will be like a vulture devouring a dead carcass. It is too terrible a scene for there to be any doubt about it.

The story of the vulture starts with a fall. A person, or animal, falls to the ground because of some disease, or injury. A vulture is quick to notice this fall, and comes to wait and watch. Soon, he is joined by others of his kind, and they all wait. They wait patiently for the disease to worsen, and death come. When death and decay comes, they are ready to attack and devour.

Like the vulture, God's judgment is patient. He will wait till sin is to the point to where judgment is justified, When it is, he will descend quickly and deal with sin harshly.

Jesus' words probably have a literal meaning also, for our brother John speaks of fowls that gather to devour the flesh of men and animals (Rev.19:17-21). When the Antichrist and his armies attempt to defeat Jesus, they will be quickly defeated. John tells us there will be so many killed the blood will be to the horse's bridle (Rev.14:20).

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DISTURBANCES

*Mt 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:*

It seems like the entire universe goes into convulsions. John describes this event (Rev.6:12-14). This time described in other places of scripture (Isa.13:10; 34:4; Ezk. 32:7; Joel 2:31; Zeph.1:14-15).

Imagine the catastrophic effects of what is spoken of in this verse. Luke tells us this will be such a terrifying time that men will literally die from fear (Lk.21:25-26).

Some try to explain this verse by saying it is symbolic and was fulfilled when Titus overthrew Jerusalem. However, if Jesus spoke in a literal sense when speaking of the wars, famines, earthquakes and so forth, I see no reason to say He was speaking symbolically here.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DELIVERANCE

The prediction given about Jesus' return will come to pass. As He left, He will return (Acts 1:9,11). He will come and deliver His own.

*Mt 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

The time will come when the Antichrist and his army will invade Israel. John wrote, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them..." (Re 17:14). It will appear as though they are winning and God's people are about to be defeated (Zech.14:1-2). But, just when it seems like defeat is certain, the Lord comes, defeats the Antichrist and his army, and delivers his people (Zech.14:3-4; 13:6).

What exactly will be the "*sign of the Son of man*" is unknown. This has led to some bizarre speculation. Some suggest this sign may be some unusual appearance in the heavens, maybe a star, or even a flaming cross. We cannot be certain for the Lord did not see fit to give us the details about this matter. We do know his coming will be accompanied by unusual activity in the heavens (Isa.13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:31; 3:15-16). Perhaps this is the sign this verse speaks of.

All the "*tribes of the earth*" will mourn when He comes. He is coming to judge unrighteousness. No one will be unaffected. The great day of His wrath has come (Rev.6:17).

The word, "*mourn*" means "to beat the breast". That reminds me to the repentant publican who would not so much as glance towards heaven, but smote upon his breast in humiliation (Lk.18:13). There will be no pride, no arrogance, no bragging, in that day.

The words, "*great glory*" speak of the visible display of His majesty. This is speaking of His own glory. He will simply reveal Himself. We talk about the splendor of heaven but we often forget the brightness of heaven comes from Him (Rev.21:23). The Hollywood and music stars of today have to have all types of lighting and special effects to make them look more glamorous than they actually are. He needs none of these gimmicks (Eph.1:20-22). The three disciples saw a little of His glory when He was transfigured before them (Mt.17:2). But, when He returns, He will be seen in all His glory.

He came in humility the first time (Phil.2:8). He will come in "*power*" the second time. He will come as the God who owns everything. He will come as King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim.6:16).

John gives a detailed description of this event (Rev.19:11-16). Jesus will descend from heaven riding a white horse. He is coming to "judge and make war" (Rev.19:11). His armies (the saints) will come with Him (Jude 14), wearing clothes of white linen, and also riding white horses (Rev.19:14). His feet will stand on the mount of Olives and it will split down the middle (Zech.14:4). He will come to execute judgment on all unbelievers (Jude 15). The Antichrist and his crowd will attempt to defeat Jesus and His army. However, Jesus will defeat them simply by the word of His mouth (2 Th 2:8; Rev.19:19-21).

*Mt 24:31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

God uses angels in various ways to accomplish His plan (Ex.23:23; Ps.103:20; Isa.37:36; Dan.10:13; Lk.1:9; Heb.1:7,14; Rev.12:7). He will use them once again to gather His people at the end of the Tribulation Period.

In the Old Testament, trumpets were used to communicate with the people of Israel (Lev.25:9; Num.10:21-7; Judges 3:27). One of the uses of trumpets was to sound the assembly of the people (Num.10:2). God will use a trumpet again to assemble His people.

The Tribulation saints will have been scattered but they will be gathered together and to go into the Millennial kingdom. The words, "*the four winds*" is an expression referring to all parts of the earth. God will not miss one believer.

When the people of Israel come before their Messiah, they will see the wounds in His hands and will recognize who He is (Jn.19:37; Zech.12:9-10). They will mourn about their mistreatment of Him. Then will be brought to pass the prediction mentioned by Paul that tells us the blindness of Israel will be withdrawn, and they will be saved (Rom.11:25-26).

Jesus will not just deal with His people at this time. He will also deal with the devil, the Antichrist, and the false prophet. He will cast the Antichrist and false prophet into the lake of fire (Rev.19:20). He will cast the devil into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. At the end of this thousand years, the devil will be loosed for a season that he might tempt those who lived through the kingdom their natural bodies (20:1-3).

#### THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE 24:32-35

Jesus gave some parables to emphasize what he had said in this chapter. The parables are as follows, the fig tree (24:32-35), two workers (24:40-41), the householder (24:42-44), good and evil servants (24:45-51).

Jesus was still answering the questions his disciples asked (v.3). He answered their question about "what shall be the sign of thy coming" in verses 4-31 of this chapter. His answer their question about "when shall these things be" begins in verse 32.

*Mt 24:32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:*

Jesus gave a parable about a fig tree to explain the circumstances that will be prevalent just before his coming. When its "*branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves*" refers to the days of spring when the sap begins to run into the branch. When you see this happening, "*ye know summer is nigh*". The sprouting of leaves tells us summer is close.

The question arises, what was Jesus referring to when he talked about the "*fig tree*"? Many teach he was referring to the nation of Israel. And, there are times when God uses a fig tree to refer to Israel. However, in this instance, I do not believe Jesus was referring to the nation of Israel. In Luke's record of this instance, we find Jesus said, "Behold the fig tree, and *all the trees*" (Lk.21:29 emphasis added). Notice, Jesus did not make reference to just a fig tree, but *all trees*. Since he was speaking about all trees, he could not have been referring to Israel only.

Therefore, I believe Jesus used a fig tree as an illustration to demonstrate how quickly these things will happen at the end of the Tribulation Period and beginning of his kingdom. He makes that point in the next two verses.

*Mt 24:33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*

The word, "*likewise*" connects verse 33 with verse 32.

Jesus said, when you see "*all these things*" (what he has talked about in verses 4-31) you will know the kingdom is near. The kingdom will be "*at the doors*".

When Jesus said, "*it*" is near, he was speaking of the establishment of his kingdom. Luke tells us, Jesus said "when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the *kingdom of God* is nigh at hand" (Lk 21:31 emphasis added). After all, isn't that what the disciples were asking him to begin with (cf. v.3).

This information will mean a lot to those who are living during the Tribulation Period. Those who are alive when these events begin can rest assured that it will not take long before the tribulation will end and his kingdom will become a reality.

Jesus was trying to assure those who would be alive during the horrible events he spoke of in verses 4 through 31. He was telling them when they see those terrible things begin, they can be sure the kingdom is close.

So, the parable about the fig tree was meant to drive home the point given in verses 29 and 30. That being, once these events begin, they will go swiftly, and the Lord's coming is near.

*Mt 24:34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*

Jesus continued to stress how quickly these events would transpire once they began. He said, this generation shall not pass until "*all these things be fulfilled*". The word, "*pass*" means to die. So, this generation shall not die until all the events transpire, and his kingdom is set up.

That brings us to another question. What was he referring to when he used to the word "*generation*"? This has sparked much debate through the years.

One, some teach it is referring to an actual generation, and that a generation is forty years. Those who teach this usually believe the fig tree mentioned in verse 32 is speaking of the nation of Israel. They go so far as to say the fig tree budded in 1948 when Israel was legally declared to be a nation. This has led to many ridiculous predictions about the Lord's return. They say, when you add 40 years to 1948, you get 1988. From this, they say, Jesus will return in 1988. The one obvious problem is, he did not return in 1988. Since He did not return in 1988, some have actually said Jesus was wrong about His timing. They explain this away by pointing to the fact that Jesus Himself admitted that He did not know when He would return (Mt.24:36). However, there is vast difference between not knowing and being wrong. If Jesus was wrong about when He would return, He can be wrong about any number of things, and we cannot trust anything He says.

Two, some teach the word "generation" is used in reference to the Jews as a nation. They teach Jesus simply meant God would protect the people of Israel so they will survive until all is fulfilled. However, I wonder, if Jesus meant Israel, why did He not simply say Israel?

Three, others teach Jesus was referring to the "generation" that is living when these signs begin will not pass away until all is fulfilled. This implies that once these events start, they will come so quickly, the generation living at that time will live to see the end.

In my opinion, this is the best explanation. Once again, he was making reference to the fact that once these events begin, they will go rapidly and without delay. Certainly that will be true since the entire time of all these events will be somewhere between three and one half to seven years.

*Mt 24:35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

When Jesus spoke about "*Heaven*" in this verse, he was not talking about the heaven where God abides. He was talking about what is commonly called, the first and second heaven.

The bible does not speak specifically of a first or second heaven. However, since the bible does speak of a third heaven, we can assume there is a first and second. The first heaven is the atmosphere that surrounds the earth (Gen.6:7; Jam.5:18). The second heaven is what we would call outer space, where the stars and planets are (Isa.13:10; Mt.24:29). The third heaven is the place when God abides (Dt.10:14; Acts 7:55; Heb.9:24; Rev.11:19).

Jesus said, heaven and earth shall "*pass away*". The words "pass away" mean "to perish". This earth and the first and second heavens are reserved for God's judgment. They have been contaminated by sin, so God will purify them with fire (2 Pet.3:10; Rev.21:1). The third heaven has never been contaminated by sin and needs no purification.

A note of interest. This fire will burn the earth to the core but it will not consume it entirely. The bible teaches the earth will last forever (Ec.1:4; Ps.78:69). The book of Acts speaks of a restitution of all things (Acts 3:21). The word "restitution" means reconstruction, and reconstruction suggests the presence of materials used previously. Peter compares the flood of Noah's day with this consuming by fire (2 Pet. 3:4-7 ). Even though all that was on earth was destroyed, the earth itself was saved.

Not only will God consume earth and heaven with fire, but He will create a new earth and new heaven (2 Pet.3:13; Rev.21:1). God's creation longs to be delivered from the results of sin (Rom.8:21-24).

Much of creation may pass away, but God's Word will never pass away. Jesus said not one "jot or one tittle" shall pass away (Mt.5:18). The "jot" is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It could be likened to the "i" of the English alphabet. The "tittle" is a small mark in a Hebrew letter. It could be likened to the dot over "i" in the English alphabet. Jesus is saying, not even the smallest portion of the Word of God will never pass away.

The Word will remain the same forever. Man tries to change it, but His Word will never change. What a blessing, we have a bible we can trust. We can trust it when it comes to knowing how to get to heaven. We can depend on it when trials are too big for us to handle. We can rely on it when we do not know which way we should go. We can trust it no matter what.

*Mt 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

No man knows the "*day and hour*" of his second coming. He will refer to the "hour" again in verse 42, verse 44, and verse 50.

It is useless to speculate on the date the Lord will return. Many have attempted to do so and ruined their reputation as a result. It not only ruins the individual's reputation, it mars the cause of Christ for it gives the doubters another reason to mock.

At that time, even Jesus did not know the exact moment he would return. While he walked in his human body, he never ceased being God. There were many occasions when he demonstrated his omniscience (Mt.12:25; 22:18; Lk.6:8; Jn.1:48; 13:11; 16:30; 21:17), and his omnipotence (Mt.8:3,15,16; 14:25,32; Mk.1:25-26; Lk.5:4; Jn.10:18,28). Yet, while he walked in flesh, there were times he willingly restricted himself of certain of his godly attributes (Mt.8:24; Lk.22:44; Jn.4:67; 19:28; 19:30). There were times when he allowed himself to know only that which the Father revealed to him. He said, "all things that I have heard of my Father I have made know unto you" (Jn. 15:15). It is said of him, he "increased" in wisdom (Lk. 2:52). That suggests, at that time, he did not possess all wisdom. It amazes me to even think about the fact that our Lord actually learned things.

That is certainly not to say that he is still unaware of the time of his coming. I believe he reclaimed the totality of his divine attributes after he rose from the dead. After his resurrection he said, "All power is given unto me" (Mt. 28:18). I believe that included his full omniscience. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). Certainly he reclaimed his full position as the Son of God.

After his resurrection, he told his disciples, "It is not for *you* to know the time and seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7 emphasis added). But, he did not say he did say he still did not know.

With all this being said, Jesus said no man can know the "day and hour" of his coming. We may not know the day or hour but we can know a great deal about the general time when he will come. He gave many signs to help people know his coming would be soon.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DEFIANCE

During the Tribulation Period there will be an inordinate attitude of defiance against God. Man has never liked being told how to live but without the Holy Spirit's restraint rebellion against God will be rampant. Perhaps like never before, man will defy God.

*Mt 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

Jesus compared the days before his return to the time of Noah. Unfortunately, this reminds us of how mankind hasn't changed through the years.

The days before his coming can be compared to the days of Noah in the following ways.

One, there will be an abundance of sin during Noah's day. It could be described as a time of sin, selfishness, and stubbornness. Before the flood, God said the wickedness of man was "great" and the heart of man was on "evil continually" (Gen.6:5-6). Man's sin was so bad that God destroyed most of His creation (Gen.6:7). As in Noah's day, sin will be rampant before Jesus returns.

Two, the flood came suddenly. Once the judgment started, it came quickly. The rain came, the subterranean waters were pushed to the surface, and the ocean waters were released (Gen.7:10-12) and it happened quickly. There was no time for getting right with God. In like fashion, Jesus' coming will be sudden.

Three, the flood affected everyone on earth in some way. Those outside the ark were consumed. Those inside the ark were kept safe. No one will be unaffected when Jesus comes.

Four, God was long suffering during the days of Noah. He gave them 120 years to repent (Gen.6:3). He will be patient with those living before the second coming.

Five, the time of God's mercy ran out and the flood came. Also, when Jesus returns, judgment is certain for those who reject him.

*Mt 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,*

In verse 36, Jesus said no man can know the day nor the hour. In verses 38-39, He gave the days of Noah as an example of not knowing what *day* Jesus would come. In verses 42-44 he will give a parable that deals with not knowing the *hour* he would come.

Jesus' primary focus here was the fact that those who were living when the flood came were living their lives as though they were going to live forever. The predominant characteristic of Noah's day was the fact that people were living their lives as they pleased, with no thought of God, or His will. In like fashion, those living in the time before Jesus second coming will be living their lives as usual.

The people of Noah's day lived their lives as usual till the very end. They expected life to go on as it always had. But, that changed suddenly. The deadline came and the time of no return arrived.

Notice this verse says, "*until the day that Noe entered the ark*". God's deadline was not when the rain started. His deadline was when Noah and his family entered the ark. Once God closed the door to the ark it was too late for anyone to repent (Gen.7:16). The rain did not start until seven days later (Gen.7:7-10). For seven days, they were like walking dead men. Their judgment was sealed before the first rain drop fell.

*Mt 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

They "*knew not*" means they did not know the exact time the flood would come. They were aware of the facts about the flood, but they did not really expect it to happen. This same type of mockers are alive today and their type will be living just before Jesus returns (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Notice, the point Jesus was making here is the fact that a judgment came and took these people away. And, that is exactly what he meant when he was talking to his disciples. He was not talking about the blessing of him returning in the rapture. He was talking about his second coming when he will come and take the unbelievers away to be judged.

As He did Noah's generation, God will warn those living during the Tribulation Period. And, as in Noah's day, most will reject the message.

Considering the extreme circumstances of the Tribulation Period, you would think people would be willing to repent and accept the gospel. Yet, just as in Noah's day, they reject Christ, and his grace. The people of Noah's day rejected the preaching of Noah (2 Pet.2:5). Noah preached 120 years but no one, other than his family, listened. They neglected the warning. So it will be during the tribulation period. In Jesus' day they heard his words, saw his miracles, and still rejected him. And, just before Jesus' second coming they will hear the truth, but reject it. They will reject the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Rev. 7:4), the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-11), and, of the angel who preaches the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6). As in Noah's day, the lost will hear the preaching of the gospel, but many will refuse to accept it. And, they will suffer the consequences.

Dear friend, if you are reading this and are not saved. Please do not delay accepting Christ as your personal Savior. By the time the judgment begins, the opportunity for repentance will be past. Some one may think they will wait until they see these events beginning to transpire and call on the Lord then. If that is what you are thinking, I have some questions to ask. First, why do you think you will be any more liking to accept Christ then than you are now? Do you think your heart will be more tender then? That is highly unlikely. Usually the older we get the harder our hearts become. Secondly, do you think you will be more likely then to resist the sin that so binds you? Jesus said, "iniquity shall abound" during that time (v. 12). Sin will be even more rampant then than it is now. Every type of sinful pleasure imaginable will be easily accessible. If you love sin now you will love it even more then. Thirdly, do you think you will be more likely to accept Christ when persecution will be so severe?



Many believers will lose their lives during this time (Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:24-25; 12:17; Rev. 12:17, 13:7). It is highly unlikely that you would be willing to accept Christ when the cost is so high if you are not willing to accept Him now when there is very little persecution. Also, the Lord's offer for forgiveness is not going to improve. If you won't accept it now, you will not then. It will still take faith and repentance to be saved. If you are not willing to repent now, you will not be any more willing then. Another factor you should consider. It is quite possible that the Lord may not convict your heart. A person cannot be saved if the Lord is not speaking to them (Jn. 6:44). If He speaks to your heart, call on Him while you can.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE TWO WORKERS 24:40-41

*Mt 24:40-41 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

These working in the field and grinding at the mill reminds us of what Jesus said in verse 38 about people continuing to live their lives as normal.

Quite often these verses are incorrectly used to describe the rapture. Jesus was talking about those who will be taken away to be judged when he comes in his second coming at the end of the Tribulation Period.

We must remember, Jesus was still comparing the time of Noah with the time of his return. He was connecting this to what he said about those who were taken away in verse 39. They were taken away in the flood judgment. In these verses, he was referring to those who will be taken away to judgment when he comes again. One "*shall be taken*" in judgment and one shall be "*left*" to go into the kingdom with Christ.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER 24:42-44

Jesus gave a parable about a householder who gives responsibility to his services and goes on a journey.

*Mt 24:42 Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

In verse 36, Jesus said no man can know the day, nor the hour. In verses 38-39, He gave the days of Noah as an example of not knowing what day he would come. In verses 42-44 he gave a parable that deals with not knowing the *hour* he would come.

Those living in the days before he returns are to "*watch*". This has the idea of someone keeping watch over their houses and belongings.

The word "watch" means to "keep awake". Above all, the person watching over their household must stay awake. Sleep is the enemy of the person watching because a thief could come while they are asleep. The natural tendency of the body is to doze off. The person watching must not let his limitations stop him from doing his job.

The word "watch" also means "to be alert". The person watching must stay alert at all times because he has no idea when a thief might come. As Jesus said, "*ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*".

Part of the watching process was to make sure to not get distracted. There were so many things that could take his attention off his duty. Jesus warned those living in the last days to not allow anything to take their attention off the fact that he could come at any moment.

*Mt 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*

Several times throughout the bible, Jesus is likened to a thief that comes at an unexpected time (cf. Lk. 12:39-40; 2 Pet.3:10; 1 Th. 5:4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

The "*watch*" Jesus referred to a watch of the night. They divided the night into four watches, or divisions, of three hours each. They were 6 pm till 9 pm, 9 pm till 12 am, 12 am till 3 am, and 3 am till 6 am. If the homeowner knew in what watch the thief was coming, he would be more likely to catch him because he would only have watch for that three hour period. He would prepare for him and not lose his valuables.

The homeowner who is expecting a thief prepares ahead so the thief does him no harm. The homeowner who is not prepared suffers loss. In like fashion, the effects of Jesus' return will be determined by whether a person is expecting him. Those expecting him will live in a constant state of readiness. Those who doubt his coming will not prepare and suffer loss.

*Mt 24:44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

Jesus was talking about his second coming, but what he said is also true about the rapture. The truth is, most people will not really be expecting the Lord's return. We know he could come any day, but we really do not expect him today. We should live every second as though he was coming the next second.

The sad fact is, if he came right now, most of us would be surprised. The same will be true before Jesus returns at his second coming. They'll talk about him coming, but not really expect him at any moment.

#### THIS TIME OF TRIBULATION WILL BE MARKED BY DILIGENCE

In the next verses, Jesus stressed the importance of being diligent in doing the will of God while waiting for his return.

### THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD AND EVIL SERVANTS 24:45-51

Jesus was still answering the questions of the disciples (24:33). He was warning those who would be alive before Jesus' second coming to be ready for his coming.

Jesus gave a parable to describe the importance of being faithful. This parable is about a householder who goes on a journey. While he is gone, he gives the responsibility of running his farm to his servants. Each of these servants were given a specific task to do while the householder was absent. These servants would be held accountable for their faithfulness to their assigned tasks upon the return of the householder. When Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation Period and before he sets up his kingdom, he will examine the deeds of those who lived during the Tribulation Period. This parable tells us about that examination.

To understand this parable it is vitally important that we recognize the actions of the servants reveal their heart condition. A servant who works faithfully reveals a righteous heart. On the other hand, a servant who is unfaithful reveals an unrighteous heart. One servant is saved, the other is lost.

This parable reminds me how the way of salvation does not change. No matter what time period a person lives, the way to heaven is the blood of Christ.

This parable also reminds me of the importance of being faithful. No matter our circumstances, we are to be faithful. This parable speaks of those who will be living during the horrible time of the Tribulation Period. Yet, they will be held accountable to how faithful they were to the Lord. If they are without excuse, certainly we are.

*Mt 24:45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?*

The first servant Jesus spoke of is one that he described as "*faithful*" and "*wise*".

The word, "*faithful*" means "trustworthy" or "reliable". It means the householder could trust this servant to do what was expected of him. We talk a lot about how we need to trust the Lord, but we should ask ourselves, can the Lord trust us? Can He depend on us to do what we should with what He has given us.

The one thing God requires of His servants is faithfulness (1 Cor.4:2). He, rightfully so, expects us to do what He asks us to do.

The word, "*wise*" means "intelligent" or "prudent". It speaks of a person who has keen mental intelligence and good judgment. This person considers the facts at hand, and does the appropriate thing. A servant of a land owner would need wisdom to know how to handle the daily issues that would arise in the household. In like fashion, we need wisdom to know how to do God's will as would please Him.

Jesus called each of them a "*servant*". The word literally means one who serves. A servant was assigned a job. All of the servants were to be busy doing that which was assigned to them while the householder was gone.

The word, "*lord*" means "supreme in authority" or "master". Of course, this is referring to God. He is the one with authority over all who dwell on earth. As this parable indicates, He is master over all, whether they be saved or lost.

The word, "*ruler*" means "to designate". In other words, this householder gave his servants the authority to act in his name in his absence. They were to do what the householder would do if he were present.

God has given a certain amount of goods to every person alive. He has given to all of mankind the same number of hours every day. He has given us the breath we breathe, and the life in our bodies. God has also given every person on earth a certain amount of spiritual light. Each of these servants would be held accountable for how they managed what the householder had entrusted to them. So will every person who has ever lived. Whether a person is saved or lost, they will be held accountable for what God has given them.

Each servant was given their own specific job. They were responsible only for that which has been assigned to them. They were not expected to do that which had been assigned to another servant. It will be a happy day when we learn to discern God's will for our own lives. God's will for you is unique to you. Find it, and do it faithfully.

*Mt 24:46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

When he comes, the master finds one of his servants in the process of doing his job. The only way this can happen is for the servant to constantly be doing what his master had assigned to him.

The master will "find" some of his servants being faithful. That tells us he will examine the work of the servants when he comes.

The word, "Blessed" means "happy". The servant who is doing his master's will is excited about his return. He will be glad he did the master's will. The only way we can be happy then, is to serve now.

The word "Blessed" also means "fortunate". It carries with it the idea of being well off. Many blessings await those servants who simply do what the householder wants them to do. This speaks specifically about the blessings enjoyed by those who will go into the millennial kingdom with their Lord.

*Mt 24:47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*

Those who serve faithfully during their master's absence will enjoy his blessings when he goes into his kingdom. Being faithful in one area of service will be rewarded with a higher place of service and responsibility (cf. Lk. 19:11-26).

*Mt 24:48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;*

Jesus mentioned another type of servant. This one he called "evil". The word means, "bad, evil, or wrong". Notice, this servant was not described as lazy, unproductive, or under qualified. He was called evil. This shows the true condition of heart of this servant.

This servant's problem was the fact that he thought the householder was not coming any time soon. Therefore, he saw no reason to do what the householder expected.

Notice, the evil servant called the householder his "lord" but he did not follow the instructions of the householder. The evil servant represents a person who professes to be saved, but is actually an unbeliever. He refused to follow the instructions of the householder. Even though this person is not saved, he will be held accountable for those things God has given him.

This servant's doubt about the householder's return did not keep him from coming. Many scoffers shall arise, but their unbelief will not keep Jesus from coming (2 Pet.3:3-4).

*Mt 24:49 And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;*

Because this servant was not expecting the householder (cf. v. 48) he began to do that which he desired instead of what the householder desired. He started mistreating his fellow servants and living wickedly.

The true nature of this man is seen by his actions. He did evil, because he had an evil heart.

He was living as though the master was not going to return. He was living as though he would not be accountable for his actions. It is amazing how far a person will wander when they think they can get away with their deeds. But, he had one problem, the householder did return.

There are three areas of failure in this man's life.

One, he refused to do that which the householder instructed. An evil heart produces an evil life.

Two, he mistreated the other servants. When the evil servant was not right with the householder, neither he was not right others. It had been his assignment to assist these people. He was not only, not assisting, he was mistreating them. He did harm in the family of God (v.49a). I wonder how many of the people who cause trouble in the local church are those who are not actually saved.

Three, he turned to wickedness and sin. A step away from God assures a step towards sin and the world. He did harm inside the family of God, but he also did harm to those outside the family (v.49b). The person who lives wickedly while professing to be a Christian does untold damage to the cause of Christ. Many a sinner has used the ungodly lifestyle of a professing Christian as a reason to not accept Christ.

The evil servant is a picture of a lost person who professes to be saved. They may live a clean life for a while but their evil nature takes control and their true condition becomes evident.

*Mt 24:50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,*

Since his attention was focused on the things that pleased himself, he was not even thinking about the householder returning. Again, we see the effects of not expecting the return of the Lord. When a person does not expect him, they will not be focused on doing what will please him. What could be worse than to be surprised by the return of the Lord?

*Mt 24:51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The householder will "*cut him asunder*". The word, "asunder" means "to cut into parts". This refers to a terrible punishment wherein their bodies were cut into pieces (cf. Dan.2:5; 3:29; 1 Sam.15:33; 2 Sam.12:31; 1 Kg.3:25; Heb.11:37). This speaks of the horrible pain involved with this man's punishment when he goes to hell.

We should notice how many times the word "he", "him", or "his" are used in reference to this servant. This speaks to the fact that this servant will answer for himself. He will be held accountable for what he did as an individual. He can blame no one for the place he finds himself.

The word, "*portion*" means "share". He got what was coming to him. He deserved what he got.

He received his portion with the "*hypocrites*". He is sent where the hypocrites are sent. Luke tells us he received his portion with the unbelievers (Lk. 12:46). This man's judgment will be a fitting end to a wicked life. He will go to the place of all false professors. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something they are not. This man was pretending to be one of God's children, but he was not. God knew his heart and put him where he should go.

The end result of this man's life will be a place where there is "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*". This speaks of the anguish of hell. How horrible this place must be if God uses words like "weeping and gnashing of teeth" to describe it.

This parable reminds of how it is possible for a person to profess to be saved, be a part of a local church, attend regularity, and even hold a position, and yet, not really be saved (cf. Mt.7:22-23).

Those who choose the sin of the world in this life, will endure the place of sin through all eternity. He lived his life without concern for the will of God, so he will die the same. He lived as though there was no God, so he went to the place where there is no God. He rejected the mercy of God, so he was cast into a place where there is no mercy.

The servant who has done his master's will will not fear his return. In fact, he will welcome the return of the master. However, the servant that has failed to do that which would please the master will tremble at the thought of his master's coming.

## THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS 25:1-13

Chapter twenty five is a continuation of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus was still answering the disciples questions (Mt.24:3). That being true, it is important to realize that these words are directed to the Jews.

Jesus gave another parable dealing with the importance of being ready for Jesus' second coming. It is essential that we keep in mind the fact that every parable has one primary message. The primary message in the parable of the ten virgins is the same as the parables Jesus gave in chapter 24. That message is, the importance of being ready for the second coming of Christ. If we try to carry this parable beyond that primary thought it will lead to confusion. Many have tried to do so and failed in their attempt.

Since Jesus was speaking to Jews, we know he was talking about a Jewish wedding. Knowing the customs connected to a Jewish wedding is vital in understanding this parable. The wedding ceremony was followed by the marriage supper. Just as our modern weddings often have the wedding reception at a different location than the wedding ceremony, there were times when the Jewish marriage supper was held at a different location than the marriage ceremony.

As I have mentioned, the virgins pictured in this parable are not a part of the bride of Christ. They are guests who have been invited to the wedding of Jesus and his bride. The New Testament church is the bride of Christ, not the Jews. Jewish believers pictured in this parable are the guests that have been invited to the wedding supper that is held after the wedding ceremony. John spoke about this invitation when he said. "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb"(Rev.19:9). Those who are "called" is talking about those who are invited to the marriage supper. Of course, the bride is not invited to her own wedding, the guests are the ones who are invited.

So, the parable of the ten virgins is referring to the invitation God extends to Israel to be guests at the marriage supper of His Son. These virgins are waiting for the wedding party as they move from the wedding ceremony to the wedding supper. This was an exciting event for those who wished to participate. They wait with excitement for the groom to come with his bride so they can join the procession and attend the celebration.

*Mt 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

The words, "*be likened unto*" tell us this is a parable. As previously mentioned, these virgins are not the bride of Christ, they are the friends who are invited to the wedding supper.

Since this wedding procession is at night, a well lit lamp is necessary.

At this point, these virgins seem identical. They are all identified as virgins, they all have lamps, and they all expect the groom's arrival. However, we are about to discover, these virgins are anything but alike. In fact, there is a difference so significant that will determine where they spend eternity.

*Mt 25:2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

The word, "*wise*" carries with it the idea of a person who considers the facts and reacts appropriately. It speaks of a person who is mentally attentive.

We will discover, these virgins were wise because, even though they did not know when the groom would come, they were prepared.

The word, "*foolish*" actually means "blockhead". We get our English word "moron" from this word. It speaks of a person who will not listen to reason.

The bible refers often to those who are without Christ as being foolish and those who are saved as wise.

Notice, these virgins are described in one of two ways, they were either wise, or they were foolish. Those who were wise, were so because they were ready for the groom. Those who were foolish, were so because they were not ready.

The fact that half of these virgins are foolish does not indicate that half of those who profess to be saved are not. Jesus was just making the point that not all who profess to be saved, actually are.

*Mt 25:3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:*

This verse tells us why these five virgins were called foolish. They had lamps, but they did not have oil. Everyone knows, a lamp with no oil is worthless. It may look good, but it is of no value.

These five knew the groom could come at any time, yet they did not make the proper preparation. It was indeed foolish to bring a lamp but not the oil needed for the lamp.

*Mt 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

The five wise virgins had prepared beforehand in order that they might be ready when the groom came. They prepared by bringing oil for their lamps.

Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Ex.30:30-32; Ps.89:20-21; Lk.4:18). The wise virgins had oil but the foolish did not. The scripture is very clear, anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit is lost (Rom.8:9).

Oil in their vessels is a picture of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a believer. Like a lamp without oil bears no light, a life without the Holy Spirit bears no righteousness.

*Mt 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

The bridegroom did not come as quickly as they expected. While they waited, they all got sleepy and went to sleep. This is a perfect picture of the attitude of so many today. Believer and unbeliever alike, have fallen into the sleep of indifference about Jesus coming again. The believers waste away their lives, doing little for the Lord. The unbelievers continue to live in sin, and mock those who talk about the Lord's return.

The same attitude will be prevalent during the Tribulation Period. The believers who are enduring the horror of that time will begin to doubt his coming. The unbelievers, just like the unbelievers of today, will ridicule those who are expecting the Lord's return.

The problem about them sleeping is the fact that those who believe are missing the opportunity to do something for the cause of Christ. How many are doing the same today?

*Mt 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*

The cry came that the groom was coming. The groom came when they were not expecting him.

*Mt 25:7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*

They all arose and begin to trim their lamps. The trimming involved cutting off the burnt part of the wick and adjusting it so the lamp could burn brightly.

It appears as though they are all ready. However, we are about to find out that is not the case for five of these virgins.

*Mt 25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*

The five foolish virgins arose and tried to light their lamps, but they did not have the oil needed to do so.

The wise virgins had oil in their lamps. The true believer has a supply that is sufficient. The heavenly supply is eternal. It will not run low, or be taken away.

Notice, the slumber of the wise virgins did not cause their oil to diminish. A believer may not be all they should be for Christ, but that does not take away their salvation.

The foolish virgins acknowledged their need. They realized they did not have what was required.

Realizing their condition, they asked the wise for oil. I cannot help but notice that they knew who to go to when they needed oil. The lives of the wise had demonstrated a real Christian lifestyle. Do the lost who are around you know you are real?

*Mt 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

The wise could not give what they had to the foolish. The oil of salvation cannot be shared. Salvation is an individual relationship. We are not saved because we have Christian friends, or because we were raised in a Christian home. Someone has said, God has no grandchildren.

The wise virgins said, "*go ye to them that sell*". Their response reminds us of the fact that salvation can only come from God. He alone could provide the payment for sin. He alone can draw the lost person by conviction. He alone can forgive the sin of a lost person. He alone can receive the forgiven sinner into heaven.

Their instructions to go a "*buy*" is not saying salvation can be bought, or earned. It simply means they were to do what was necessary to obtain the oil they needed. When referring to salvation, the bible does talk about buying, but it says we are to buy without price (Isa.55:1). Salvation is free to those who are willing to accept it.

*Mt 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*

The sad truth of this parable is seen in this verse. These foolish virgins are willing to obtain the oil needed, but it was too late. Before, they showed no interest in getting ready for the bridegrooms arrival.

The wise virgins went in, and the "*door was shut*". The time of opportunity had come to an end. When God shuts the door, no one can open it.

*Mt 25:11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*

One of the saddest things about hell is the cry for one more chance. No doubt, all of those who end up in hell would be willing to repent now, if they only could. But, it is too late to pray. They forfeited their opportunity for forgiveness while living on earth.

*Mt 25:12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

The answer to the foolish virgin's request was, "*I know you not*". Jesus did not know them. This type of response was spoken of earlier in the book of Matthew, where Jesus said, "I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt.7:21).

This is the one thing that determines where a person will spend eternity. Did they know the Lord personally? The groom did not say, "you went to sleep so you do not deserve to enter". All of them, the foolish and the wise, went to sleep. He did not say, "you did things you should not have done, so I cannot let you in". Everyone has done things they should not do.

Notice, the groom is the one who responds to the cry of these bridesmaids. He is the only one with the authority to shut them out, or to let them in. Again, when God shuts the door, no man can open it (cf. v.10).

This parable reminds us, for a person to be ready for the next life, he must make preparations in this life. How the Lord finds a person when he comes will be the condition the person will be in for all eternity (Rev.22:11).

I cannot help but think of the time the wise virgins spent asleep. Had they stayed awake, could it be possible that they would have noticed the lamps of the foolish virgins and warned them ahead of time? If each of them had only warned one of the foolish, perhaps the outcome could have been different.

*Mt 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*

Verse thirteen connects the parable of the ten virgins with the parable of the talents. The words, "*Watch therefore*", was the end of the ten virgins parable, and "*for*" was the beginning of the talents parable.

Jesus gave another parable that dealt with the importance of being faithful. This parable further illustrates how he would deal with men when he returns at the end of the Tribulation Period. In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus dealt with waiting and watching. In this parable he dealt with working. So, while the saints are waiting and watching, they should be working.

Even though this parable speaks specifically to the believers who will be living just before Jesus comes at the end of the Tribulation Period, it can be applied to all believers living any time. Since Jesus did not tell his disciples when he would be coming, all believers living in any time period should watch, wait, and work.

Some have compared the following parable with the one Jesus spoke in Luke 19:11-27. While these parables are similar in some ways, they are two different and were given at different times.

This parable describes God as God over all. He is God over those who are saved as well as those who are lost. Therefore, all those who are under His rule, whether saved or lost, will be held accountable for how they live their lives.

In this parable, the man who has gone on a journey, is a picture of God. The servants are a picture of all professing Christians, whether they genuine or not.

#### THIS PARABLE DEALS WITH RESPONSIBILITY

This parable teaches us how all mankind will be held responsible for how they live their lives.

*Mt 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

Here, as in other places in the New Testament (cf. Mt.13:24-30; 36-40; 47-48) Jesus used the term "*kingdom of heaven*" to refer to his realm of authority over all who profess to be saved. Of this number, some are really saved, and some are not.

The man in this parable took a journey "*into a far country*". This is a picture of the Lord returning to heaven after his resurrection (Jn.14:28).

The word, "*goods*" means, "property" or "possessions". He gave his servants the responsibility of running his business affairs. They were to do what he would do if he was still present. This man is showing a great deal of confidence in these workers. The success or failure of his business is dependent upon them.

The fact that this man went to a "*far country*" suggests he would be gone for a good while. Verse 19 tells us he was gone a long time.

#### THIS PARABLE DEALS WITH RECEIVING

The servants receive talents from the master.

*Mt 25:15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

When we use the word talent we generally think of someone's ability, like singing, or writing, or playing an instrument. The word Jesus used is speaking of a weight. We find an example of this where John wrote of hail stones that weigh a talent (Rev.16:21).

So, when Jesus spoke of a talent, he was talking about a certain weight of money. The value of each talent was different depending on the type of material it was made of. A talent of gold, for instance, would be worth quite a bit more than a talent of silver.

These talents were most likely made of silver because the word "*money*" in verses 18 and 27 is the Greek word for silver. No matter what material these talents were made of, the master entrusted these servants with a significant amount of money.

The talents represent that which the master had given to each servant. Whether we realize it or not, God has given us what we have.

The time, treasure, talents, and truth of every person on earth came from God. Our time comes from God. He has given every person on earth the same twenty-four hours each day. God will give to every person a certain amount of treasure. We have the money we have because God provided it. God has given to every person certain talents. The abilities we have are a gift from God. Also, God has given everyone on earth a certain amount of truth. God has given a certain amount of light to every person on earth. Some have a little, some have a lot, but every person has received some light from God (Rom.1:20).

And all these things, and more, are represented in this parable by the master's "*goods*". Everything we have has come from God.

That is especially true of God's children. God has exposed all His children to a certain amount of truth. He has also given His children certain spiritual abilities. These abilities are generally called "spiritual gifts". A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability given by God to the believer at the moment of their salvation (1 Cor.12:7; Eph.4:7). As this parable indicates, God determines which spiritual gifts we receive (1 Cor.12:11). For further information about spiritual gifts study diligently (Rom.11:29, 12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:1-11, 28; Eph.4:7-11).

Since this is true, God's children ought to do great things for Him. We ought to use our "talents" well.

The master gave each servant a different amount. He knew the servants, and he gave them according to their ability. The word, "*several*" means, "private" or "personal". It is talking about each servant's personal ability.

Everyone is different. Socially, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, we are all different. So, the master in this parable gave his talents as the servants were able to handle them. This may seem unfair to us, but the fact is, it is more than fair. What would be unfair would be to give the same to all when he knew much of it would be mishandled by those who were not equipped to handle it rightly.

These talents were given to the servants that they might use them, and that they might make a profit from them. God wants us to use the good things He has given us in a way that will bring Him glory.

*Mt 25:16-17 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.*

The servants who received five and two talents used what they had received wisely and doubled their money. We are not told how these servants did what they did, but we can be sure, they were not idle, and they were not wasteful. For them to have done so well, they must have used every opportunity available. The major focus of this parable is that we use every opportunity to do that which will honor our God.

The message of this parable is dealing primarily with the Jewish believers who will be living during the Tribulation Period. If there is ever a time when every believer will need to use everything God has given them, it will be during that difficult time.

However, the truth of this parable applies to every believer living in our day. We dare not squander that which God has given us. We should use every ability God has given us to advance the cause of Christ.

The word, "*traded*" actually means "to toil". It gives the idea of an all-out effort. What the servants did was not easy. There are times when serving God can be very difficult. But, it is always worth it.

*Mt 25:18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

This servant was quite different than the other two. He buried his talent in the ground. The banks were not dependable during the days of Christ, so often people would bury their money or valuables somewhere on their property. Jesus spoke of this earlier (Mt.13:44). The problem with this plan was the fact that the master's money was not being used.

#### THIS PARABLE DEALS WITH RECKONING

The time of reckoning did come. It was time to reward the faithful. It was also time to separate the real from the phony.

*Mt 25:19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

Like the man in this parable, Jesus has been gone a long time, but he will return and set up his kingdom.

The fact that he returned tells us all three servants had the same amount of time to do the work of the master.

The word, "*reckoneth*" means, "to compute an account". They could not claim, or deny, anything. Their records show the facts. They would receive according to their labor.

*Mt 25:20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

The servant that received five talents gained five more talents. He doubled the master's money. Any investor will tell you that one hundred percent profit is fantastic. Who can rightly say they have done as well with that which has come from God?

This servant used what had been given him and he had gained an increase as a result. Those who use wisely that which the Lord has given them shall experience an increase. I certainly hope we can all see an increase in that which we do for our Lord. Can you rightly say that you have more love today than you did last year? Are you quicker now to allow God's Word to change your life? Are you more victorious in the battles with the devil than you used to be? Has there been an increase in your life? Have you used the time, talent, treasure and truth God has given you in a way that has advanced the cause of Christ?

Notice, the servant said, "*Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents*". He knew where his help had come from. He was very much aware of who had given him the opportunities he had.



The word, "*behold*" is a word of surprise or amazement. He was joyful and amazed at the same time. He was astounded that he was able to do anything for the master.

The comments from this man do not show any arrogance. However, he did know he had been faithful. It was not pride, it was joy and amazement, and he was giving the master the glory. Paul displayed this same type of attitude about meeting the Lord. He said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Ti 4:7-8). Paul certainly was not arrogant about what he had done for Christ, but he knew he had been faithful, and he would be rewarded. John talked about not being ashamed when the Lord comes (1 Jn.2:28). He also spoke of having boldness in the day of judgment (1 Jn.4:17).

This servant had been faithful and his labor had gained him an increase. He was quick to give the credit to the master. He realized he could have done nothing without that which the master had given him.

*Mt 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

The message of this parable is seen in this verse. This servant used what had been given him to the best of his ability. The issue was not how much he had received, but what did he do with what he received.

The master called him a "*good*" servant. He was not just talking about the servant's conduct, he was talking about his character. He not only did what was right, he was right, he was good. That which he did, he did for his master.

The master also called him a "*faithful*" servant. He did what he could, as well as he could, for as long as necessary.

What an outstanding thought, that the God of all creation would look at us and say, "you are good and you did good".

The master said, "*thou hast been faithful over a few things*". This servant had been faithful with his few things. We may wonder why God does not give us more than He does. A question we should ask ourselves is, have I been faithful with that which He has already given me. If He can't trust us with a few things, we need not expect Him to give us many things. In fact, it would be wrong for Him to do so.

If we want God to give us more, we must be faithful with what He has already given us. A good father does not give more toys to the child who neglects, or abuses, the ones he already has.

The master also said, "*I will make thee ruler over many things*". The faithful servant had served, now it was time for him to rule. What an amazing statement. Of course, this speaks primarily of the kingdom age. The believers who are alive when Jesus comes will go straight into the kingdom. The believers who served faithfully will be promoted during the kingdom. Part of the reward will be gaining higher responsibility and privileges with the Lord in His kingdom.

Even though these words are directed towards those saints who will live through the Tribulation Period and are ushered into the kingdom afterwards, they can be applied to the wonders of heaven.

This can be applied to all believers who will go to heaven. There will be different rewards and responsibilities given to those who go to heaven.

We see this in our lives now. There are different roles and responsibilities in the body of Christ now. Every believer is a part of the body of Christ, but every believer has their own place of service and responsibility. So, believers are all the same in that they are in the body, but they are different in that they all have their own unique place of service.

Just as believers have differing roles on earth, so it will be in heaven. In many ways, every believer in heaven will be the same. Every believer will have a glorified body, every believer will be eternal, every believer will be in His presence. However, as on earth, every believer will have their own place of service in heaven. Every believer will have their own assignment in heaven. We will not all be doing the same thing.

The fact that there are different ranks in heaven should not surprise or alarm us. Angels have different ranks and they serve the Lord gladly. So, it will be with the believers who go to heaven. Even though there will be different levels of service in heaven, there will be no pride or jealousy. All who dwell there will be glad to be a part of heaven's majesty. Everyone will be totally satisfied in their position.

So, what we enjoy in heaven will be partly determined by how we use that which He has given us now. How we are able to honor Him then will be determined, to some extent, by how we honor Him now.

Some of the most delightful words in the bible are in this verse. The master told his servant, "*enter thou into the joy of thy lord*".

Of course, the joy he spoke about here was dealing specifically about the joy of going into the kingdom with their Lord. But, this statement can be applied to the joys of heaven.

One of the greatest joys of a true believer is to serve the Lord in a way that He will get the credit. The greatest joy on earth is to serve the Lord with all of our hearts. The joy that comes from serving God will continue throughout eternity in heaven. Heaven will not be boring. We will serve the Lord in ways that we can not even imagine.

The joy of the Lord is speaking of the joy the Lord Himself has. The bible talks about the "joy that was set before him" when referring to Jesus' suffering on the cross. That means, Jesus experienced joy when He returned to heaven because of a task well done. He had pleased the Father, he had paid the price for salvation, he had defeated the devil, and it brought him joy. Imagine the joy of the Father in the eternal future. The work of salvation will be complete, His enemy will be in the lake of fire, and His children will be home safe and sound. And, it is into that joy that every believer will enter and experience for themselves. And Jesus tells us, if we are faithful, we will experience that type of joy.

*Mt 25:22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*

Like the first servant, this servant had also doubled what he had received.

*Mt 25:23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

For further information about this verse, please refer to the comments on verse 21.

These servants were *promised*. They knew they would be rewarded if they served faithfully. They were *prompt*. They went straight to work using the talents given them. They were *persistent*. Unlike the unwise servant, these servants continued to do what they should. They were *prepared*. Because they did what was expected of them, they were ready when the master came to judge them. They were *pleasing*. The master said, "well done". He was pleased with their actions.

#### THIS PARABLE DEALS WITH REBUKE

One of the servants did not do the master's will. He will be rebuked by the one who gave him everything.

*Mt 25:24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.*

This servant thought the master was too "*hard*". He thought the master expected too much out of him. He was saying he could not do what the master expected, so he just did not even try.

He did not see the master's worthiness. The master had the right to expect service from those he had given so much to.

This servant was mistaken about his master. What a misunderstanding. He was not a hard man. He did not demand too much from his servants. He simply expected them to be faithful in using what he had entrusted to them. His master had been nothing but good to him. He had given him what he had not earned. He gave him that which he did not deserve. And all he asked for in return was that he use what he had received.

No one who knows our God would describe Him as uncaring, too harsh, or too demanding? Who would dare say God has not been good to them? Anyone who would say such a thing is a person who does not truly know the God of heaven.

He saw the master as being unfair. He saw him as dishonest for he accused the master of "*reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed*". That means he was accusing him of stealing someone else's crops.

The world is full of people who accuse God of doing wrong. They do not deny the existence of God, but they do not acknowledge Him as the God who has the right to rule the universe. They may disagree with how He runs His business, but the fact remains, God is good and He always does right. The truth of the matter is, God is much better to them than they deserve.

*Mt 25:25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

He was "afraid". This tells us he did believe God existed.

He was mistaken. He did not think his one talent was worth much. But, he could have done a great service for the master.

He was miserable. He lost what he could have had. He suffered the results of a fruitless life. He will also suffer an eternity without Christ.

He hid the talent in the earth. This man did absolutely nothing with what the master had given him. So many are doing the same thing today. So many do not take advantage of the blessings that had been presented by the Lord. He speaks to them about their sin and their need for salvation, but they do not take advantage of that offer. He gives them a life where they could do something great for God, but they use it for themselves. He provides many good possessions that they could use for His glory, but they build kingdoms for themselves.

*Mt 25:26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not straved:*

This servant was the opposite of the other two servants. They were good and faithful, he was "*wicked and slothful*".

The word, "*wicked*" means "evil". The master knew this man. He called him "*wicked*" because he was wicked.

The word, "*slothful*" means "lazy". He simply did not do what he should have done. God judges man, not just for doing what is wrong, but for not doing what is right. Not doing right is as much sin as doing wrong.

The master was not agreeing with the servant's evaluation of himself. He was using the servant's own words to judge him. If the master had truly been a hard man, the servant should have been even more determined to do that which he required.

He was judged because of his misuse of that which the master gave him. He did nothing with the talent he had been given. He was judged also because of his attitude. He did not recognize the authority of the master. Many lost people believe in a God, but they do not recognize Him as He is. He is God, so He has the right to make demands upon mankind.

*Mt 25:27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

The "*exchangers*" were somewhat like bankers. They were money-changers who exchanged money for a fee and paid interest on money. The Jews were forbidden to charge interest from fellow Jews (Dt.23:19-20; Ps.15:5) but were allowed to take it from non-Jews.

The master had the right to expect his own back, with extra. We are not to use what God has given us for ourselves.

This man had only one talent, but that did not excuse him from using what he had. He may have not had as much as the others, but he was accountable for what he did have. He may have not been able to do as much as the other servants, but he could have done something. He could have been as faithful with his one talent as the man with five, or the man with two.

*Mt 25:28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*

When one misses a blessing, someone else receives it. Those who are faithful will receive added blessings and responsibilities in the kingdom and later in heaven.

The ten talent servant had shown himself faithful. Therefore, he could be trusted to use the extra talent.

*Mt 25:29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

The reward, or lack thereof, of each servant was determined by how they handled that which was given to them by the master. They were held accountable only for that which had been given them.

From him that "*hath not*" is speaking about the person who had nothing to give the master. He did not use what had been given him. Therefore, he had nothing to give back.

Shall "*be taken away even that which he hath*" is saying this person will lose that which could have been. He could have been forgiven, he could have been serving the Lord, he could have been gaining rewards for heaven. But, all that was gone now.

*Mt 25:30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The word, "*unprofitable*" means, "useless". He had done absolutely nothing for the kingdom's sake.

The indication is clear, this servant was not genuine. Many profess to be true servants of the master, but some are imposers. The words "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" can only refer to hell (Mt.8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51). There is no doubt about where this man ended up.

This parable teaches us several valuable truths.

One, it teaches us the importance of using whatever God has given us. It should not matter that someone else may seem to have more than us. We are to be faithful with what we have received.

Two, it teaches us there are no unimportant servants. One servant may have had only one talent, but his talent mattered. There are no unimportant saints (1 Cor.12:22).

Three, it teaches us to not be critical of others. The servant with five talents had no right to look down on the person with one talent.

Four, it teaches if a person continues to neglect the opportunities God gives them, the time will come when He will stop sending them.

## THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS 25:31-46

The next fifteen verses is Jesus' response to the disciples question about the end of the world (Mt.24:3).

These verses tell us more about the events immediately following the second coming of Christ. All those who are alive on earth when he returns will be called before him to be judged. This judgment separates the godly from the ungodly. The ungodly will be cast into hell, and the godly will be led by Christ into his kingdom. Those who are saved will go into the kingdom, and later, into the splendor of the eternal heaven. Those who are lost will be cast into hell, and later, will be sent to the eternal lake of fire (Rev.20:14-15).

This judgment is only recorded by Matthew. Matthew pictured Jesus as a king. He is the king who is coming and deciding who will be in his kingdom. Before he establishes his kingdom, he will decide who gets to go in and who will be kept out.

*Mt 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*

These comments are not a parable. The events Jesus described are real and not symbolic.

Jesus referred to himself quite often by the title, "*Son of man*" (Mt.8:20; 16:28; 19:28). This title pointed to his humanity. He humbled himself and became a man (Phil.2:8).

He came the first time in humility. This time, the Son of man will come "*in his glory*". He will reveal himself as he is, the God of the universe. He will be seen as he is (Rev.19:12-16).

All the holy angels will accompany Jesus when he returns (Mt.13:24-30; 24:30-31; Rev.14:14-15). Paul described them as "mighty" angels (2 Th.1:7). This vast number of angels will be ready to do his bidding.

He will "*sit upon the throne of his glory*". He sat down in heaven after his resurrection and ascension (Heb.1:3). He will sit down again. This time, it will be on earth as he judges, and then rules his kingdom. The King of kings has arrived and rightly claims His throne. A throne speaks of authority and dominion.

*Mt 25:32 And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:*

The Lord will sit on his throne as the nations of the world are gathered before him.

When we think of nations, we usually think of the different countries throughout the world. However, the word "*nations*" in this verse is a word that is used for non-Jewish races (Rom.3:29; 9:24; 11:13; 16:4; Gal.2:12).

For this reason, this judgment is commonly called, the judgment of the nations. It may be called the judgment of the nations because those being judged are the Gentile nations who lived through the Tribulation Period. It is also called the judgment of the sheep and goats. It is not the Great White Throne Judgment mentioned by John (Rev.20:11-15). The Great White Throne Judgment clearly happens after the thousand year millennial reign of Christ. This judgment takes place immediately after the second return of Jesus. The Great White Throne Judgment happens in heaven. The judgment of the nations takes place on earth. The Great White Throne Judgment involves all unbelievers. The judgment of the nations involves only those who have lived during the Tribulation Period.

It is important to recognize, those standing before Jesus will be judged as individuals and not as groups.

All the nations of earth will be gathered before Jesus. He will not only be king, but he will be judge. Only he can judge rightly. None else is worthy. He is the only one who knows the heart of man.

This verse reveals the fact of how the Lord will separate the godly from the ungodly. Jesus will divide the godly from the ungodly as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats. It was common for shepherds to allow sheep and goats to mingle together during the daytime, but they would separate for the night. A shepherd could easily separate his sheep from the goats for he knew his sheep. The bible says the shepherd calls his sheep by name (Jn.10:3). The all knowing God will separate the godly from the ungodly. He alone is able to do this. He knows the hearts of every person standing before Him. His judgment is right, and it is final.

*Mt 25:33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

The godly are referred to as "*sheep*". The ungodly are referred to as "*goats*". This speaks to the nature of those who are standing before the Lord. A sheep acts like a sheep because it is a sheep. The same is true of a goat. In like fashion, those in this judgment did what they did because of what they were. There is a vast difference between a sheep and a goat. And, there is a vast difference between those who are saved and those who are lost.

*Mt 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

The king addresses the sheep first. He invites them to enter the kingdom he has prepared. Of course, this is referring to what is commonly called the Millennium. It speaks of the kingdom God promised His people Israel. This kingdom will be on earth and will last one thousand years (Rev.20:4-5).

Jesus will say "*come*". This is not the first time he has extended this type of invitation. He invites those who labored and were heavy laden to come (Mt.11:28). Those who accepted his earlier invitation, will be invited to come once again, this time into his kingdom.

Those who survive this judgment and enter this kingdom are certainly "*blessed*".

The word, "*prepared*" means "make ready". This kingdom has been made ready for his people. Like heaven, his kingdom will be a prepared place for a prepared people.

*Mt 25:35-36 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

As we will see, the basis of this judgment will be how these people treated the Jews during the Tribulation Period. As previously stated, the Tribulation Period will be a time of trials for the Jews. God will use those trials to purify His people Israel. Therefore, the Jews will be one of the focal points of this period. The devil, the Antichrist, and the false prophet, will do their best to annihilate the people of Israel. Those who follow the Antichrist will have the same hatred for Israel as their evil leader. So, how a person treats the Jews during that time will reveal a great deal about who they are.

This does not mean they earn their way into the kingdom. Their treatment of the Jews will have manifested the condition of their hearts. Those who were saved will assist the Jews during the Tribulation Period. Those who are lost will join the Antichrist in his attack against the Jews. So, their actions will reveal their spiritual standing. Their works are evidence of their salvation (cf. Jam.2:20, 26).

Just as the treatment of Christians is an indicator of the spiritual condition of mankind today, the treatment of the Jews will be a spiritual indicator during the Tribulation Period. Those who love Jesus love his people.

Also, the fact that these people were doing good to the Jews proves they had not believed the lie of the Antichrist (2 Th.2:11). This is another indicator that these were saved, for all unbelievers will be deceived, and will believe the lie of the Antichrist.

Even though these words are specifically directed to those living in the Tribulation Period, we can certainly see their application to our modern times. Notice, first of all, how common these actions are. Jesus talked about providing food for the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and visiting the sick or those in prison. Certainly these are not actions that move the universe. Yet, these are the actions that reveal the heart of a true Christian. The Christian life is a life of ordinary deeds. Yet, not one of these ordinary deeds go unnoticed.

The deeds of God's children do not solve all the world's problems, but they do assist those dealing with those problems. In other words, the hungry person fed today, will be hungry again tomorrow. The person needing clothing today, will need another coat before long. We may not fix the problems, but we can be the means whereby someone is helped to get through another day. By the way, that is exactly what Jesus did when he walked this earth.

*Mt 25:37-39 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?*

The nature of these who stand before the Lord is revealed by the word "*righteous*". They enter the kingdom, not because of what they did, but because of what they are. They have been washed by the blood of the lamb. Our actions reveal what we are. You can tell a tree by the fruit it bears.

Their response also shows us how they are aware of how unworthy they are to receive any commendation from the Lord. We are unworthy of his forgiveness, and we certainly are unworthy of his rewards.

*Mt 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

These words show us the attitude of those Jesus will be speaking to. They seem almost shocked about how they will receive rewards. That tells us they did what they did out of love and not merely to gain rewards. They did not do what they did in an effort to gain anything for themselves.

All those who know him as Savior are his "*brethren*". They are a part of his family.

Some misinterpret Jesus' words to mean a place in heaven can be obtained by feeding the hungry, giving to the poor, and visiting those who are sick. Nothing could be further from the truth. Salvation comes only by the grace of God (Eph.2:8-9).

These words certainly speak of the Judgment of the nations. However, the truth of these words can be applied to us who live today. There are many around us who are hungry, thirsty, and in need of clothing. There are many who are in the prison of sin.

Like those Jews who will be alive during the Tribulation Period, there are people who need someone willing to help. What we do for Jesus' brethren, we are doing for him. Saul persecuted God's children, but Jesus asked him "why persecutest thou *me*" (Acts 9:4-5 emphasis added).

The hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned may seem unimportant to the world. But, Jesus said helping them is the same as helping him. The deeds done for the servants are the same as doing them for the master. The love a true Christian has for Christ will cause them to assist those in need.

These words let us know a little about the conditions of the Tribulation Period. Jesus was referring of believers when he spoke about those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and in prison. As previously discussed, this will be a time of destitution for all of God's people, especially the Jewish believers.

*Mt 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:*

This verse tells us God created hell for the devil and his angels. The devil and his angels sinned before Adam. This is obvious because the devil tempted Adam and Eve (Gen.3:1-6). That tells us hell was not designed for man. However, man goes there because they follow the devil and refuse to accept the forgiveness provided by the cross of Christ. Like the devil, they reject the way of God and will suffer the consequences.

Jesus tells these to "*Depart from me*". There are no more sad words in the human vocabulary than these.

The word, "*cursed*" means "doomed". There is no hope. There is no reversal of this decision.

These are commanded to depart because they refused to come. They are cursed because they refused to be blessed (cf. v.34).

As in verse 34, the word, "*prepared*" means "make ready". It gives the thought of a place being prepared specifically for a particular person. As the rewards of heaven are designed with each individual in mind, the degree of torment of hell will be designed according to the individual.

*Mt 25:42-43 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.*

In this verse, Jesus explained why he had just told them to depart. Jesus' standard of judgment is the same for all those standing before him.

The accusation brought against these people deals with what they did not do. When we consider the subject of sin, we usually think of things we do. This reminds us that not doing right is as much sin as doing wrong. In fact, the real reason every lost person goes to hell is because of what they did not do. They did not accept God's way of forgiveness.

*Mt 25:44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?*

Like those who did the Lord's will was shocked to receive the blessings, these who failed to do his will were shocked when they were cast out.

*Mt 25:45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*

Just as the doing of good deeds revealed the godly nature of those who did them, the failure to do good deeds revealed the ungodly nature of those who refused.

It is interesting that neither the godly, nor the ungodly, had the correct estimation of their works. The godly did not see their works as good as they were and the ungodly did not see their works as bad as they were.

*Mt 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

The conclusion of the judgment will be severe. The words, "*everlasting punishment*" are words inconceivable. The bible talks about a real hell. It is a place of real fire and it lasts forever.

Their entrance into the kingdom is only the beginning. They will enjoy the kingdom of Christ for a thousand years and heaven for eternity.

The word, "*everlasting*" and the word "*eternal*" are the same Greek word. The suffering of hell for the lost will be just as long as the joy of heaven for the redeemed.

And so, Jesus concluded his sermon on the mount.

## A PLOT AGAINST JESUS 26:1-5

The last three chapters of Matthew describe the end of Jesus' life. These last hours of his life are emphasized more than any other period of his ministry. Jesus knew full well what was ahead, yet he never wavered from his Father's will.

The next few verses reveal some contrasts. Jesus' submitting to death is contrasted by the evil plans of the religious leaders to take him by force. Jesus' love is contrasted by the hatred of the religious leaders. Mary's anointing of Jesus is contrasted by Judas selling him for thirty pieces of silver.

*Mt 26:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,*

When Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount he directed his attention toward his disciples. He was still making every effort to prepare his disciples for what was ahead. Unfortunately, yet again, they did not get it.

*Mt 26:2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.*

I believe Jesus' greatest work while on earth was about to take place. His death was the greatest miracle he performed while in the flesh. It truly was a miracle for the Lord of life to die. Jesus had done many wonderful works but nothing like this one. This work was his best, it was the most successful, it offered the greatest benefits, and it caused more opposition than any other of his works.

Jesus had spoken before of his death as something in the future (Mt.16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-20). Now, he told them how and when he would be crucified. This shows us how he was completely in control of the circumstances involving his life and death.

The word, "*betrayed*" means, "to hand over". Judas would hand him over to the enemy.

Jesus said the Son of man "*is*" betrayed to be crucified. The present tense is often used when describing a future event. It reveals the certainty of the coming event. There was no doubt about what Jesus was saying. God's plan was coming together. This reveals to us the fact that Jesus had surrendered himself into the hateful hands of the ungodly religious leaders.

Jesus said he would be crucified on the Passover. This is the last time Jesus mentioned his approaching death. In verse five the chief priests, scribes, and elders say we will not take him during the Passover because of how the people would respond. As we will see, God was in even in control of when His Son died.

The "*feast of the passover*" was the first feast on the Jewish calendar. The yearly feasts observed by Israel are, the Feast of Passover (Lev.23:5), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev.23:6), the Feast of First Fruits (Lev.23:10-11), the Feast of Pentecost (Lev.23:17), the Feast of Trumpets (Lev.23:24), the Feast of Atonement (Lev.23:27), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev.23:34).

The Passover was a ceremony the Jews celebrated to remember how the Lord brought them out of Egypt (Ex.12:14). God demanded they observe this ceremony in order that they not forget how He passed over those who had the blood applied to their door. Like the Jews of old, we are prone to forget the goodness of God. For this reason, God has instructed the New Testament saints to observe the Lord's table (Lk.22:17-20; 1 Cor.11:24-30).

The Passover was the highest of all of the holy days observed by the Jews. Jews would flood into Jerusalem to observe it each year. Some have estimated there were as many as two million Jews in the city of Jerusalem during this Passover. Passover was followed by the seven day Feast of Unleavened bread.

*Mt 26:3 Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,*

While Jesus was telling his disciples about his death, his enemies were meeting to plot his death.

These Jewish religious leaders met with one thing in mind. They were discussing what they could do to get rid of Jesus. Their hatred for Jesus had grown to a fever pitch. They were determined to do whatever it took to get him put to death.

This group would have normally met at the Temple, but they met in the home of "Caiaphas". Perhaps this was done in an attempt to keep this meeting secret.

Caiaphas was the chief priest of the Jews. He is mentioned several times in the New Testament (Mt.26:3, 57; Lk.3:2; Jn.1:49; 18:13-14, 25, 28; Acts 4:6; 23:2; 24:1). He served as high priest from 18 AD to 36 AD. Since Rome was in control of the Jews, they appointed the high priests. Originally the position of high priest was held for life. Apparently the Roman government changed this and removed and appointed the high priests as they desired.

Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, had served as high priest but had been removed by the Roman government. In spite of his removal, many people still referred to him as high priest.

Caiaphas' hatred for Jesus was very obvious. History tells us he was power hungry. His reaction about Jesus proved this to be true. Every time we read of him in scripture he was trying to put Jesus to death. The last thing he wanted was someone who might rob him of some of his authority with the people. This same attitude is seen in many people today. So many want to be able to control their lives and refuse to give Jesus any control.

*Mt 26:4 And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.*

They had wanted to do away with Jesus for a long time. They had thought about it, talked about it, but now they were going to do something about it.

We see in this what happens when man is allowed to do as he pleases. God was withdrawing His restraint upon these men. His hand had restrained them from what they desired and had stopped them from putting Jesus to death earlier (Lk.4:29-30; Jn.5:18; 8:59; 10:39). But, now his hour was close (Jn.2:4). He was allowing their evil desires to be accomplished. When the desire of man has no restraint, the wickedness of man is let loose.

The word, "*take*" means, "to use strength, to seize or hold fast". They had no idea who they were fighting against. What strength did they have compared to the God of heaven?

The word, "*subtilty*" means "a trick" or "to deceive". Imagine, thinking that you can trick the all knowing God.

Their plan was to "*kill him*". They wanted to seize Jesus and deliver him to the Romans to be crucified before the people discovered what they had done.

Their hatred had grown to the point to where they wanted more than to quiet him, or to run him out of town. They would be satisfied with nothing less than seeing him dead. This would not be easy because of the crowds who were constantly close to Jesus.

*Mt 26:5 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.*

They determined it to be best to postpone their taking of Jesus until after the feast. The feast of Unleavened Bread, which was immediately after Passover, lasted seven days.

Sad to say, they were more concerned about the reaction of the people than the sacredness of the feast.

They were concerned about the reaction of the people. Some of them believed Jesus was a great political leader and were expecting him to deliver Israel from the Roman control. Some believed he was a great teacher and were expecting him to teach them to live a good life. And, there were some believed he was the Son of God, and were expecting him to bring about a spiritual change. Since Jerusalem was filled with people observing Passover it would take very little to cause a riot.

This group determined to wait until after Passover to arrest Jesus. However, Jesus said he would die on the day of Passover. As always, Jesus was right. He died exactly when and how he said he would. He died the very hour of the slaying of the Passover lambs. The true Lamb of God would be offered for the sin of the world (Jn.1:29). Once again, we are made aware of God's power. He destroys the plans of the wicked.

The hypocrisy of this group is absolutely unbelievable. They were discussing a way to kill the Son of God and making plans to observe their religious celebration at the same time,. They feared the people but there seemed to be no fear of God in their hearts. Amazingly, they were more concerned about offending the people than offending a holy God.

#### JESUS ANOINTED FOR BURIAL 26:6-13

There is a good bit of discussion about whether there were one or two anointings. I have chosen to concentrate on the details of the event instead of adding my opinion. This anointing is most likely different than the one described by Luke (Lk.7:36-39).

*Mt 26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,*



We know little about Simon other than he had been a leper. He must have been healed or he would not have been able to have company come into his house (Lev.13:45-46). Though we cannot be certain, it is possible he was one of the lepers Jesus healed.

*Mt 26:7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.*

Matthew does not tell us the woman's name. If John's record of the anointing is the same as Matthew's, it was Mary (Jn.12:3).

Since they did not sit at their meals, Jesus would have been reclined while they were eating.

*The ointment was perfume.*

Mark tells us this ointment was spikenard (Mk.14:3). Because of its pleasant fragrance spikenard was used as perfume.

*The ointment was precious.*

Spikenard was "*very precious*". Spikenard was so expensive it was used mostly for weddings or for very special occasions. Mark tells us it could have been sold for three hundred pence (Mk.14:5). Three hundred pence was equivalent to a years wage. Their work day was usually twelve hours long. That is 4,320 hours of labor that was invested in this one act. Even today, some would say it was an awful waste. But, I would just like to ask, is our Lord not worth it? She gave him the best she had. Should we do less?

It is quite possible that this was the only truly expensive item this woman owned. There is no way to be sure but I have wondered if she had been saving this ointment in case she ever married. There may have been times when she thought about selling it. Perhaps there was a time when she needed money for bills and she thought about selling her spikenard. Maybe she thought about selling it because she was getting older and she wondered if she would ever get married. I wonder if there were times when she actually had it sold, and changed her mind at the last minute. Of course, this is all conjecture on my part, but I do know the Lord made sure she kept it. Even though she probably did not realize it, the Lord made sure she kept the ointment so she would have it when it was needed. I am amazed how God overrides our plans in order to accomplish His in our lives.

*The ointment was poured.*

She "*poured*" it on his head. Mark tells us she actually broke the box and poured the ointment on Jesus (Mk.14:3). The box itself was valuable. She did not hold back. The spikenard had a wonderful aroma but no one could enjoy it as long as it stayed in the box. It had to be released to be of any benefit. She did not let a few drops fall on Jesus, she poured it all out. Most of us would have saved some for a rainy day, or to help with our retirement account. But, not this woman. She spared nothing.

This act proved how much she loved Jesus. She loved him enough to where she thought he deserved her best, and all of her best. Very few have such a love today.

*Mt 26:8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?*

The disciples became angry because of what they considered the waste of the ointment.

The word, "*waste*" means, "ruin" or "loss". Ruin has the idea of something losing its value because of decay. But, that which we give to God never ceases to have value. In fact, it only increases in value for it is eternal. Loss, has the idea of something being removed. However, that which we give to God is never lost. That which is given to God gets deposited in the eternal bank of heaven. What can be wasted that is given to him? What is given to him never ruins, and it is never lost.

Even today, some would say it was an awful waste. But, I would like to ask, is our Lord not worth it? This woman gave him the best she had. Should we do less?

*Mt 26:9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.*

This statement was true. Because of its value it could have been sold and the money used to help someone in need. But, what then? It would not take long for them to be hungry again. What lasting good would it have done?

*Mt 26:10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.*

*The ointment was pleasing.*

Jesus said this woman's work was a "*good work*". This woman's act pleased Jesus. He rebuked the disciples who complained about her using it. He did not rebuke this woman, he commended her. Yes, she gave what cost her greatly, and she did it gladly. And, I think she would do it again. She gave Jesus her best, what have you given?

She took the opportunity when it presented itself. She probably knew she would not get another chance.

This woman's love for Jesus was real. She didn't just give, she gave her all. She didn't just do, she did her best, and she did it with all her heart. I am afraid many Christians do not have that type of love. Most of us are like the man writing a letter to his girlfriend. He wrote, "Darling, I love you with all my heart, I'd swim the broadest ocean, I'd climb the highest mountain, I'd fight a jungle of lions, for you. So, I'll see you tonight, if it doesn't rain". Like this man, our love is very limited.

*Mt 26:11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.*

Jesus was not being calloused when he said, "*For ye have the poor always with you*". He cared for the poor. He had assisted the poor his entire ministry. He was simply speaking the truth. There would always be another poor person who needed assistance.

The help this ointment could have provided would have been temporary. The food it bought would have been eaten and they would have been hungry again. The clothes it could have bought would have worn out. But, they would not always have the Lord. He certainly spoke the truth when he said "*me ye have not always*". He had a few hours to live. What they did for him, they had to do quickly.

*The ointment was preparing.*

*Mt 26:12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.*

This anointing was an act of preparation for his soon burial. Jesus had been telling his disciples about his coming death for a good while.

I can picture our Lord as he breathes in the aroma of the spikenard. What thoughts he must have had, knowing that aroma was an indication of how close his death was.

It seems that this woman saw what the disciples did not see. Her act of anointing Jesus was more than an act of love, it was a preparation for his burial. They did not embalm their dead, they anointed them with ointments and perfumes in an attempt to mask the odor of decomposition.

This was one of the few things connected to his death that actually gave him some comfort. In fact, the best I can tell, Simon carrying his cross (Mt.27:32), the cheap wine given to him as he hung of the cross (Mt.27:48), and Mary's anointing, were the only things that offered any relief from the agony of the cross. The pleasant fragrance, and the soothing effect of the ointment provided at least a little comfort. The wine mingled with gall he was offered later (Mt.27:34) could have provided him some relief, but he refused to drink it (Mt.27:34). This oil did provide a little bit of comfort.

*The ointment was powerful.*

*Mt 26:13 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*

This woman's deed would be remembered. Of course it is. I mean, two thousand years later, we are discussing it still. Millions have been made aware, and encouraged, by what she did. She is remembered for what she did, but she is also remembered for how much she loved her Lord.

We must not forget the contrast between this woman and Judas in these verses. She is thought of with fond memories.. But, even the name Judas is cursed and despised.

Jesus came to her defense. He accepted her act of love. That tells me she did right. Hear that Judas, listen closely angry disciples, the expense was not too great. The pouring of the ointment was not a waste.

*The ointment was provoking.*

As we will see in the following verse, it would seem this act of love provoked Judas to make his move in betraying Jesus. The wonderful aroma filled the entire house, but but Judas was too upset to enjoy it.

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

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH COMMUNION

There is more involved with this event than simply a woman serving the Lord. It shows her communion with the Lord. Our service for him will be empty if our fellowship with him is lacking. Serving will be a chore, it will be empty and draining.

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH COMMUNICATION

Our experience with Jesus involves a constant communication. As important as regular prayer time is, there is more involved with our fellowship than just a time we pray every day. There should be a constant communication with him. We should keep our minds focused on him throughout our day. We should converse with him as we would a close friend who is always with us. That is what our grandparents did. They went through their days, doing what they needed to do, but they kept their minds on their God. A religion that will not work in the real world is not much of a religion.

If you do this, he will tell you what he desires of you. He will tell you how much he wants you to pray, how much you should read the Word, how much you should give, and who you should witness to. In essence, he will reveal his will for you.

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH CLOSENESS

This event brought this woman closer to the Lord. She had to get close to anoint him. Our Lord desires a close fellowship.

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH COMPASSION

She did what she did because she loved him. Unlike so many others, she did not approach Jesus for what she could get from him. The fragrance of the ointment was a symbol of the sweetness of their communion. How much sweeter would be our lives if we simply loved him with all our hearts.

We are taught to give in order to receive. Preachers tell us how we need to sow the seed in order to receive the harvest. What has happened to giving because we love the Lord without any concern about getting something in return?

We would do well to learn from this woman's example. Most of our giving is related to need. We give when there is a need. That is not bad, it just is not the best. We should give because we love.

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH COMMITMENT

She believed her Lord deserved her best. She gave her all. Very few know communion this woman had, and even fewer know the type of commitment she had. Therefore, very few know the blessing this woman experienced.

- THIS STORY DEALS WITH CONFLICT

There were some who did not like what she did. Unfortunately, some of those who objected the loudest were those who were disciples themselves.

## THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS 26:14-16

*Mt 26:14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,*

The one who betrayed Jesus was "*one of the twelve*". Judas was one of the ones Jesus chose (Mt.10:1-4). He was sent out just like the other disciples (Mt.10:5-10). Jesus knew he was a hypocrite from the beginning (Jn.6:64, 70-71; 13:18). He was often described as the one who would betray Jesus (Mt.26:16; Jn.6:64, 71; 12:4; 13:2, 11). He is always named last when listed with the twelve.

The name "*Judas*" means, "he shall be praised". No one ever failed to live up to their name more than this man. The name "*Iscariot*" means "inhabitant of Keriath". Judas was a fairly common name, so this part of his name was given to make certain there was no misunderstanding about which Judas was being referred to.

Judas was never saved. His true nature was revealed by what he did. Jesus knew what he was when he chose him. He said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is *a devil*" (Jn.6:70 emphasis added). He called him the "son of perdition" (Jn.17:12). That is a title God gives to the Antichrist (2 Th.2:3). This has led some to believe the Antichrist will be Judas incarnate. I personally believe it is a stretch. I think the Lord was simply trying to tell us Judas and the Antichrist are similar in that they both do all they can to oppose God.

Judas went to the "*chief priests*". The first five verses of this chapter told us the chief priests, scribes, and elders were meeting to decide how to put Jesus to death. No doubt, Judas was aware of their desire to do away with Jesus. He used this opportunity to enact his own ungodly scheme.

Remember, the chief priests were the high-ranking members of the Jewish priesthood. God established the priesthood to assist the people of Israel in their pursuit of God. However, by the time Jesus was born, they were more of a political group than spiritual. How astounding that those who were supposed to help people get to God were the ones who helped crucify the Son of God.

*Mt 26:15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.*

The wicked heart of Judas is revealed once more. This act proves the type of man he was.

The word, "*deliver*" means "to hand over". Judas would lead the Roman soldiers to Jesus. They had to make certain they got the right man.

Why did Judas betray Jesus after he had experienced his kindness for three years? One thing is certain, Judas' plan came from the devil (cf. Lk.22:3). Some have suggested Judas turned Jesus over in an attempt to force him to take a stand and establish his kingdom. If this had anything to do with his betrayal, it was still from selfish motives. No doubt he had been anticipating the establishment of the kingdom that he might receive a position of authority and the money it might provide. Judas probably assumed Jesus would promote those who were with him to positions of authority when he established his kingdom. Maybe he was trying to force this to happen.

But, no matter what he was thinking, he was motivated by his greed. Judas' words tell us the real reason why he did what he did. He asked one simple question, "*What will ye give me*". His motive was greed. He loved money and he would do whatever it took to get it. The bible called him a thief (cf. Jn.12:6). He loved money more than he loved Jesus. He sold his soul to the highest bidder.

I believe Judas was mad. He was mad because he was thinking about about three years of his life that he thought he had wasted. He had followed a man who had talked about a kingdom, yet that kingdom had not come to pass. He was mad because it looked like he was not going to get the promotion he had anticipated. He was mad at Jesus, he was mad at himself, and he was mad at God.

The chief priests agreed with Judas for "*thirty pieces of silver*". That was the amount paid for a common slave (Ex.21:32). Luke tells us the chief priests were glad to make this deal with Judas (Lk.22:5).

It could not have been more perfect for them. They had found someone to betray him, and they had found the betrayer in the number of those who claimed to love him.

*Mt 26:16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

Having finalized this deal with the chief priests, Judas immediately began watching for an opportunity to betray Jesus. Luke tells us Judas sought opportunity to betray him in the absence of the multitude (Lk.22:6). Judas and the chief priests realized the crowds would protest if they took Jesus in a public place.

THE LAST HOURS OF JESUS' LIFE
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The last hours of Jesus' life were very busy. The order of these events is somewhat difficult to discern. I have attempted to give the chronology of these events to the best of my ability.

EVENT	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Preparation for Passover	26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	
Jesus gathered with his disciples	26:20	14:17	22:14	
Disciples argued about who was greatest			22:24-30	
Jesus washed the disciples feet				13:2-17
Jesus spoke of his betrayal	26:21	14:18	22:21	13:18-21
Disciples asked Jesus "Is it I"	26:22	14:19	22:23	13:22-25
One who dips his hand in dish	26:23	14:20		
Peter got John to ask about betrayer				13:23-25
Judas was identified	26:25			13:26
Judas left				13:27-30
Communion was observed	26:26-30	14:22-26	22:14-20	
Jesus spoke of Peter's denial	26:33-35	14:29-31	22:31-34	13:33-38
Jesus' further admonition				13:2 - 16:33
Jesus' high priestly prayer				17:1-26

Garden of Gethsemane	26:36	14:32	22:40	
Jesus arrested	26:47-56	13:43-52	22:47-53	18:1-11
Jesus questioned by Annas				18:12-24
Jesus questioned by Caiaphas	26:57-68	14:53-65		
Peter denied Jesus	26:69-75	14:66-72	22:54-65	18:25-27
Caiaphas and Sanhedrin condemn Jesus	27:1	15:1	22:66-71	
Pilate examined Jesus	27:2,11-14			
Judas committed suicide	27:3-10	15:2-5	23:1-5	18:28-38

Herod questioned Jesus			23:6-12	
Pilate examined Jesus again	27:15-25	15:6-15	23:13-25	18:39-19:16
Roman soldiers mock Jesus	27:27-31	15:16-20		
Jesus led to be crucified	27:32-34	15:21-24	23:26-31	19:17
Jesus crucified and died	27:35-56	15:25-41	23:32-49	19:17-37
Jesus buried	27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-56	19:38-42

THE PASSOVER 26:17-25
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*Mt 26:17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?*

It was a common practice of every devout Jew to observe the time of Passover. In the afternoon they would take a lamb to the temple. The priests would kill the lamb, sprinkle it's blood at the altar in the temple, and burn it's fat. Then, they would take the lamb home, roast it whole and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. This eating of the lamb was called the "Passover meal". It was meant to remind them of the time when God delivered them from Egypt. Those who escaped Egypt were the ones who had placed the blood of a lamb on their door posts (Ex.12:1-15).

His disciples asked "*Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover*". How amazing that the God who owned all of creation had to borrow a place where he could observe Passover.

*Mt 26:18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

The term "*such a man*" is very interesting. It is from a word that is found only here in the bible. It has the idea of something that is not specified. In other words, Jesus said he was sending them to find a man and he was not going to tell them who he was. It would be like telling someone to go and find Mr. Whatchamacallit.

So, the question immediately arises. How would the disciples know this undescribed man? This is especially troubling considering the fact that there were around two million Jews who had arrived at Jerusalem for Passover. How would they find one man in such a crowd?

Luke tells us Jesus sent only Peter and John to prepare for the Passover (Lk.22:8). Jesus told his disciples they could recognize this man because he would be carrying a pitcher of water (Lk.22:10). Seeing a man carrying water would have been very unusual because women usually collected the water. We are not told why this man was carrying water. Perhaps his wife was sick and not able. Maybe his wife was lazy and refused to get the water that day. Whatever the reason, he was willing to do what was not usually expected. Maybe he simply felt a strange urge to go get water. Of course, that urge was the Holy Spirit. We certainly cannot miss the Lord's hand in making sure he was carrying the water at the precise moment the disciples came into town, and to the exact spot where they were walking. God's timing is amazing.

*This unnamed man pointed the servants.* More or less, Jesus told the disciples to follow this man and do what he did. That means he was in the right place at the right time. This also tells us this man was going the right place. If someone follows you, will they end up at the right place?

Jesus could have simply told his disciples the exact house they were to go to. The question arises, why was Jesus being so secretive about where they would eat the Passover meal? I believe we find the answer in the verse preceding these. Judas had already made an agreement to betray Jesus. Luke tells us he was looking for a private place to turn him over (Lk.22:6). If Jesus had told his disciples exactly where they would observe the Passover, it would have been the perfect opportunity for Judas to inform the Roman government and have Jesus arrested. Jesus intended to celebrate this Passover with his disciples for he knew he would be teaching them about the observance of the Lord's Table, or Communion Service. That private time with his disciples was vitally important and Jesus was not going to allow them to be interrupted.

*This unnamed man prepared the space.* The room was ready when they arrived. Luke tells us the room was furnished (Lk.22:12). That means, the homeowner had prepared the room for visitors.

The tables and couches or mats, needed to observe Passover were already in place. No doubt, he had also searched the house to make sure there was no leaven as the Law required (Ex.12:15).

The room they were led to belonged to the man carrying the water. Jesus' words were, "I will keep the passover at *thy* house with my disciples" (emphasis added). Luke tells us it was a large upper room (Lk.22:12). I may be reading more in this scripture than I should but a large room may suggest this man was well off financially.

*This unnamed man pleased the Savior.* Though this man did not do much, what he did was vitally important. What he did pleased God. This Passover would be the first observance of the Lord's Table.

*Mt 26:19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.*

I am amazed at the simplicity of this verse. More or less, it says the disciples did what Jesus said to do and they found it as he had said. Yet, there is so much in these words.

First, it tells us Jesus knew what he was talking about. The disciples did find the man carrying the water and he did lead them to his house where the room was ready.

Secondly, it tells us when the disciples obeyed Jesus, he took care of all the necessary details. The word, "*appointed*" means, "to instruct". They simply followed directions. Our lives would be so much simpler if we just learn to follow the instructions of our Lord. As long as we are obeying the voice of our Savior, He will take care of the details of our lives.

Thirdly, we see the importance of the man they followed. He was at the right place, at the right time. He did what he could. All he did was walk home. But, imagine the difference if he had not been walking. Our spiritual walk is more important than we realize.

As far as we can tell, Jesus never spoke to this man personally. Luke tells us Jesus told his disciples to tell the man, "The Master saith unto thee" (Lk.22:11) but he did not speak to the man himself. In fact, according to the way Luke words his record of this event, it seems as though even the disciples did not actually speak to this man until they arrived at his house (Lk.22:10-11). It appears as though they simply followed him home without saying anything to him. I wonder, did he see them following him? What was he thinking?

Notice how this man is not mentioned again. The bible simply says, "*And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover*". Mark gives much the same wording in his record (Mk 14:16). All it says is, they obeyed Jesus and it happened as he had said it would. The man is not mentioned at all.

This may seem unimportant, but I believe it tells us how the homeowner was content to be used in a way where he did not get a lot of recognition. I mean, we are not even told his name. Until we have the humility this man had, I doubt if we will be used greatly. Those who must be recognized should not expect

His part may have not been a big part, but he did it. And, what he did aided Jesus to do what he wanted to do. Are you doing your part?

*Mt 26:20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.*

Luke tells us Jesus said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk.22:15). Jesus truly loved these disciples. He was about to institute the Lord's supper and he wanted to enjoy the spiritual experience with them. This reminds us of how Jesus truly loved the disciples, he enjoyed their company, and wanted to teach them.

Luke and John describe events that Matthew did not record. The exact order of these events is difficult to be certain about. I have included these events in the order that seems the most logical to me.

#### THE DISCIPLES ARGUED ABOUT WHO WAS THE GREATEST

Luke tells us the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest (Lk.22:24-30).

#### JESUS WASHED THE DISCIPLE'S FEET

John tells us Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (Jn.13:2-17). The dusty roads caused their feet to get dirty. The washing of the feet of visitors was usually the job of a servant. Imagine, the God of heaven doing the work of a servant. Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet (Jn.13:13-15). He was not teaching that foot washing should become a church ordinance. He said, "What I do thou knowest not now" (Jn.13:7). That shows us there was more to what he was doing than merely washing their feet. The object lesson in him washing feet was that they should do as he had done and become servants to others.

One of the most astounding parts of this act was the fact that Jesus washed the feet of the one he knew had already made plans to betray him. John records Jesus saying, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, *but not all* (Jn 13:10 emphasis added). He was speaking of Judas as the one not being clean. So, Judas was still there when Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

#### JESUS SPOKE OF HIS BETRAYAL

*Mt 26:21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

Jesus had told them about his betrayal (Mt.17:22-23; 20:18-19) but this was the first time he told them it would be one of them that would betray him. These words shocked eleven of the disciples. I wonder what Judas was thinking. He had already made his deal with the high priests by this time and he knew Jesus was aware of what he had done.

*Mt 26:22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

John tells us the disciples looked around at each other, doubting of whom he was speaking of (Jn.13:22). They were puzzled about which of them would betray him. Judas had played his part well. None of the disciples suspected him. He was such a good actor he was chosen by the disciples to be the treasurer. You do not get the job of treasurer if you are not trusted.

Each of the eleven genuine disciples knew enough about themselves to realize they were capable of doing that which Jesus spoke of. They all asked if it was them who would betray him. Even the possibility of doing such an awful thing unnerved them. Those who love the Lord are devastated when they hurt him.

*Mt 26:23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.*

At this point Jesus was not naming a specific disciple. He was simply saying one of those who was eating with him would be the one to betray him. Luke tells us Jesus said, "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table (Lk 22:21). He was saying the betrayer was at the table at that moment.

The "*dish*" Jesus spoke of was probably a dish containing a mixture of bitter sauce, raisins, and vinegar. This bitter mixture was consumed during the Passover meal to remind them of the bitter labor of their fathers in Egyptian bondage (Ex.12:8).

*Mt 26:24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

Jesus said "*as it is written*". He wanted his disciples to know that what was about to happen was not an accident. His betrayal, his arrest, and his crucifixion were within the plan of God (Acts 2:23). It was happening exactly as God had decreed. Jesus was not a victim. He was not overcome by the enemy. He willingly submitted to the plan of his Father. He not only was not a victim, he was a victor. He won the battle between God and the devil, between good and evil, between heaven and hell.

This was the plan of God but that does not mean those involved were not accountable for their actions. Judas did what he did of his own volition. God did not force Judas to do what he did. Jesus chose Judas knowing he would betray him. But, that does not mean Jesus made Judas betray him. Like all mankind, Judas was responsible for his decision. He would have gone to hell anyway since he never trusted Jesus as his Savior. However, his punishment is much worse because of his betrayal.

The "*woe*" Jesus spoke of here cannot be explained with words. The degree of punishment in hell is determined by how a person treated Jesus, their deeds done, and the light they received. No man ever treated Jesus worse, did more ungodly things, or had more light than Judas. More than likely, Judas will suffer more in hell than any other man who ever lived. Certainly it would have been better had Judas never been born than to suffer the anguish that was before him.

As the night progressed, Jesus was more descriptive about who would betray him. Peter asked John to ask Jesus who the betrayer was (Jn.13:23-25). Jesus response was, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it". After he dipped the sop he gave it to Judas (Jn.13:26). We cannot be certain if all the disciples heard this part of their conversation, but certainly Peter and John knew Judas was the betrayer.

*Mt 26:25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

Judas was the last one of the disciples to ask this question. His hypocrisy is unbelievable. He knew he was the one Jesus had been talking about. And, he knew that Jesus knew. Yet, he kept playing his part. All the other disciples were asking if it was them that would betray him, so Judas knew if he remained silent it would cast suspicion on him. So, he asked the same question everyone else was asking.

Notice, Judas called Jesus, "*Master*". He did not call him "Lord". Judas never called Jesus Lord. He did not call him Lord because Jesus was not his Lord. In fact, the other Judas called Jesus "Lord" and the Holy Spirit made a point to clarify it was not Judas Iscariot (Jn.14:22).

The words, "*Thou hast said*" was a common way of saying, "It is as you have said". It is possible Jesus spoke these words just loud enough for Judas to hear because the disciples wondered why he left when he went out (Jn.13:28-29).

John gives us more insight to the events at this point. Jesus said the one he gave the sop to was the one who would betray him. Then, he gave sop to Judas (Jn 13:26). Some of the most chilling words in the bible are written at this point. John tells us when Judas took the sop, Satan entered him (Jn.13:27).

I believe Jesus dismissed Judas at this point. John tells us Jesus said "That thou doest, do quickly" (Jn.13:27). The decision had been made. Judas had totally committed himself to his evil plan.

Judas went out into the night (Jn.13:30). This was not only literally true, but it was true spiritually. Truly, this man did go out into the darkness.

The disciples were still confused. They either did not hear Jesus when he told Judas he was the one who would betray him, or they did not understand the meaning of what Jesus was saying to Judas. When he left, they thought he might be going to buy things needed for the feast (Jn.13:28-29).

#### THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S TABLE (Communion) 26:26-30

*Mt 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.*

John's recording of this event seems to indicate Judas left before Jesus instituted the Lord's table (Jn.13:27). He had no part of the body and blood of Jesus, so it was right that he not be allowed to partake of this ceremony.

In this upper room, Jesus had observed the process of the Old Testament Passover meal. As they came to the end of that meal (cf. Lk.22:17) Jesus took some of the bread, blessed it, brake it, and gave it to the disciples.

This would be the last legitimate Passover ever observed. This indicates the merger of the Old Testament Passover into the New Testament Lord's table or Communion service.

Only God had the authority to end the old and begin the new. Jesus, being God, had that authority. The bread and wine used in the Passover would take on new meaning. They would become symbols of Jesus' body and blood.

The bread of the Old Testament Passover was unleavened. It reminded them how God told His people to leave the leaven of Egypt behind when He brought them out (Ex.12:15,19). It also reminds us of the pure life of Christ. He was completely holy and without any sin.

Jesus broke the bread that he might give it to the disciples. But, he broke it also because it was a reminder of his body that would be broken for mankind. Paul writes, "And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is *broken* for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor.11:24 emphasis added). How could Jesus speak of his broken body when Psalms 34:20 says none of his bones would be broken? The answer is, while not one of his bones were broken, his skin and muscles were broken.



*Mt 26:27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

Mark tells us all of the remaining eleven disciples drank of this cup (Mk.14:23). When we partake of Communion and receive the drink it is a symbol that we have received Jesus' work on Calvary. Jesus told his disciples to drink "*all of it*". This reminds us of how it took all the blood of Christ to purchase our salvation. Someone has wrongly said, "One drop he shed just for me". Friend, one drop of his blood would have done us no good. He had to shed it all. It took his death.

*Mt 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

When Jesus said "*this is my body*" and "*this is my blood*" he was not speaking literally as some have supposed. He was speaking symbolically here just as he was when he said "I am the bread" (Jn.6:41) and "I am the light" (Jn.9:5). The bread and drink were mere symbols of his body and blood. Jesus was simply saying he would give his body and his blood as a sacrifice for sinners.

The word, "*testament*" means, "contract" or "covenant". God was making a new covenant. The entire Old Testament priesthood had pointed to this new and living way (cf. Heb.10:19-20). Jesus did not come to do away with the Old Testament system, he came to fulfil it. He had said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt 5:17). That which the Old Testament had pointed to was becoming a reality.

It is by his blood we can have the "*remission of sins*". Remission means, "forgiveness, deliverance, or freedom". His blood provides the way of forgiveness to those who will accept it.

Some teach the word "*many*" means Jesus did not die for all mankind. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus' died for all the world (Jn.1:29; 3:16; 2 Cor.5:15; 1 Tim.4:10; 1 Jn.2:2; 4:14).

*Mt 26:29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

From this point on, when they ate the bread and drank the drink they were not remembering the body and blood of a lamb killed on an altar by a priest, they were remembering the body and blood given by the Lamb of God.

Jesus looked ahead to his kingdom. He said he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drinks it with his believers in the "*Father's kingdom*".

*Mt 26:30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

During the Passover ceremony, the Jews sang what was known as the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113-118). It is very likely this is what they sang that night in the upper room.

In establishing this ceremony, Jesus was giving us an example that we should follow. God's family are to observe this table until he returns. This has become one of the two church ordinances. Luke tells us Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me" (Lk.22:19). The Old Testament Passover had been a reminder of how God brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The New Testament Communion Service is a reminder of how Jesus brought believers out of the bondage of sin. We are so prone to forget what it cost God to provide salvation. We should never get used to the high cost of the payment for our sin.

Paul wrote about this event (1 Cor.11:17-22). The Communion Service is far more serious than many seem to realize. Paul said there were some who are weak, there were some who are sick, and there were some who were dead, because they took the Communion Service lightly (1 Co 11:30).

When we observe the Communion Service, we are looking back to how Jesus gave himself for our sin, we are also looking in to examine ourselves (1 Cor.11:28-29), and we are looking ahead, to when we will be with our Lord in the kingdom, and eventually in heaven.

Jesus said much that night that Matthew did not record. John says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron". The words John referred to was what Jesus said in John chapters thirteen through seventeen.

Jesus spoke about his departure (Jn.14:1-14), his promise of the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:15-31), his teaching about the vine and the branches (Jn.15:1-17), his warning about the world's hatred (Jn.15:18-16:6), his further teaching about the Holy Spirit (Jn.16:7-15), his teaching about prayer (Jn.17-33), his leaving and return (Jn.16:16-33), his prayer about himself (Jn.17:1-5), his prayer for his disciples (Jn.17:6-19), and his prayer for future believers (Jn.17:20-26).

They went out "*into the mount of Olives*". The ceremony being ended, Jesus led the disciples out of the upper room and towards the garden of Gethsemane.

FURTHER WARNING ABOUT PETER'S DENIAL 26:31-35

*Mt 26:31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*

Jesus tried to warn his disciples about what was ahead. He had warned them before (Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Had they listened, they could have been better prepared. The disciples failed later because they failed here. How many times have we failed our Lord simply because we did not listen to him when he spoke to us? A warning is information about approaching danger. The sign on the highway tells us there is a dangerous curve ahead. A wise person will give heed to the warning and take the necessary steps to be ready for what is coming. Since Jesus knows everything about what is in our future it would do us well to give heed to all of his warnings.

The word, "*offended*" means, "to trip up" or "to stumble". What was about to happen would have a traumatic effect on their walk with the Lord. He said "*All ye*" shall be offended. What was ahead would be so devastating that none of them would handle it rightly. They would all forsake their Lord that night.

Jesus said they will stumble because "*of me*". He was about to do something the disciples never expected. In spite of all his warning about his coming death they still expected him to overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom. When that did not happen, it overwhelmed them. All their lives they had expected the Messiah. And now, the one they thought was that Messiah, allowed himself to be arrested by the very ones they thought he would overthrow. They could not process that information in their minds.

Jesus said, "*It is written*". The failure of his disciples had been prophesied (Zech.13:7). None of this caught God by surprise.

The word, "*scattered*" has the idea of being disoriented. Sheep are totally dependent on the shepherd. Their only hope was to follow the shepherd. Without a shepherd they become totally disoriented and wander aimlessly. Jesus was warning the disciples about his arrest and death. No words have ever been more true of his flock. The shepherd was smitten and the sheep were scattered. They were about to run like scared puppies.

Not only will the sheep be separated from the shepherd but they will be separated from each other. They would all go through the same ordeal, but they would all feel totally alone. It is bad enough to go through a difficult time, but it makes it so much worse when you feel like you are going through it all alone.

What Jesus was speaking about was going to happen "*this night*". All the disciples had just pledged their commitment to Jesus. But, before the sun came up again, they would all have done that which they thought they would never do. A one-two punch from the devil can quickly take even the most determined saint out of the fight.

The scripture Jesus quoted said, "*I smite the shepherd*" (emphasis added). These were the words of God the Father. He would be the one who would smite this shepherd (Ps.69:26; Isa.53:10; Mt.27:46). He poured His wrath for sin on His Son.

*Mt 26:32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*

Jesus said it again. But, "*after I am risen again*". His crucifixion would not be the end. In fact, it was the very means whereby he would accomplish the will of his Father.

Had the disciples just listened to his words, they would have been able to deal with his arrest, his trials, and his crucifixion. They would have realized all his agony was a prerequisite of his glory.

He said he would meet them in Galilee. These words reveal the fact that Jesus was already thinking beyond the cross and to the joy that was set before him (Heb.12:2). Thank the Lord, this meant his ministry with these disciples was not over. They would forsake him, but he would not forsake them. He did not toss these aside and look for others to take their place. There is recovery after ruin.

The words, I will "*go before you*" is another indicator of how he was the shepherd who would lead the sheep. But these words make me think of more than just the fact that he would literally going out in front of them.

It makes me think of someone who goes before another in order to prepare for their arrival. Certainly, Jesus would make the necessary arrangements to provide what these disciples would be needing. He plans ahead to provide for us what we need, even before we know we need it.

Jesus would keep this promise (Mk.16:7; Mt.28:16). He was not saying they would not see him until they saw him in Galilee. Some of them would see him before his appearance in Galilee (Lk.25:34,36; Jn.19,26). He was referring of his foremost appearance when over five hundred of his disciples saw him at once (1 Cor.15:6).

Why did Jesus plan to meet his disciples at Galilee?

Because of *superstition*. Some believed the spirit of a person hovered for several days around the tomb of a dead person. Meeting him in Galilee would prove he was more than a spirit.

Because of *seeing*. Jesus showed himself to many of his disciples in Galilee. They saw him, they touched him. Their doubt and fears were dealt with at Galilee.

Because of *service*. He would gather his disciples in an effort to unite them for service (Mt.28:16-20).

*Mt 26:33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

Like so many times, Peter's impulsive nature made he speak before he thought. An impulsive person acts before they have all the information about a matter.

Peter did not learn easily. He did not know himself, he did not know the power of Satan, and he did not realize the severity of the battle ahead. He said "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (Jn.13:37). He was wrong but he was sincere. He really intended to stand with Jesus no matter the cost.

Many believers fall into the trap Peter fell into. He saw the flaw of others, but he failed to see his own flaws. He thought others might fail but he never would. That is a dangerous attitude that sets us up for failure. Our fallen nature makes us capable of doing anything if the circumstances are right. You may never do what Hitler did but you have a nature within you that makes you capable of doing exactly what he did.

*Mt 26:34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

Peter not only would deny the Lord, he would deny him three times.

*Mt 26:35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*

Peter refused to give in. He was actually disputing God. We never win an argument with God.

I believe Peter was willing to die for Jesus. He expected a battle with Rome and he knew battles mean some people will die. He realized he might be one of the ones that would be killed. But, a good soldier is willing to give their lives for the cause they are fighting for. Peter believed the cause of Christ was worth dying for. If he died standing with Christ, he considered it worthwhile.

However, he was about to face something worse than death. The man he thought to be the Messiah would not do what he expected him to do. As I have mentioned, Peter and the other disciples expected Jesus to overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom. When that did not happen, it overwhelmed Peter. All his life he had expected the Messiah. And now, the one the thought was that Messiah, allowed himself to be arrested by the very ones they thought he would overthrow. That was something he was not prepared for. The worse experiences of our lives are the times when God does what we do not expect and could not explain.

Peter was mistaken in several areas.

He was mistaken about how weak he weak he was. Peter was not near as strong as he thought he was. He had stood many times before but this time would be different.

He was mistaken about how wicked he was. The wicked nature of Peter was still alive. Peter still wanted his way.

He was mistaken about how strong the devil was. He did not realize the devil's power.

He was mistaken about the severity of the battle ahead. He was about to face something like he had faced before. The worse battle of his life was ahead.

He was mistaken about how well Jesus knew him. Jesus knew him more than he knew himself. If Jesus said he was going to deny him, he should have believed him.

Peter didn't realize how weak he was, but Jesus did. Peter didn't realize how wicked he was, but Jesus did. Peter didn't realize how strong the devil was, but Jesus did. Peter didn't realize the severity of the battle, but Jesus did. So, what is my point? Peter should have listened to Jesus. And, so should we.

Luke tells us Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Lk 22:31). The word "desired" reminds me of the evil nature of Satan. He wants to cause trouble and heartache.

This also reminds me of how the devil must get permission from God before he can attack one of God's children (cf. Job 1:12). He may want to hurt us but he cannot make a move toward us until God gives him permission.

The process of sifting grain was done after it had been winnowed. After winnowing, there was still some chaff, small stones, and debris left in the wheat. This debris had to be removed before the wheat could be ground into meal. The wheat was placed in a sieve and shaken back and forth forcefully. This was a violent process. This shaking motion caused the debris to rise to the top and the wheat to settle to the bottom. The sifter would blow away the debris and pick out the stones. This process was continued until all the debris was removed and nothing but wheat was left. The sifting caused havoc for the wheat but it also got rid of the worthless debris.

As mentioned, the sifting process brought the chaff to the top of the wheat. So, the chaff became that which was visible and the wheat stayed underneath. The devil wants to sift our lives that the chaff in us might be what is seen. He wants our temper to come to the surface. He loves it when our impatience causes us to act inappropriately. He is thrilled when we let our flesh control us. He wants the old stuff that is still in us to be seen by those around us.

However, God wants to use the sifting process to remove the chaff in us. It may feel like God is shaking your world at times, but He is doing it for your good. He may even use the devil to accomplish this work.

So, the devil sifts us to disrupt our lives. And God sifts us to remove the worthless junk from our lives. God said He would sift the house of Israel (Amos 9:9).

One thing was certain, Peter was about to be shaken. But, Jesus told Peter, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Lk.22:32). Thank the Lord for His intercession on our behalf (Heb.7:25). He still prays for us.

We may not openly deny Jesus as Peter did, but we do the same type of thing when we refuse to witness to our neighbor. We may never have denied him publicly as Peter and the disciples did, but we have not faced what they did. What would you do. Peter thought the same thing you are probably thinking.

We center our attention on Peter but he was not the only one who promised to die with Jesus. All the disciples promised to stand with Christ but they all forsook him when the time came (Mt.26:56).

#### JESUS TRIED TO PREPARE THE DISCIPLES

Luke records some of Jesus' admonition that Matthew does not mention (Lk.22:35-38). He reminded the disciples how he had provided for them as they walked with him. He asked them, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing?" (Lk 22:35).

But, then he told them to get a purse, a script, and a sword. He was trying to prepare them for the difficulties ahead. They would need to necessitates of life to survive.

All four gospels record the event at the garden of Gethsemane (Mt.26:36-56; Mk.14:32-52; Lk.22:40-53; Jn.18:1-11). John records the arrest in the garden but none of Jesus' agonizing in prayer. John emphasizes the fact that Jesus was God. As God, Jesus did not wrestle with the plan of the Father.

Jesus was about to face the worse battle since he left his Father's house. It was at this point when the devil attacked Jesus as never before. He was doing his best to kill him in that garden. He trying to keep him from going to the cross.

These verses show us how Jesus prayed three times. We can assume the devil was attacking him during each of these times of prayer. It reminds us of how the enemy tempted him three times during one of his times of temptation (Mt.4:1-11).

No where in the life of Jesus do we see his humanity more than at Gethsemane.

The suffering he endured in the garden was the worse he had faced up to that point of his life. Jesus' suffering on the cross would be indescribable, but he suffered terribly at Gethsemane.

As they were approaching the garden, Jesus told his disciples, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Lk.22:38). His admonition for them to pray was for them, and for him. They were all about to face the worse battle of their lives.

Before we even look at these verses, it is important to realize, Jesus was not trying to avoid the cross.

#### JESUS AND HIS FIGHT

Jesus was in for the fight of his life in the garden that night. He had faced many battles and had won easily. But, this experience would be different. It was going to be a real fight.

I have said it before, but we must not miss the fact that the devil was trying to kill Jesus right there in the garden. He did all he could to stop him from going to the cross. He pulled out all the stops here. He unloaded every weapon he had against Jesus. He isn't likened to a roaring lion for no reason.

He had a fight because of his natures. He was totally human and totally God.

We see the humanity of Christ here like never before. His human nature, though flawless, struggled with the thought of enduring the agony and shame of the cross.

We also see the deity of Christ here. His holiness was repulsed by that which laid ahead. We see his deity in that he even survived what happened in the garden. No ordinary man could have lived through that experience. As I have said, the devil was doing his best to kill Jesus in that garden. He would have been successful had the Father not intervened.

*Mt 26:36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

Jesus and his disciples had come to the garden of "Gethsemane" often (Jn.18:2). No doubt it was a place where he could find solitude from the crowds and from the demands of his ministry. It was a place where he could spend time alone with his Father. It had indeed become a special place for him and his disciples.

This garden was located on a slope of the Mount of Olives. Olive trees grow there still today. The word "Gethsemane" means, "oil press". An oil press was a devise used to squeeze the oil out of the olive. Olive oil was valuable but the olive had to be crushed that it might be removed. Like the olives, Jesus would go through a time of intense squeezing in that garden.

Jesus told his disciples, "*Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder*". Jesus always prayed, but he certainly prayed before the important events of his life. He knew what was ahead, so he found a place where he could spend some time with his Father. We would do well to learn from his example.

*Mt 26:37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.*

Jesus left eight of the disciples near the entrance and took three of them further into the garden.

The "*two sons of Zebedee*" were James and John. Peter, James, and John were the closest to Jesus of all the disciples. They experienced things the other disciples did not (Mt.17:1-8). They were not chosen because God has favorites. No doubt, they were devoted to Christ in a way the others were not. Jesus saw in them the potential for service. As a result, they would be used in a way that would honor God and help people. By the way, God is still looking for some He can use in a special way.

The word, "*sorrowful*" means, "distressed". It means "sad". It carries with it the idea of dissolving. That which Jesus was going through was something that would drain the very life out of a man.

The words, "*very heavy*" mean to be fully engulfed with grief. It speaks of mental and emotional distress. It has the idea of being completely surrounded. Not one part of Jesus was untouched by this grief.

Jesus was facing an intense emotional and spiritual conflict. No other human has ever, ever, ever, faced such a battle.

*Mt 26:38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

His soul was consumed with "exceeding" sorrow. He was absolutely consumed by sorrow.

Jesus was warning his disciples about the danger. Jesus' words were so needful. The disciples were to "*watch*". They needed to be aware of what was happening around them. Jesus was about to enter the worse battle he had ever encountered. They also, would be apart of this attack. The forces of hell were about to be unleashed. If they were to not be overcome in this conflict, they needed to watch.

If there has ever been a time when we need to watch, it is now. We also, are in a time of great danger. The time is too serious and there is too much at stake for us to play around.

We see an openness in Jesus we have never seen before. He was honest with his disciples about how he felt. Jesus did that which he had never done before. He turned to his friends for assistance. After all he had done for them, surely these men would stand with him. Surely they would see the distress in his face and it would concern them enough to pray. Sadly, they missed it. These "friends" would fail him miserably.

The words, "*even unto death*" indicate how close Jesus came to death that night. It literally was more than any normal human could have lived through. Jesus himself came close to dying.

### JESUS AND HIS FOCUS

Jesus won the victory because he stayed focused on doing the will of his Father. As always, he stayed focused on doing that which pleased his Father.

*Mt 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Jesus went into the garden and prayed three separate prayers. As I mentioned, Jesus was in a fight in the garden. His fought his fight by praying. We would do well to do the same. Many battles are won or lost by whether we pray or not. In fact, prayer itself is a battle. The devil knows the power of prayer, and he is not about to let us pray without a battle.

This was the first of the three prayers Jesus prayed that night..

I believe we should examine this verse from the end first. He said, "*nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*". There is much discussion about the events of Gethsemane, but there is one thing we cannot miss, Jesus was totally committed to doing whatever his Father willed him to do. No matter what Jesus would say as he prayed, his will was always completely surrendered to the Father's will.

Jesus was not trying to avoid the cross when he said, "*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*". He was simply saying, "if there is any other way to provide forgiveness and to pay for sin, let me do it that way". The only way of salvation is the cross of Calvary. This prayer magnifies the fact that there was no other way to provide forgiveness for lost sinners. Had there been any other way, the Father certainly would have stopped His son from going to the cross. If there had been any other way, Jesus died an unnecessary death. This prayer proves to all who will hear, there is no other way to be pay for sin. No one on earth has any hope in eternity unless they have turned to Jesus by faith.

There is no doubt about Jesus being dedicated to his Father's will. He lived to do the Father's will. He was committed to the cross every second of his life. When he died, he said, "It is finished". He had accomplished that which he left heaven to do. Jesus submitted totally to his Father's will, knowing it meant he would suffer His undiluted wrath (Isa.53:10).

Jesus went "*a little further*". Luke tells us he was about a stones throw from them (Lk.22:41). This was a battle Jesus had to fight alone. He found a place where he could be totally alone with his Father. The words "he went a little further" were true literally, he did go further into the garden than the disciples. But, these words are also true spiritually. He went further than anyone else. He gave more, did more, sacrificed more, than any man who had ever lived. He certainly did go further.

What "*cup*" was Jesus referring to? It was was the misery and anguish connected to the cross.

*The cup contained the bitter dregs of sin.*

The cup represented all the sins of all the world. The thought of drinking the bitter dregs of sin must have overwhelmed the mind of a sinless Savior.

Imagine all the sins of men like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein, the sins of every child molester, every drunk, and every prostitute, and the sins of the executive on Wall Street who so filled with pride he thinks he needs no God. All these sins were placed on Jesus as he hung on the cross.

The sin of the sinner was placed on him in order that his righteousness might be placed on the sinner when they repent and believe (Rom.3:22; 5:19).

To understand what this meant to Jesus, we must see the vileness of sin and the holiness of God.

Sin is more vile than we will ever imagine. In our flawed human understanding we do not truly see the abomination of sin. Sin is worse than we could ever comprehend. It is so vile it required the death of the perfect Son of God for its payment.

Just as we fail to comprehend the vileness of sin, we also fail to recognize the holiness of God. Sin is the breaking of God's law. But, we must realize, God did not give His law simply because He wanted to restrict man from doing something wrong. God's law came from His very nature. God is holy, pure, and flawless. There is absolutely no sin in Him. Since Jesus was God, the thought of having sin placed on him was almost unbearable. The perfect, sinless, Son of God could not tolerate the filth of sin.

*The cup contained the bitter dregs of suffering.*

This cup speaks of the physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering Jesus endured as he hung on the cross.

Jesus suffered physically. The physical agony of crucifixion is beyond our comprehension. He suffered the pain that every human would have suffered if they all went to hell forever. The pain of crucifixion was so severe the word "excruciating" means "from the cross".

Jesus suffered emotionally. We will never be able to comprehend the emotions Jesus endured. He was under such pressure he was literally at the point of death. It was the night before his crucifixion. He knew his time was running out. The indescribable weight of Adam's sin, of Israel's rejection, of Judas' betrayal, of Peter's denial, of the disciples forsaking, and the Father's anger came upon him all at once.

*The cup contained the bitter dregs of sorrow.*

I am sure he thought about the many who would reject his payment for sin and go to hell. Also, he probably was looking ahead and seeing how many believers would live half-hearted lives. It breaks his heart when someone goes to hell. It also breaks his heart when Christians live lukewarm lives.

*The cup contained the bitter dregs of separation.*

The holy Trinity had would be divided for the first time in all eternity. All this agony, Jesus had to bare alone. The concept of this truth boggles the mind.

Since God cannot look upon sin (Hab.1:13), the heavenly Father had to turn His back on His Son as he hung on the cross (Mt.27:46).

No doubt, this troubled Jesus more than any other aspect of the cross. He would take the place of guilty sinners and experience the punishment that was due them. Paul would write, "For *he hath made him to be sin for us*, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Co 5:21 emphasis added).

Jesus took the sin of the world upon him, but he never actually became a sinner. Jesus never committed a sin personally, but when he hung on the cross he was made sin judicially. We find this concept in the Old Testament sacrifice. When a sacrifice was offered for sin, the guilty party brought a sacrifice to the priest. The priest would lay his hand on the animal and then he would slay it (Lev.3:2; 4:4). This placing of the hand was a sign of the sin of the guilty person being transferred to the sacrifice. This being done, the sacrifice became the substitute for the guilty. The animal never actually became sinful in nature even though it had become a substitute for sin. In like fashion, sin was imputed to Jesus, but he never became a sinner.

God the Father treated Jesus as though he was a sinner, even though he was not. The reason, Jesus was taking the place of the sinner. He became our substitute (Isa.53:4-6; Gal.3:10-13; 1 Pet.2:24).

This tells us the cup contained the wrath of God. God is angry about sin. The bible says, "God is angry with the wicked every day" ( Ps 7:11). The Father's wrath was poured on the Son as He hung on the cross. God must judge sin and Jesus was dying in the sinner's place.

The amazing fact is, if Jesus did what his Father desired, it would result in them being separated. Never before did obedience to God cause separation from God.

## JESUS AND HIS FRIENDS

All of those who claimed to be the friends of Jesus failed him miserably that night. While he was fighting with the devil, they were all sleeping.

*Mt 26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*

Jesus returned to the three disciples to find them sleeping. These were the same men who slept through part of the experience on the mount of the transfiguration (Lk.9:32). It looks like they would have learned something. They gave into their fleshly desires instead of staying awake and praying for strength to endure their battle.

He confronted all three but addressed Peter. These were the same disciples who had promised to die with him (v.35). Yet, they would not even stay awake and pray with him. As Jesus was struggling with the heaviest load ever bore by man, his disciples were sleeping.

But, we must recognize the fact that the disciples were in a battle also. The devil was fighting them just as he was Jesus. Their battle had to do with their physical limitations, they were tired in body. Their battle had to do with discernment, they did not recognize the severity of the attack from the wicked one that night. Their battle was sorrow. Luke tells us they were "sleeping for sorrow" (Lk.22:45).

That means, the emotional strain was taking a toll on them physically, mentally, emotionally, and even spiritually. All they had expected from the Messiah seemed to be drifting away. He wasn't overthrowing Rome, he wasn't delivering Israel, he wasn't setting up a kingdom, and it all confused them. On top of that, he had been talking about having to die and leaving them. They truly loved him and they did not want him to leave them. Also, they had grown accustomed to having Jesus with them. They were used to him being there when trouble came, or if they needed something, or if there was a decision that needed to be made. Now, he said he would be going away. The time was coming when he would be gone. He wasn't going to be there for them to lean on. They were going to have to learn to adjust to those changes. Things were getting ready to get tough. He's trying to prepare them for what's ahead. I'm afraid we get comfortable with life. There is a danger with getting used to things. Life can become too familiar. Church can become too familiar. The Lord may have to rock our boat some teach us how to appreciate his grace.

Probably the greatest issue they were struggling with was the fact that they did not know what to expect. Sometimes, the greatest weight, the greatest burden, the greatest distress can come from what we think *might* happen. Most of the time, the things we worry about never even happen. If it does happen, worrying about it now, does not do a bit of good. We need to just trust God for now, live right and let him take care of what comes.

And, Jesus did not excuse them. They were weary, but that did not give them an excuse to go to sleep. It was not time to sleep, it was time to be alert, it was time to watch and pray (v.41). He was telling them that they needed to stand for God in spite of what was going on.

If they aren't excused, surely we aren't. Sure, we have faced battles, things have happened that have grieved us, and life has been hard at times, but that does not give us the right to fail God. As many have said before us, we are never as strong as when we are on our knees. Our Lord's sufferings drove him to his Father, our sufferings should do no less.

Jesus saying, could ye not watch with me "*one hour*" indicates his time in prayer had been more than just the few seconds it would take for him to speak the words recorded in verse 39.

*Mt 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

In this verse, Jesus not only told them to pray, he told them why they should pray. They should pray that they might not enter "*into temptation*".

Sadly, they were already giving into the temptation. Their battle was lost in the garden when they failed to watch and pray. They would fail and they would disgrace the Lord. And their failure can be traced back to what they did here, or better said, what they did not do. To begin with, they did not watch. Had they been watching, they certainly would have been praying. Had they been watching, they would have seen the agony of Jesus. They were close enough to Jesus to hear him praying. His agony would have alerted them to the urgency of the hour. And then, they did not pray. The disturbed continence of Jesus and earnestness of his prayers should have moved them to pray. They should have sensed the attack of Satan and rushed to prayer. And, they should have been especially alert because of what Jesus had told them just minutes earlier. He had just told them they would all be offended *that* night (v.31). He even told them they would be scattered. This reminds us that without prayer, defeat was certain. The battle is won or lost, in the prayer closet.

Jesus knew the way to victory was prayer. If he prayed, do we not need to? If he saw the importance of calling on the Father for the necessary assistance, do we not need to see the same?

The "*spirit is willing*". A true Christian wants to please God. But, good intentions alone fall short. The spirit may be willing, but "*the flesh is weak*". That is the real reason the disciples failed that night. They had told Jesus they would die with him and they really meant it (Mk.14:31). But, they mistook their good intentions for strength. And, that is one of the reasons why they did not pray. And, they did not have strength because they did not pray.

Our old flesh has no desire, nor power, to serve God. Our flesh craves the things of the world. It always has and it always will. There is no cure for the flesh. It will not improve and it will not change.

That is why it is necessary for us to be filled with the Spirit (Eph.5:18). Our only hope in overcoming our flesh is to be totally controlled by the Spirit of God.

*Mt 26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*



Jesus prayed the second time.

His first prayer was "If it be possible". His second prayer was not a request at all. In essence, he was saying, since the cup cannot be removed, I am willing to drink it.

*Mt 26:43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.*

They were asleep "again". That shows they did wake up when Jesus came back to them the first time. They heard his words and still went back to sleep. Sadly, the disciple failed to grasp anything Jesus had tried to teach them. How this must have broken his heart.

*Mt 26:44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*

Jesus ended this prayer as he had lived his life, in complete submission to his Father's will (Lk.2:49; Jn.4:34; 6:38). That should instruct us to one purpose of prayer. One reason for prayer is that we might come to the point of total surrender to our Father's will. Jesus was never hesitant to accept his Father's will, there are times that we are. We may start our prayer with some resistance to what the Father desires, but if we pray rightly, we will not end our prayer with that attitude.

#### JESUS AND HIS FATHER

Luke tells us about a detail that Matthew does not mention. Jesus sweat drops of blood (Lk.22:44). The word used for "drops" literally means "clots". The sweat glands are surrounded by tiny blood vessels. These vessels can rupture in such a manner as to cause the sweat to be mingled with blood. This happens very rarely and only in times of extreme anguish. In many cases, this causes death.

The tension had become so great it was as though Jesus' very life was oozing out of his body. Had the Father not assisted him he would not have made it out of the garden alive. Thankfully, the Father sent help. Luke tells us the Father sent an angel to assist Jesus (Lk.22:43).

This angel did not end the battle but he aided Jesus to where he was not overcome. We will not be exempt from battles but there is help to be had. The Lord will give us grace to face whatever comes. He will give us enough grace to keep serving God and walking with him in spite of the battle.

There is no telling what is ahead for us. Troubles will come and there isn't one thing we can do to stop it. We can try to ignore it like the disciples did, and we will be defeated just like they were. Or, we can stay alert, walk close to God, obey him no matter what, and experience victory.

Jesus prayed three times about the same thing. This should indicate to us the fact that it is not wrong to pray more than once for a particular need.

Certainly, Jesus was not using vain repetition as he himself forbade (Mt.6:7). He was not shouting out mindless words with no meaning. He did ask the same thing more than once, but his words were sincere and real.

#### JESUS AND HIS FOE

The one who had turned against him was on the way to the garden, and he wasn't alone. He had the enemies of Jesus with him.

*Mt 26:45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

This conflict was over and Jesus had won the battle. The devil had lost again. Some believe the words, "sleep on now" indicate Jesus allowed these disciples to sleep awhile before he actually woke them. However, since he also said, "the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners", he was probably telling them it was too late to wake up and pray. His betrayal had already taken place and it was too late to pray about it. He had fought through the battle of Gethsemane alone. Since they slept through it all, Jesus not only had to fight the battle alone, but they would not be prepared for the events ahead.

Jesus had spoken of his "hour" before (Jn.2:4). But now it was time for him to do what he came to do. He would be "betrayed into the hands of sinners". He was about to turn himself over to the control of wicked and ungodly men. They were men who he had given life to. Even though he held their very breath in his hands, he yielded himself to their control. Jesus did not fight or resist in any way those who were coming to arrest him. He had submitted totally to what was ahead.

*Mt 26:46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*

The word, "rise" means to stand up. He told his disciples it was time for them to do something. They were not to stay where they were. They were not to give in to their emotions. They were to refuse to be defeated.

Jesus prayed three prayers while in the garden. The first was if there is any other way, let me do it. The second was, if there is no other way, I am willing. The third was, "Since it cannot pass, let it happen". He was getting stronger and not weaker.

That is what prayer will do for us. It will give us strength to do what we should. It will help us become willing to do what we would rather not do. Jesus had wrestled through his agony by praying. The disciples had retreated from their sorrows by going to sleep.

His sorrow at Gethsemane should break our hearts. It was our sin that caused his sorrow in this garden. He fought, and won, this battle for you. Jesus counted the cost of the cross, and said "yes". Jesus' work on Calvary bought our salvation, but his work in Gethsemane was necessary also.

It was here that he submitted to the cross. He did have the power to call it off at any time (Mt.26:53). Of course, he would not because he had promised. The path Jesus was to trod was not easy, but it was right

Before we move on, we need to look at one more thought about the garden of Gethsemane. The writer of Hebrews gives us some insight about the experience of Gethsemane. That writer said, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;" (Heb 5:7).

Much ink has been spilled over this verse. Of course it is speaking of Jesus' agony in the garden, but what do the words, "save him from death" mean? Some believe since the devil was trying to kill Jesus there, it means Jesus was praying to survive the experience in Gethsemane. Some believe Jesus was talking about being delivered from his death on Calvary by being raised from the dead. Whatever these words mean, we know he "was heard". God did hear his cry and grant his request.

### THE BETRAYAL OF JESUS 26:47-54

These events are also recorded by the other gospel writers (Mk.14:43-50; Lk.22:47-53; Jn.18:1-12). It would be very beneficial to read these accounts.

*Mt 26:47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.*

Even while the words were in the mouth of Jesus, Judas and the crowd came to arrest him.

Once again, Judas was described as "*one of the twelve*" (cf. Mt.26:14). God wanted to make sure there was no confusion about which Judas was responsible for betraying His Son.

Judas knew of the garden of Gethsemane for Jesus and his disciples had gone there before (Jn.18:2).

The "*multitude*" included temple guards of the Sanhedrin, leaders of Israel, and Roman soldiers (Jn.18:18). With the crowds being so large during Passover, Roman soldiers were used to guard the temple and prevent disorder. They certainly considered Jesus and his disciples to be a disruption. Mark tells us this crowd was sent by chief priests, scribes, and the elders of Israel (Mk.14:43).

This group came heavily armed. They brought "*swords and staves*".

John tells us they were carrying lanterns and torches (Jn.18:3). Even though there was a full moon they probably thought Jesus might hide in the shadows of night. It must have been some sight to see this crowd coming through the night.

*Mt 26:48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.*

How ungodly could Judas be? This is absolutely inconceivable. There needed to be a sign of some sort in order to mark Jesus to the crowd. But, Judas could have simply pointed to Jesus or put his hand on his shoulder. Yet, he chose to identify Jesus by a kiss on the cheek. A kiss on the cheek was a sign of love and affection. Kissing on the cheek or hand was also a sign of humility towards someone of greater standing. This was certainly not of a sensual nature as some have tried to indicate.

Perhaps Judas chose a kiss because he was still trying to act like the devoted disciple. He kept playing the part even though he knew that Jesus knew he was a hypocrite.

Someone has rightly said, Judas was the man who kissed the door to heaven and then went to hell.

Judas told them to "*hold him fast*". That carries with it the idea of overpowering and taking possession of someone. Judas was aware of the power of Jesus. He had seen in demonstrated many times.

*Mt 26:49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.*

The word, "*Hail*" was a word that meant to rejoice, or have joy. It was used to express the joy of seeing a good friend.

The word, "*master*" is the word for a Rabbi. It was a word used for a highly respected teacher of the law. It was used when the person speaking wanted to show the superiority of the one spoken to. Judas continued to show his hypocrisy. He certainly had no respect for Jesus.

The book of Proverbs tells us "the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Pr 27:6). How true that was in this case.

Luke tells us Jesus said, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss" (Lk.22:48).

As I have mentioned, the name Judas means "he shall be praised". Nothing is further from the truth in Judas' case. Judas has no fans. He defiled everything he touched. It is no wonder why Jesus called him the "son of perdition" (Jn.17:12). He never was a believer (Jn.6:64). He heard the preaching of Jesus for around three years, but he never applied it to his life.

*Mt 26:50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.*

The word, "*friend*" means "comrade". Jesus asked one of the most searching questions that has ever been asked. He asked, "*wherefore art thou come*". He asked Judas where he been. Of course, he knew Judas had just come from betraying him.

Jesus said, "*wherefore art thou come*". He spoke these words to make Judas think about what he was doing and not because he was uninformed.

These were the last words Jesus ever spoke to Judas. No doubt, these words have haunted Judas as he burns in hell. He probably hears Jesus saying them over and over.

The crowd "*laid hands of Jesus, and took him*". But John gives us information about this event that Matthew did not record. He tells us Jesus asked this crowd, "Whom seek ye" (Jn.18:4). They responded, "Jesus of Nazareth", and Jesus said, "I am *he*". When he spoke those words the crowd went backward and fell to the ground (Jn.18:6). A small portion of the power of God in him was unleashed and it knocked them flat on their backs. Jesus was giving them proof of his infinite power and their inability to prevail. Had he chosen to use that power, they would have had no chance against him. It looks like some of this crowd would have realized there was something different about this man and stopped their pursuit of his arrest.

The humility of Jesus still amazes me. Had he not allowed it, there would have been no way for them to have taken him prisoner. He could have spoken a word and disintegrated Judas and the entire crowd on the spot.

John also tells us Jesus said, "I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way" (Jn 18:8). Once again, we see the heart of Jesus. He was willingly giving his life for those he loved.

*Mt 26:51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.*

As the soldiers attempted to arrest Jesus, his disciples began to react. Luke tells us the disciples asked Jesus if they should take their swords to defend him (Lk.22:49). Perhaps they were wondering if the time of battle for the kingdom had begun.

However, Peter did not take time to see if Jesus would respond to their question, he took his sword and cut one soldier's ear off. No doubt, Peter was aiming for the soldier's head but he ducked just in time. John tells us the man's name was Malchus (Jn.18:10). Luke tells us it was the right ear (Lk.22:50).

*Mt 26:52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

Jesus told Peter to stop resisting. John tells us Jesus spoke to Peter and said, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it" (Jn 18:11).

Jesus said, "*for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*". He was talking about the reap what you sow principle. Those who use violence, will receive violence. However, I believe Jesus was referring to more than just the reap what you sow principle. I believe he was talking about the Old Testament principle that dealt with the shedding of blood (Ex.12:14; Lev.24:17, Dt.19:21). The law said the punishment should fit the crime. God gave government the authority to make and uphold laws. Some call this "an eye for an eye". The law said if a man sheds another's blood, his own blood should be shed. So, Jesus was telling Peter, "If you take the life of one of these soldiers, the government will have the right to take your life".

Luke also tells us how Jesus healed Malchus' ear (Lk.22:51). This is the only fresh wound recorded that Jesus healed. It would do us well to realize there was no faith on Malchus' part. This was the last miracle Jesus did before his death.

It looks like these soldiers would have reconsidered their actions when they saw Jesus heal the ear. After seeing such a miracle, you would think they would at least have thought that this man may just be who he claimed to be.

*Mt 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?*

There is a calmness about Jesus that is astounding. His hour had come and he surrendered.

It was not the fact that Judas betrayed him that led him to Jesus' arrest and trial. It was the fact that he surrendered himself to them. They had tried to take him before, but were unsuccessful (Lk.4:28-30; Jn.10:39). Mark recorded how Jesus spoke about this (Mk.14:48-49).

Peter's use of his sword revealed a lack of faith in the protection of God. Once again, we see him depending upon himself and not the power of God.

But, Jesus made it clear, his Father was well equipped to come to his defense. His Father was able to send "*twelve legions of angels*" to deliver him, if He so chose.

Notice, Jesus made it clear that he could ask the Father to send the angels. That shows us angels do not act on their own, they are under the authority and control of the Father.

A legion was a division of the Roman army that consisted of six thousand men. The Father had 72,000 angels standing by. Had Jesus simply called on the Father, He would have rescued him. Certainly, we know that would not be the case. He had come to die. He could not save himself if he were to save others.

We do not have to depend on the arm of flesh. Those who know the Lord have the same Father Jesus did. He is just as ready to come to our defense. We are not without heavenly assistance.

*Mt 26:54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

Nothing was more important to Jesus than to do what his Father desired of him. He would do what the scripture said (Ps.22:1, 7-8, 15-18; 41:9; 69:21; Isa.53:3-12; Dan.9:24-27; Zech.69:21).

Jesus was God, and he conducted his life according to the scriptures. The Word of God is the one thing of earth that we can depend on. It is settled and trustworthy.

*Mt 26:55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.*

They had come with their weapons as though they were coming to battle. Now, they were hunting him down like a common criminal.

Saying he "*sat*" in the temple implied he was offering no resistance to them in any way. Jesus did not travel with a group of body guards. He did not hide behind armed guards. He opened himself up to the world. He was accessible.

Since he submitted to them, there was no need for their weapons. Had he chosen to resist them, no number of weapons would have been enough to overtake him.

Luke tells us Jesus also said, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk.22:53). I believe he was referring to more than simply the fact that they came to arrest him under the darkness of night. I believe he was speaking about how God had allowed the prince of darkness a time in which he could work his work (cf. Lk.22:3). However, this time would end and the Prince of darkness would be overthrown by the Prince of Peace. It would seem that the forces of evil were winning but the battle was not over and their defeat was certain. Little did the devil realize his evil plan would backfire and be the very means whereby lost humanity would be provided the means of forgiveness. God always wins in the end.

*Mt 26:56 But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

Once again, we are reminded of the fact that none of this happened by accident. Every detail was according to the "*scriptures of the prophets*".

All the "*disciples forsook him, and fled*". What a sight this must have been as all eleven disciples scurried off into the shadows and disappeared. The men who said they were willing to die for him revealed how limited their dedication was.

They forsook Jesus because they were afraid. They feared being captured and the consequences. They acted on emotions instead of faith. Fear debilitates. Paul warned Timothy about fear (2 Tim.1:7-8). If Paul had to warn the great Timothy about being fearful, we had better take his warning to heart. We have no idea what we may have to face before we leave this world. The disciples feared the possibility of death and fled from it. Jesus saw death as an enemy to be conquered and stood up to it. The disciples should have known that Jesus had power over death. They had seen him raise people from the dead. He raised the widow son (Lk.7:11-17), Jairus' daughter (Mt.9:18-26), and Lazarus (Jn.11:1-44).

They defected because they were weak in the Word. Had they really listened to Jesus' many warnings they would have been prepared. It was the last thing they expected. But, why was this so? They did not expect what happened because they did not listen when he tried to prepare them.

They defected because of their lack of prayer. They were sleeping when they should have been praying. When we weak in the Word and weak in prayer, we will not be ready when the trials come.

This was one of the lowest spots in the lives of these disciples. Thank the Lord, they would not stay down. Later, these same men would be beaten, but would continue to preach (Acts 5:41). Some of the greatest days for a child of God can be after a fall and restoration.

Mark tells us about a young man who was present (Mk.14:51-52). More than likely, he had been awakened by the noise of this crowd on the way to arrest Jesus. He quickly wrapped some type of bed-clothing around himself and followed them to Gethsemane. Thinking he was one of the disciples the soldiers attempted to capture him. Whereupon, he slipped out of the bed-clothing and ran away "*naked*".

This man was probably not completely naked. The word "naked" is used in the bible in a variety of ways. It is used to speak of total nudity (Gen.2:25; Job 1:21; Ecl.5:15; Micah 1:8; Amos 2:16), of being poorly clad (Isa.58:7; Jam.2:15), and when referring to someone simply not wearing an outer garment (1 Sam.19:24; Isa.47:3; Mk.14:52; Jn.21:7).

The fact that the soldiers attempted to capture this man seems to indicate that they were under orders to capture the disciples of Jesus also.

## THE TRIALS OF JESUS 26:56-68

Jesus was tried by two different forms of government. The Jewish government and the Roman government. At the time of Christ, the Roman government was in control and the Jews were in subjection to Rome.

### THE JEWISH TRIAL

THE JEWISH TRIAL WAS A RELIGIOUS TRIAL

The Jews examined Jesus to determine if he had broken the Old Testament Law.

THE JEWISH TRIAL WAS IN THREE STAGES

FIRST STAGE: THE MEETING WITH ANNAS Jn.18:13-14

The meeting with Annas was much like our grand jury. Annas was to examine the evidence against Jesus in order to determine if there was enough to justify a trial against him.

The decision in this trial. Jesus was found guilty.

SECOND STAGE: THE MEETING WITH CAIAPHAS AND THE SANHEDRIN AT NIGHT Mt.26:57-68

The decision in this trial. Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy and determined to be worthy of execution.

THIRD STAGE: THE MEETING WITH THE SANHEDRIN IN THE MORNING Mt.27:1-2

The decision in this trial: Jesus was guilty and deserved the death penalty.

### THE ROMAN TRIAL

THE ROMAN TRIAL WAS A LEGAL TRIAL

The Romans examined Jesus to determine if he had broken the Roman Law. This was a totally different type of trial than the Jewish. In this trial, he was charged with inciting people to riot, forbidding people to pay their taxes, and claiming to be a king.

THE ROMAN TRIAL WAS IN THREE STAGES

FIRST STAGE: TRIED BEFORE PILATE Mt.27:2; Lk.23:1-7; Jn.18:28-40

The Roman government had taken away the right of the Jews to perform capital punishment (Jn.18:31). Therefore, the Jews had to take such trials to the Roman court system. That is why they sent Jesus to Pilate.

The decision in this trial: Not guilty.

SECOND STAGE: TRIED BEFORE HEROD Lk.23:7-12

The decision in this trial: Not guilty.

THIRD STAGE: TRIED BEFORE PILATE AGAIN Lk.23:11-25; Jn.18:39-19:6

The decision in this trial: Not guilty. Pilate still turned Jesus over to the Jews to do with him as they pleased (Mt.27:26).

THE TRIALS OF JESUS ACTUALLY VIOLATED THE LAW

The Jewish judicial system had been given to them by God. God told Israel to set up judges and officers in the towns who would judge in righteous judgment (Dt.16:18-20). These judges were not supposed to take bribes and were to be completely impartial in their decisions. The judicial system of America is based on this type of principle. We have local police that makes sure the laws of the land are observed. We also have judges and court systems that judge and punish those who break the laws of the land.

The Jewish judicial system worked fine as long as they did as God had directed. However, the Jews did not always follow the letter of the law when they judged Jesus. As we will see, many of the laws of the judicial system were violated in the case of Jesus. They willingly abused the law in order to condemn a man they hated. The fact that he was innocent did not stop them from pursuing his execution. Like hungry sharks, they tasted blood, and they moved in for the kill.

#### THESE TRIALS VIOLATED THE LAW IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS

- No trial was to be held at feast time

Jesus' trial began on a day before an annual Sabbath (Jn.18:28).

- No trial was to be held at night

At least part of Jesus' trial was conducted during the night (Jn.18:12-13).

- The accused was to be given counsel to help plead their case

Jesus had no one to plead his case.

- The accused party was not to be asked any self-incrimination questions

Jesus was asked questions that violated this law (Mt.27:11).

- The accused party could not be convicted on his own testimony

At least part of the grounds for Jesus being convicted were based on his own words (Lk.22:67-71).

- Evidence of the innocence of the accused was to be brought forward before any evidence of guilt

Though there could have been much evidence of Jesus' innocence, none was brought forward.

- There had to be two or three witnesses and their testimonies had to agree

They searched for anyone who would bring a false witness against Jesus (Mt.26:59-63; Mk.14:55-59).

- The sentence was pronounced in a place forbidden by law

The trial was held at the high priest's house (Lk.22:54). According to law, a death sentence could be pronounced only at the court's appointed place.

- The witnesses could not be paid for their testimony

Some of those accusing Jesus had bribed Judas for his part in Jesus' arrest (Mt.26:15; Lk.22:52).

- If the death penalty was given, a night must pass before the sentence was carried out

Jesus was crucified the same day he was convicted.

- The initial charge of blasphemy was changed to sedition

Jesus was originally charged with blasphemy. If the Sanhedrin had brought Jesus to Pilate with the charge of blasphemy, he would have simply told them to deal with him by their own laws. The Roman government would have cared little about anyone committing blasphemy. So, the Jewish leaders decided to charge Jesus with treason (Lk.23:2). The Roman government looked hard at anyone accused of defying their system, so they would be more likely to prosecute this type of case.

#### GUIDELINES FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CASES

It would do us well to take a minute to examine the guidelines that dealt with crimes that deserved the death penalty. These guidelines were established in an effort to not sentence an innocent person to death. They were very precise and were supposed to be followed exactly.

The law promised a public trial. Being held in an open and public manner assured the accused a fair trial. Of course, this was violated in Jesus' case.

The accused was promised the right to some form of self-defense. They had the right to have a person defending them. Jesus was denied this.

There could be no conviction unless there was two or three witnesses. If any witnesses were found to have given a false statements, they themselves would receive the punishment of the crime the person was being charged with (Dt.16:16-19). So, if the accused was charged with robbery, the person giving false witness would receive the punishment for robbery. Those who were witnesses would be the ones who assisted with the execution of the sentence (Dt.17:7). An example of this is found when the woman who had been found in the act of adultery. Jesus said to her accusers, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). If she had been found guilty, those who claimed to witness the adultery would be the ones to throw the first stones. This made any witnesses think twice before they offered any evidence that was not factual.

Those serving on the council would examine the evidence to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused. They were to abstain from food or wine to make sure nothing would cloud their thought process as they considered the evidence.

A vote or guilty or not guilty was cast with each member of the council voting individually. This was violated in Jesus' case.

A majority was sufficient to convict or to acquit. If the majority voted not guilty, the accused person was set free and the trial was over. If the majority voted guilty, the court adjourned for an entire day.

This provided some time for those who voted guilty to reconsider all the evidence in case they decided to change their verdict. This also provided time for any new witnesses to come forward with evidence that might show the innocence of the accused. In the case of Jesus, they did not want to take the chance of any positive witnesses to come forward, so they put him to death the same day. No public announcement of the verdict was to be given at that time. Those on the council were sent to their homes to ponder the evidence that had been brought forward during the trial.

On the third day, they returned to the judgment hall. Each person on the council would state again their opinion about the guilt or innocence of the accused. Any of these who had found the accused guilty had the right to change their minds and acquit the accused person. However, if they had voted to acquit they could not change their mind and vote to condemn.

If he majority still voted guilty, the accused was taken out immediately to carry out the punishment. They formed a procession going from the judgment hall to the place of punishment. A herald went before this procession proclaiming with a loud voice, the name of the condemned person, the crime they were accused of, and the names of the witnesses against him. The herald would also request anyone with further evidence to step forward with such evidence. A man walked at the end of this procession watching for anyone who might step forward with new evidence. This procession would go down the main streets of the city that as many as possible might see and hear the results of breaking the law. Considering these facts indicate a system of justice mingled with mercy. Every possible opportunity was provided to not send an innocent person to judgment.

## JESUS BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL 26:57-75

The Jewish communities were based around the synagogue. The focal point of every community was the house of God. Therefore, the justice system for these communities was structured on biblical principles. We have this same type of governing to some degree. Each church makes it's own rules and regulates those rules as it sees fit. When a person violates the rules of the church, the church determines what actions should be taken.

## FIRST STAGE OF RELIGIOUS TRIAL: THE MEETING WITH ANNAS Jn.18:13-14

### JESUS WAS TAKEN TO ANNAS FIRST Jn.18:13

Matthew takes us straight to the main trial of Jesus, but John tells us they took Jesus to Annas first (Jn.18:13). Annas was the high priest from 6 AD to 15 AD. He was still called high priest. Once a man served as high priest, he was called high priest for life. We do the same with our presidents.

Annas was the father in law of Caiaphas (Jn.18:13). Caiaphas was the high priest that year. The office of high priest had originally been an office that was held for life. However, since Rome was in control they determined who would be the high priest. No doubt, they thought a man who served as high priest for that length of time would develop too much power. The Romans did whatever it took to keep their dominion over other nations.

Annas has been called the most powerful Jew in Jerusalem. It has been said that he was the true power behind the throne. Even though he no longer served as a high priest he still had power over much of the religious system of the day. He controlled the temple system, which included the selling of animals for sacrifice, and the money changers. This gives us some insight as to why he would want to see Jesus done away with. After all, Jesus had overturned the tables, loosed the animals in the temple, and called it "a den of thieves" (Mt.21:13).

Annas asked Jesus about "his disciples, and of his doctrine" (Jn.18:19). Annas, being a man consumed with power, wanted to know what Jesus was teaching and how many were following him. He feared anyone who might obtain power among the people. No doubt, he wanted to entrap Jesus by getting him to talk freely about himself and his activity. What a hopeless plan. How do you trick God into saying the wrong thing? As I have mentioned, this interrogation was totally illegal for it was done during the night. It was a makeshift meeting that would not have considered official even according to their rules.

Jesus' response was a touch of genius. He told Annas to ask those who heard him for he had spoken openly everywhere he had gone and he had nothing to hide (Jn.18:20-21).

Jesus' response to Annas stirred the anger among those who were present. One of the officers struck Jesus with the palm of his hand and said, "Answerest thou the high priest so" (Jn.19:22). It is difficult to imagine how anyone could have more respect for a corrupt high priest than they would for the very Son of God.

Jesus gave one simple response to the strike on his face. He said, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me" (Jn 18:23).

Though an official verdict was not declared at this meeting, the consciences of the group was Jesus was guilty.

<p>SECOND STAGE OF RELIGIOUS TRIAL: THE MEETING WITH CAIAPHAS AND THE SANHEDRIN AT NIGHT Mt.26:57-68</p>
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ANNAS SENT JESUS TO CAIAPHAS Mt.26:57-68; Mk.15:53-65; Lk.22:54-65

Matthew began his record of these events with the main trial of Jesus, so he tells us about them taking Jesus to the house of Caiaphas. Of course, this was after Jesus' meeting with Annas (cf. Jn.18:13).

*Mt 26:57 And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.*

The soldiers led Jesus to Caiaphas' house, where he and the Sanhedrin were waiting. Part of the duty of the Sanhedrin was to judge the legal and religious matters of the Jews. They tried those accused of crimes to determine their guilt or innocence. They acted as judge and jury. Their primary obligation was really to protect the law. They did this by examining the evidence and determining the guilt, or innocence, of the accused. They were as obligated to protect the innocent as they were to punish the guilty.

One interesting note is the fact that Mark tells us all the chief priests, elders, and scribes were assembled in Caiaphas' house (Mk.14:53). Also, Luke tells us of a man who was a member of the Sanhedrin who did not consent to the death of Christ. His name was called Joseph of Arimathaea. John tells us Joseph was a secret disciple of Christ because he feared the Jews (Jn.19:38). Though he must have been present at this meeting, he did not agree with their decision (Lk.23:51). He would gain a God given courage after the crucifixion and ask Pilate for the body of Christ.

The first step of a trial would have been what we would call an arraignment. This meeting was held in order to determine if there should even be a trial. In this meeting the charges of the accused were supposed to be read aloud.

Though many of these requirements were ignored in Jesus' case, the reason for this meeting was supposed to examine the evidence against him, and decide whether to try him.



Caiaphas was the high priest at that time. Part of the duty of the high priest was to sit with the Sanhedrin and judge the religious matters of the Jews. This Jewish council was made up of seventy of the leading Jewish leaders, and the high priest. That made the total sitting on the Sanhedrin seventy-one. The Great Sanhedrin was like the Supreme Court of Israel. Other than Sabbaths and holy days, they met daily at the temple to hold court. The high priest was the leader of the Sanhedrin would be the one in charge of the meeting.

John tells us more about Caiaphas. John says, "Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (Jn 18:14). This refers to some comments Caiaphas had made earlier when he had given advice concerning Jesus (Jn.11:47-51). Caiaphas was afraid of Rome. His thinking was, if Israel did anything to upset Rome, they would retaliate. At that time many were beginning to follow Jesus and some were even calling him the King of the Jews. Caiaphas said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (Jn 11:47-48). He thought the only way to survive was for Israel to appease the Roman government. He said, it would be better to let one die in an effort to appease Rome than for all of Israel to die (Jn 11:49-50). Caiaphas was saying if it came down to Jesus. or the nation of Israel, he would go with Israel every time. Little did he realize, but from his heart full of hatred and wickedness, came words of prophecy about the sacrificial death of the Son of God for a lost world. Without realizing it, he spoke what had been planned by God.

*Mt 26:58 But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*

As this image reveals, the palace of the high priest was a dwelling with several rooms built together with an open court yard in the center. This would be similar to a modern apartment complex. Annas' and Caiaphas' houses were both in this complex.

Peter had followed close enough to not lose sight of the crowd, yet far enough as to not be noticed. At first, he waited at the gate of the palace.

John tells us "another disciple" followed with Peter (Jn.18:15). Many believe this other disciple was John. He had a habit of referring to himself in an anonymous way (Jn.1:40; 13:23; 19:26).

The other disciple knew the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the palace complex while Peter stayed outside (Jn.18:15). This other disciple spoke to the porter of the door and got permission for Peter to enter (Jn.18:16). So, while Jesus was being examined, Peter was sneaking around the courtyard trying to stay inconspicuous.

Peter "*sat with the servants*". John tells us he warmed himself at their fire, for it was cold (Jn.18:18). As with all who follow Jesus from afar, he was found among unsavory company. This would prove to be one more step towards his failure. It is no wonder why we are admonished to avoid the world (Jam.4:4).

This reminds us of some more of the illegal aspects of this trial. This trial was held at night, it was held at a private residence, there was no formal indictment read aloud, and it was being held the day before a religious feast, all of which was illegal.

Matthew tells us Peter sat there "*to see the end*". We know it means he was waiting to see what would happen, but the wording makes it sound so final. There is an eeriness to these words.

While Peter waited outside, Jesus was being examined inside.

*Mt 26:59 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;*

For there to be a conviction there had to be at least two witnesses of the crime. This group was not seeking evidence in order to determine the guilt or innocence of Jesus.

It is very clear they had already determined his guilt. They just needed to find a crime to charge him with. Nothing shows their hatred of Jesus more than this. They actually sought people who would be willing to lie about him.

They cared nothing about the truth, they simply wanted him dead. People do the same thing every day. They would rather believe what they know is a lie than accept the truth of God's word. They do it because they are just like those who judged Jesus. They want him out of their lives. Little did they realize, you cannot get rid of God.

Palace similar to Annas' and



*Mt 26:60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses,*

Since the law demanded there be at least two witnesses in capital punishment case, they searched anywhere and everywhere for these witnesses. Mark tells us several came with false information but they did not agree (Mk.14:56). How it must have frustrated them to search unsuccessfully for any evidence they could use against Jesus.

The testimonies of witnesses had to agree. Normally, the witnesses would be separated and questioned separately to assure the accuracy of their testimonies. But, this group was not concerned about any rules, they wanted Jesus convicted no matter what it took.

We need to recognize there is more behind this search for witnesses than appears on the surface. This was more than men trying to find some accusation against Jesus. The devil himself was behind this scheme. He instigated and energized these men in their search. And, even the devil, could not find one accusation to bring against Jesus. If anything shows he lived a pure life, this does.

Finally, "*two false witnesses*" came forward.

*Mt 26:61 And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.*

The words "*This fellow*" was a derogatory term. This accusation came from Jesus' comments that are recorded in the book of John. Of course, Jesus never said he would destroy the temple. He actually said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). And, as John tells us, he was speaking of the temple of his body, and not the actual temple (Jn.2:21). The temple of his body would be destroyed but he would raise again after three days.

*Mt 26:62 And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?*

Jesus did not utter a word at this point. His silence had to be a first for this council. No doubt, every criminal they had ever interrogated had been quick to speak to their own defense. Most of us would be very quick to defend ourselves if wrongly accused. The innocent need not defend themselves. As we have seen before, Jesus' faith in the Father kept him settled in very stressful situations (cf. Mk.4:38).

This reminds us of how God does not waste words (cf. Mt.7:6; Rom.1:24, 26). Why speak when you know it is falling on deaf ears? They had already made their decision. There wasn't anything Jesus could have said to change their minds. As previously stated, this demand for Jesus to speak for himself was illegal.

*Mt 26:63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*

By this time Caiaphas was furious. Yet, Jesus remained silent. Most people would have been greatly intimidated by the demands of the high priest, but not Jesus.

Caiaphas' statement, "*I adjure thee by the living God*" was supposed to make Jesus legally obligated to reply. Caiaphas' comment refers to an Old Testament law that said if a witness has information and does not speak it, he is guilty himself (Lev.5:1). The principle behind this law was the fact that it is harmful to conceal information that could assist someone in need. Caiaphas was actually calling on Jesus to be a witness against himself. That was totally illegal for the accused could not be forced to testify against themselves.

Caiaphas was trying to force Jesus into saying something he would use against him. What makes this worse is the fact that the high priest was supposed to defend the innocent. There was no doubt about the innocence of Jesus, but he cared nothing about that.

He asked Jesus directly if he was "*the Christ, the Son of God*". Jesus did reply to this question.

*Mt 26:64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Luke tells us Jesus said something before he made the comments in this verse. He said, "If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go" (Lk 22:67–68). Once again, Jesus was making the point of how nothing he said would make any difference in the decision of the council he was standing before.

But, then Jesus said, "*Thou hast said*". These words were a form of affirming what had been spoken. It was the same as saying, "It is as you have said".

Jesus made it clear that he was the Son of God and it would be proven by him sitting on the "*right hand*" of power. This is actually speaking of the place of highest power and supreme authority. Sitting on the right hand indicated a place of honor. Stephen would see Jesus standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55).

Under these circumstances, for Jesus to remain silent would have been equivalent to him denying who he was. He not only answered the question, but he included truth Caiaphas did not expect. In essence, he said he was the Messiah and it would not be long before he would prove it before them all.

Jesus was standing before and being judged by Caiaphas at that time. But, the time is coming when the roles will be reversed. It will be Jesus sitting on the throne and doing the judging the next time they meet. Unlike Caiaphas, Jesus judgment will be right.

Jesus also referred to his coming again when he said, "*and coming in the clouds*" (cf. Acts 1:9-11; Jude 14-15; Rev.1:7). So, Caiaphas may have been instrumental in bringing Jesus' life to an end, but he would not do away with Jesus completely. Caiaphas wanted Jesus to give him proof about who he was. One day, he will get that proof but it will be too late to respond.

*Mt 26:65 Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.*

The rending of clothes was fairly common in that day. It was an outward expression of grief (Gen.37:29, 34; Job 18:37). Ripping your clothes was an outward sign of your ripped heart. The hypocritical Pharisees learned how to tear their clothes in the seams to where it would be relatively easy to sew them back together.

Another reason to rend one's clothes was when a person heard blasphemous speech. They were to rend their clothes and never sew them together again (2 Kgs.18:37; Acts 14:14). Blasphemy is the sin of consciously using derogatory language about God (Ps.74:18; Isa.52:5; Rom.2:24; Rev.16:9, 11, 21).

However, the high priests were forbidden to rend their clothes (Lev.10:6; 21:10).

Since Jesus did claim to be the Son of God at this point, Caiaphas' accusation against him would have been correct and he would have deserved to die had he not been the Son of God.

*Mt 26:66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

Caiaphas, being the leader of the Sanhedrin, asked the rest of the council for their verdict. The reply of the council was, "*He is guilty of death*". As previously stated, the verdict in this type of trial was to spoken aloud by each individual on the council. But, in the case, they spoke unanimously.

The law did state those guilty of blasphemy were to be put to stoned to death (Lev.24:10-16). However, as we have seen, the Romans had taken away the Jews power to execute the death penalty. They would have to rely on Rome to execute Jesus.

*Mt 26:67 Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,*

The hatred for Jesus was being revealed. Spitting in someone's face showed the lowest grade of disrespect, contempt, and insult. They "*buffeted*" him, which means they hit him with clenched fists. Striking him with the "*palms of their hands*" means they slapped him with an open hand.

Though the New Testament is silent, Isaiah tells us they yanked out the hair of Jesus' beard (Isa.50:6).

*Mt 26:68 Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?*

Luke tells us they blindfolded Jesus before they smote him (Lk.22:64). They stuck him and then asked him to tell them who did it. It is not difficult to imagine this scene as they gather around the blindfolded Jesus, laughing while they strike him repeatedly.

They said many other blasphemous things about Jesus (Lk.22:65).

## PETER'S DENIAL 26:69-75

Jesus' prediction about Peter denying him was about to come true (Mt.26:34). Peter's denial was recorded in all four gospel accounts (Mt.26:33-35; Mk.14:29-31; Lk.22:33-34; Jn.13:36-38).

Some have imagined a contradiction with this event. In Matthew (26:34), Luke (22:34), and John (13:38) Jesus said Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. But, Mark tells us Jesus said the rooster would crow twice before Peter would deny him three times (Mk.14:30). There certainly is no contradiction. A rooster is likely to crow several times throughout the early morning hours. The fact that Matthew, Mark, and John do not mention the first crow does not contradict the facts of this event. The fact still remains, Peter denied the Lord the third time and the rooster crowed immediately afterward.

The chronology of Peter's denials can be difficult to determine. We should remember there was a number of people in the courtyard with Peter. That means each time Peter was questioned there were several people standing near him. In this type of setting, it would be easy for more than one person to ask a question or make a comment before Peter had a chance to respond.

We will discover how Peter's denials grew progressively worse. He merely lied at first, then he took an oath to the lie, and then he cursed and swore.

### PETER'S FIRST DENIAL

*Mt 26:69 Now Peter sat without in the palace; and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.*

While Jesus was being questioned by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin inside the palace, Peter was outside in the courtyard. As previously mentioned, the palace complex was a series of rooms with a courtyard positioned on the inside. Undoubtedly, Peter was in this courtyard and in a position where he could see, at least part, of what was happening to Jesus inside the palace.

John tells us there was a group of servants and officers that had built a fire because it was cold (Jn.18:18). Peter was warming himself by this fire (Mk.14:67).

A "damsel" approached Peter and commented about his acquaintance with Jesus. A damsel was a female slave or servant. This damsel must have been the person kept the door to the palace (cf. Jn.18:17). Her statement was simple. She simply asked if he was one of the ones who had been following Jesus.

*Mt 26:70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.*

As usual, Peter did not think through his answer. He played ignorant. He acted as though he had no idea what she was talking about. More of less, he said, "I have no idea what you are talking about". Of course, this was an outright lie.

Notice how Peter's denial was heard by all those who were gathered close enough to hear. Peter continued to drift downward. He had been following at a distance, now he was denying.

#### PETER'S SECOND DENIAL

*Mt 26:71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*

In an effort to get away from those who had questioned him, Peter moved "out into the porch" of the courtyard. He not only moved geographically, but as we will see, he was moving downward spiritually. Each move took him further down.

Mark tells us a rooster crowed the first time at this point (Mk.14:68).

Peter's moving did him no good. The people standing close had heard the damsel's question (v.69) and Peter's response. Mark tells us a maid saw him again (probably the same servant girl) and began speaking to those around her about Peter (Mk.14:69). This led to others asking Peter questions about his connection with Jesus.

So, Peter's second denial involved the same maid that asked the question before (Mk.14:69), another maid (Mt.26:71), and a man (Lk.22:58). About this John wrote, "They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples" (Jn 18:25 emphasis added). John using the word "They" shows us the group standing around Peter was talking among themselves and those speaking to Peter were actually speaking for the entire group. Undoubtedly, these were standing close to Peter and spoke before Peter gave his second response.

The word "fellow" was a derogatory term.

*Mt 26:72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*

This time Peter added an "oath" to his denial. Peter even denied knowing Jesus. He referred to Jesus as, the "man". This was a word that showed contempt.

#### PETER'S THIRD DENIAL

*Mt 26:73 And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.*

Luke tells us this happened about an hour later (Lk.22:59).

John tells us one of the ones who questioned Peter was a relative of Malchus (Jn.18:26). Seeing a man cut off the ear of one of your relatives would be a pretty traumatic experience. It would be unlikely that you would forget what the person looked like.

The word, "bewrayeth" means to make clear or to make evident. Luke tells us this was because he was a Galilaeen (Lk.22:59). His dialect and ascent gave him away. We would say his hillbilly ascent gave him away.

*Mt 26:74 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.*

Peter's third denial was, by far, the worse. He began "to curse". In essence, Peter was saying that he was calling on God to be a witness that what he was saying was the truth. He was actually pronounced a curse of death upon himself if he was not telling the truth. It is a good thing for Peter that God is merciful.

Peter began to curse and "to swear". As awful as it is, Peter was swearing by the name of God that he did not know Jesus.

And "*immediately the cock crew*". At the exact moment the words were rolling off Peter's lips, the rooster crowed.

*Mt 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

Luke tells us Jesus turned and looked at Peter at this point (Lk.22:61). Jesus was in the place being interrogated and close enough to see Peter in the courtyard. Peter looked and saw Jesus looking straight at him. There is no way to imagine the thoughts of Peter when the eyes of Christ penetrated him. No doubt, Peter saw compassion and grief in the eyes of Christ. Amazingly, there was probably no anger in those eyes.

It is interesting to me that Peter was not remorseful, and he did not repent until he saw the Savior looking at him. We can know we have wrong and not repent, but if we ever see the Lord, it will bring us to repentance. It isn't just seeing our sin that causes us to repent, but it is seeing what our sin does to our Savior.

He "*went out and wept bitterly*". These words fail to explain the significance of this moment. There are no words that can explain how Peter felt.

Peter's failure almost destroyed him. But, by the grace of God, he would get right and go on to serve God. Unlike Judas who never relied on God's grace, Peter turned to his Lord and was forgiven and restored.

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

What can we learn from Peter's denial?

- God is a God of great mercy

Even though Peter's denial is one of the greatest tragedies of the New Testament, it is also one of the greatest triumphs. Peter's denial is one of the most heartbreaking stories in the Bible. Yet, it is one of the greatest examples of God's mercy. As low as Peter went, God forgave him.

- There is a reason for everything we go through

Peter not only had three times when he could have denied the Lord. He also had three times when he could have taken a stand for Jesus. These three temptations could have been a high water mark in Peter's life. Unfortunately, he failed all three times. This reminds us, with every temptation, God gives a way of victory, if we will take advantage of it (1 Cor.10:13).

- We should never think higher of ourselves than we ought

Peter truly thought he was willing to give his life for the Lord. He found out the hard way, he was not prepared for what was ahead. Jesus had told Peter, "thou canst not follow me now" (Jn.13:36). He meant following him into heaven but we certainly can see a spiritual application to his statement. At that point, Peter was not prepared to follow Jesus on the path he had to travel. Instead of following Jesus, Peter denied him.

- There is victory beyond failure

Jesus told Peter he had prayed that his faith fail not (Lk.22:32). The heavenly Father heard that prayer.

Certainly, the crowing of the rooster was a lesson to Peter. A rooster's crow says it is time to wake up. Peter certainly needed to wake up to the fact of his weakness. A rooster's crow also says it is time for a new day. And, Peter needed to know that, in spite of his denial, a new day had come. He would have a new beginning.

No Christian has sunk lower than Peter did. Yet, after his restoration, God used him greatly. He became a great leader of the New Testament church, penned Scripture, and was used greatly for the cause of Christ.

Thank the Lord, Peter did learn how to trust the Lord and walk the path designated for him. God used Peter greatly. Please take time to study these references (Acts 2:14, 3:16, 5:3, 5:15, 5:29, 9:40, 15:7-35). By the way, Peter did eventually do what he said he was willing to do. He died for Christ. Tradition tells us Peter's life ended by him being crucified. Yet, Peter asked that he be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as his Savior had died.

Peter's experience teaches us failure is not forever. If God was willing to forgive, restore, and use Peter, there is hope for us all. There is hope and help in the grace of God. The Prodigal's Father still watches and waits for the wayward son to return home.

Peter failed because he was *flawed*. Like us all, he was made of flesh that was tainted by the sin of man. If we trust ourselves we will fail every time. Peter failed because he was *familiar*. Jesus had tried to get him to pray when they were at Gethsemane. But, that garden was a place they had gone to often. He had become familiar with it. When we get used to the Christian life, we are headed for trouble.

Peter failed because he was *faint*. He was weak because he slept when he should have been praying (Mt.26:40). Had he prayed when he should have God would have given him the courage he needed when the devil attacked. Peter failed because he was *fearful*. He was afraid of what might happen if he was arrested. There is no excuse for Peter's denial but we must realize, he had given his life for a man that he thought was going to establish a kingdom. Yet, that man not only did not establish a kingdom, he was executed as a common criminal. How many times have we been devastated when God did something we did not expect?

Peter did live to see God's grace demonstrated in his life, but I imagine he remembered his failure every time he heard a rooster crow.

THIRD STAGE OF RELIGIOUS TRIAL  
THE MEETING WITH THE SANHEDRIN IN THE MORNING Mt.27:1

*Mt 27:1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:*

This event can be found in Mark (Mk.15:1) and Luke (Lk.22:66-71). Please read these accounts in order to get a more complete view of this meeting.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin reconvened at daybreak and rendered their official verdict. In Jerusalem, the sun rose around five o'clock during that time of year. They knew the meeting they had during the night was illegal so they probably had this meeting in an attempt to make it appear legal. They had already made their decision about Jesus so it is quite possible this meeting only lasted a few minutes.

Mark tells us the whole council was at this meeting (Mk.15:1). As previously stated (cf.26:57) Joseph of Arimathaea did not consent to the decision of the council (Lk.23:51). That means, if he was there, he remained silent when the counsel was making their decision about Jesus.

Their goal was to "*put him to death*". Nothing short of death would satisfy their taste for blood.

Since the Jews did not have the authority to use capital punishment they delivered Jesus over to the Roman government. Matthew describes the questioning by the Roman officials in the following verses.

JESUS WAS LED TO PILATE Mt.27:2

*Mt 27:2 And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

Matthew tells us about Jesus being led to Pilate in this verse. The details of this meeting is given in verses 11 through 25. This was the exact events Jesus had prophesied of earlier (Mt.20:18-19).

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin bound Jesus and led him to "*Pontius Pilate*". Pilate had been appointed as governor over Judea by the Roman government.

John tells us they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the judgment hall, which is also called the Praetorium (Jn.18:28). The Praetorium was the headquarters of the Roman governor, and the place where judgment was administered. This was a Gentile court system.

Pilate lived in Caesarea, but he had a palace in Jerusalem which he occupied during the Passover season. He stayed in Jerusalem that he might deal with any rebellion among the Jews. He was the Roman procurator from 26AD to 36AD (cf. Lk.3:1). A procurator was assigned as judge over smaller areas of the country. His duties was to keep order in the country and to make sure taxes were collected for Rome. Pilate was a corrupt, wicked, and brutal man. Jewish historians tell us he was stubborn, inflexible, cruel, and had no respect for the Jews. Luke writes about how Pilate hated the Jews (Lk.13:1). Pilate must have ordered the execution of certain Jews from Galilee while they were at the temple and in the process of offering their sacrifices. This is one of the worse examples of hatred and blasphemy.

JUDAS' REMORSE AND SUICIDE 27:3-10

*Mt 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

The suicide of Judas is recorded only by Matthew. Since Matthew did not always write chronologically, there are different opinions about the exact timing of Judas' suicide. If this part of Matthew's record is chronological, Judas ended his life while Jesus was being interrogated by Pilate.

Judas must have been aware of Jesus being taken before Pilate. He knew that meant that Jesus' case had gone beyond the religious examination by the Jews and to the legal trial by the Romans. Things were getting out of control in a hurry.

The word "*condemned*" means, "to judge against" or "sentence". Judas was troubled when he saw Jesus being tried by the Roman legal system. He knew the outcome was not going to be good. Some believe this indicates Judas betrayed Jesus to force him to overthrow Rome and set up his kingdom. I believe it simply means he was beginning to understand the full gravity of what he had done.

No doubt, at least part, of Judas' troubled thinking came from remembering what Jesus had said about the one who would betray him. He had said, "woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Mt 26:24).

The words, "*repented himself*" means "to regret" or "to care afterwards". It has the idea of regretting something we have done after we see the consequences of our actions. Many a drunk has been sorry for a night of drinking when they wake up the next morning. They are sorry, not because they did something wrong, but because they are sick from a hangover. There is a big difference between regret and true repentance. Regret means to be sorry *about* your sin. It does not necessarily bring about a change in conduct. Even though Judas admitted to doing wrong, he did not truly repent of his actions.

The word "*himself*" tells us his repentance was not sincere. True repentance leads a person to the Savior. What Judas did led him away from the Savior. He was trying to fix his mess but he was not truly repentant. He was sorry for the consequences of his sin, but he was never sorry *for* his sin. Returning the silver did nothing to undo what Judas did. We cannot undo what we have done.

*Mt 27:4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.*

Judas admitted to Jesus' innocence. This should have been enough to cause them to release Jesus. Their primary witness against him had withdrawn his accusation.

Judas' statement said a great deal about Jesus. If anyone knew about Jesus, Judas did. He had walked with him for over three years. During that time, he examined Jesus thoroughly. If there had been anything that could have been brought against Jesus, Judas would have been aware of it. If there was anyone on earth who would want to find some fault in Jesus, it would have been Judas. He, more than anyone, wanted to find some flaw that would make him feel, at least a little, better about betraying Jesus. Yet, Judas said Jesus was innocent. Every person who rejects the gospel message will have to make the same admission, "I have betrayed the innocent blood".

Their response of, "*What is that to us*", makes it sound as though they had nothing to do with the entire situation. It is astounding how easily they distance themselves from any guilt or blame.

They also told Judas, "*see thou to it*". Once again, they were acting as though there was nothing they could do. However, they could have gone immediately and withdrawn the charges against Jesus. They were not as powerless as they were pretending to be.

It is no surprise that the chief priests and elders turned against Judas. They had gotten their use out of him and they were ready to toss him away like a piece of trash. Those who allow the devil to control their lives need not expect any mercy from him. The devil always discards those he deceives.

*Mt 27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

Notice, Judas returned the exact amount he had received. He had not spend any of it. He received absolutely no enjoyment from his blood money. Much like Achan of old, who buried the stolen goods in his tent and got no benefit from his sin (Josh.7:21). Sin is never as enjoyable as the devil would have us think.

Judas went out and "*hanged himself*". He got rid of the silver but he could not get rid of the guilt.

Judas sealed his own doom, not by betraying Jesus, but by refusing to accept Jesus as his Savior. He could have gotten saved just as the other disciples. Judas was not doomed to this fate. He was not a pawn of God or the devil. Even though the bible predicts there would be a man who would betray Christ, Judas made his own decisions. The fact is, we all will be accountable for the deeds of our lives (Rom.14:12; 2 Cor.5:10). We will have no one to blame but ourselves.

The book of Acts tells us, "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Ac 1:18).

Apparently the tree on which Judas hung himself overlooked a cliff. The weight of his body caused the limb or rope to break, causing his body to fall down the cliff and burst open upon impact. Some believe Judas' body hung until it was decomposed, fell to the ground, and burst open on impact.

So, Matthew described the way Judas ended his life (Mt.27:3-10) and Peter described the details of him ending his life (Acts 1:18-19).

Judas died, but that was not the end. The book of Acts also tells us Judas went to "his own place" (Acts 1:25 emphasis added). Judas went to the place he deserved. He went to hell and he is still there. He was attempting to end the torture of his mind. Unfortunately, his torture only began when he ended his life.

The devil never shows the end of life. Every person on earth should look closely at the end of Judas' wasted life. We should not look at mankind when the lights of life are bright and they are rich and popular. We should not look when they seem to have the world by the tail. We need to look at them when they are dying alone and no one cares. We need to see what happens after they are dead. We need to see them as they are cast into the lake of fire to burn forever. The road of living for self is not near as appealing when you see where it leads.

*Mt 27:6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.*

Since Judas had cast the silver in the temple, the chief priests were forced to decide what to do with it. They refused to allow the silver to be placed in the temple treasury because they viewed it as the "price of blood." This was certainly hypocritical since they were the ones who had paid it to begin with.

*Mt 27:7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.*

They gathered together once more. This time to decide what to do with the silver they had paid Judas. A "potter's field" was land that had been owned by a potter. The potter would throw his discarded clay vessels in this field making it useless as far as growing any type of crop. For this reason, the ground was almost worthless.

*Mt 27:8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.*

At the time of the writing of the book of Matthew, about thirty years after the events recorded, the field was still being called the "The field of blood". What a memorial for a man who claimed to be a disciple of Jesus. It was a constant reminder of the wickedness of Judas and the consequences of sin. However, it was also a reminder of the innocence of Christ.

*Mt 27:9-10 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

These words were undoubtedly spoken by Jeremiah but they were actually recorded by Zechariah (Zech.11:12-13).

<p>FIRST STAGE OF LEGAL TRIAL JESUS QUESTIONED BY PILATE 27:11-14</p>
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The record of Jesus before Pilate are found in Mark (Mk.15:2-5), Luke (Lk.23:2-3), and John (Jn.18:28-40). It is vitally important to read all these accounts in order to get the full picture of this event.

Verse two of this chapter told us they took Jesus from Caiaphas to the judgment hall where Pilate was. Luke tells us there was a "whole multitude" that went in this procession to Pilate (Lk.23:1). Verses 11-31 describe what happened when Pilate questioned Jesus.

They took Jesus to Pilate that he might be tried by the Roman authorities. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Jewish authorities) had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy (Mt.26:65). But, they knew the Roman government had no interest in the spiritual matters of the Jews and would not prosecute anyone for blasphemy. So, they had to come up with a charge that Rome would be willing to pursue. Therefore, they decided to charge Jesus with perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be a king (Lk.23:2).

*Mt 27:11 And Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.*

Please read John's account in order to get more information about this event (Jn.18:28-40).

John tells us the Jews took Jesus to the judgment hall of Pilate but refused to go in themselves because it was a Gentile dwelling (Jn 18:28). Jewish oral law said a Jew entering the dwelling place of a Gentile would be ceremonially unclean. Since it was Passover time, they were careful to not do anything that would make them ceremonially unclean and unfit to partake of Passover. These religious hypocrites refused to go into Gentile property because they did not want to be ceremonially defiled, but at the same time they were scheming to put the Son of God to death.



Pilate came out of the judgment hall and asked the Jews what accusation they were bringing against Jesus. Their first response was, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee" (Jn.18:28-30). They were telling Pilate to not question the reason they brought Jesus before him but to find him guilty as quickly as possible. They had declared Jesus guilty without justifiable evidence and they were hoping Pilate would do the same.

At this point, Pilate attempted to escape this dilemma by telling the Jews, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law" (Jn.18:31). It seems obvious that Pilate wanted nothing to do with this situation.

The Jews response to Pilate was, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (Jn.18:31). They did not even try to hide their desire to see Jesus die.

Pilate went in the judgment hall and asked Jesus, "*Art thou the King of the Jews*". To which Jesus replied, "*Thou sayest*". That was another way of saying "It is as you say".

*Mt 27:12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.*

Mark tells us the Jews accused Jesus of many things (Mk.15:3). Luke tells us they accused Jesus of perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying he was Christ the king (Lk.23:2).

When the chief priests and elders accused Jesus before Pilate, he "*answered nothing*". He did not defend himself in any way.

*Mt 27:13-14 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*

Jesus spoke very few words when he was being questioned by Pilate (Mt.27:11; Jn.18:34,36,37). In none of his comments did he defend himself in any way. Jesus actually dominated the trial. Even in that moment of calamity Jesus was in control. His silence lifted him above the wickedness of those who questioned him.

Pilate tried to force Jesus into defending himself. He marveled that Jesus offered no defense for himself considering the fact that he was standing trial for his life. This was probably a first for Pilate. Certainly many had stood before him and rambled endlessly about their innocence. No doubt, most of them were guilty. Is it not ironic that perhaps the only man who had ever stood before Pilate who was actually innocent, never claimed his innocence?

Pilate had dealt with many men. No doubt, he dealt with those who were insane and acted more like animals than men. He had dealt with those who came before him screaming vulgarities. But, he had never dealt with a man like this man.

<p>SECOND STAGE OF LEGAL TRIAL JESUS TRIED BEFORE HEROD Lk.23:7-12</p>
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Luke tells us about how Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. We can read this account in Luke 23:1-12.

Pilate examined Jesus and came out to report his decision to the Jews who had gathered outside the judgment hall. His conclusion was, "I find no fault in this man" (Lk.23:4). This did not please the Jews. Luke tells us, "And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place" (Lk 23:5). Of course, these accusations were false. He had actually taught the opposite (Mt. 22:21).

And then, Luke wrote, "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time" (Lk 23:6-7).

When Pilate discovered Jesus was a Galilaean and under the jurisdiction of Herod, he used that for an excuse to send him to Herod (Lk.23:6-7). Pilate clearly did not want to deal with Jesus. So, Pilate had his soldiers escort Jesus to Herod. The Jewish crowd must have followed this procession from Pilate to Herod (cf. Lk 23:10).

This was Herod Antipas. He is referred to as "Herod the tetrarch" (Mt.14:1) and "King Herod" (Mk.6:14). He had been assigned as ruler over Galilee and Perea by the Roman government. This was the same Herod who had John the baptist put to death (Mt.14:3-12).

There are three occasions found in the bible that connect Jesus and Herod. The first occasion is when Herod heard about the mighty works of Jesus and wondered if he was John the baptist risen from the dead (Mt.14:1-2). The second occasion was when the Pharisees warned Jesus to flee lest Herod put him to death (Lk.13:31-33). On that occasion, Jesus called Herod a fox. And, the third occasion is found here.

Luke wrote, "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him (Lk 23:8).

Herod's interest in Jesus had nothing to do with him desiring to know the truth. He had heard of the many miracles Jesus had done and his curiosity had been stirred. He, like so many others, was interested only with the spectacular part of Jesus' works. He wanted Jesus to perform some great miracle in his presence.

Luke tells us Herod asked Jesus many questions. He wrote, "Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing" (Lk 23:9). Jesus never spoke a word to Herod. Isaiah spoke of the silence of Christ when he wrote, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Is 53:7). A lamb offers no resistance to those who intend to slay or shear it. Jesus neither complained to God, nor criticized men.

Remaining silent in the face of calamity reveals an inner peace that not many people possess. The normal reaction is to speak out. Jesus had a quiet peace that allowed him to face the worse the devil could throw at him without any distress. This was not Jesus' first storm (cf. Mk.4:38). He would face it successfully.

As previously stated, the Jewish crowd must have followed the procession from Pilate to Herod because Luke writes, "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him" (Lk 23:10). They refused to give up on their attack on Jesus.

Herod realized he was getting no where with his interrogation of Jesus, so he decided to have some fun with him. Luke tells us Herod and his security force put a gorgeous robe (probably one of Herod's) on Jesus and mocked him (Lk 23:11). If he claimed to be a king, they would make he look like one.

Herod gave up on his interrogation with Jesus and sent him back to Pilate (Lk.23:11b).

Having a mutual enemy was the catalyst that brought two opponents together. Luke wrote, "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves" (Lk 23:12).

THIRD STAGE OF LEGAL TRIAL  
HEROD SENT JESUS BACK TO PILATE 27:15-31a

So, once again we find ourselves back with Pilate in the judgment hall. The trial continued.

Please read John 18:38b - 9:16 for a more detailed description of the following events.

*Mt 27:15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.*

The origin of the custom is unknown. The Jews released one criminal of their choosing at each Passover. The Romans had allowed them to continue this custom. This was most likely done in an effort of keeping a good relationship between the Jews and the Roman government.

*Mt 27:16-17 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?*

Pilate had a real problem. Part of his responsibility was to keep the Jews under control. He knew if he angered the Jews and caused them to rebel, he would be in trouble with Caesar. So, he wanted to satisfy the crowd in order to keep them from rebelling. Yet, Jesus had done nothing that deserved death.

So, Pilate devised a plan that he thought would give him a way out. He would allow the crowd to choose who he should release. He thought surely they would choose Jesus instead of a known criminal. He probably thought Jesus' popularity among the common people would be enough to cause the crowd to ask that he be released. Of course, his plan would fail miserably.

The name "*Barabbas*" means "son of Abba" or "son of a father". So, they had to decide if they wanted the son of a father, or the Son of THE Father.

Barabbas was a robber (Jn.18:40), a murderer, and an insurrectionist (Mk.15:7). An insurrectionist was a person who took part in an armed rebellion against the established government. Surely, the Jews would not rather have a murderer walking the streets, than Jesus. A man like Barabbas could go off the deep end at any time. No citizen was safe when he was free. Yet, they still chose Barabbas over Jesus.

*Mt 27:18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him because they envied Jesus' popularity.

*Mt 27:19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*

Pilate sat down on the "judgment seat". The judgment seat was a lofty throne where judicial decisions were made.

Pilate's conversation with the Jews was interrupted by a message that came from his wife. She had been informed about Jesus being examined by her husband. This event was recorded only by Matthew. Pilate's wife had a dream that upset her terribly. She did not go into detail about her dream. She simply said she had "*suffered many things in a dream*". Whatever she dreamed troubled her greatly.

So, Pilate was confronted with one more problem he had to sort through. Dreams were considered to be a way of receiving communication from the gods so this had to unnerve Pilate even more.

There has been much discussion about her dream and her warning to Pilate. Did this dream come from God, the devil, or simply from her own fears? Was it God trying to stop Pilate from making the worse decision of his life. Was it the devil trying to stop Jesus from going to the cross? Or, was it simply the result of her fear of what might happen to her husband? The honest truth is, we do not know for certain but I lean toward the dream being a warning from God.

His wife was correct about two things. One Jesus was a "*just man*". Two, anyone who wronged him would suffer the consequences.

Her comments about Jesus were positive. It is not amazing that in the hour when most of God's chosen people were against Jesus that a pagan Gentile woman was one of the very few who defended him?

Also, her comments only added to the blame of Pilate. It was one more bit of truth he would be accountable for when he stands before God. We are accountable for how we handle the light we receive.

*Mt 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.*

While Pilate was preoccupied with the messenger with his wife's message, the chief priests and elders had been outside the judgment hall doing their best to stir up the people against Jesus.

*Mt 27:21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.*

By the time Pilate asked this question, the chief priests and elders had the crowd stirred to a fever pitch. This must have shocked Pilate. The crowd quickly cried aloud out that Barabbas be released. They chose a criminal who was guilty of sedition and murder over the spotless Son of God (cf. Lk.23:25).

*Mt 27:22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.*

Pilate should have known better than to ask this question. Yet, it is a question everyone must answer. What will you do with Jesus?

The crowd began to cry as one, "*Let him be crucified*". Some in this crowd were the same ones who had cried, "Hosanna" and few days earlier (Mt.21:9).

Crucifixion was developed by the Persians, but the Romans perfected it. Crucifixion was usually reserved for the worse of criminals. It was such a painful form of punishment it was actually against the law for a Roman to be crucified. It was designed to bring about the slowest and most painful death possible. There were times when the criminal remained on a cross for days before they died. Death usually came from loss of blood or from a stress induced heart attack.

*Mt 27:23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*

The crowd had continued to grow while Jesus was being questioned by Pilate. Pilate was trying to reason with the them but they were far beyond any reasoning by this time. He did not have an easy way out. He would declare Jesus' innocence three different times (Lk.23:4, 14, 22). Yet, they refused to accept his decision. However, the difficulty of his dilemma in no way excused him. He could have simply refused to turn Jesus over to the crowd. He had an opportunity to do what was right.

*Mt 27:24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*

Pilate's washing of the hands was a custom used by Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins. It is mentioned in the Old Testament (Dt.21:6-9). It was a way of saying publicly that he was not guilty of what would happen to Jesus. Of course, this feeble act did nothing to relieve him of his guilt of what he was about to do. The water did nothing to wash the blood of Jesus from his hands.

Once again Pilate declared Jesus to be a "*just person*". Pilate never actually pronounced a verdict about Jesus' trial. He simply turned him over to the soldiers to do as the Jews desired. Luke wrote, "And Pilate gave sentence that it should be *as they required*. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus *to their will*" (Lk.23:24-25 emphasis added).

*Mt 27:25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

They were asking that the guilt of putting Jesus to death, if there is to be any, be on them and their children. In less than forty years their city and temple would be besieged and destroyed. Titus came in 70AD and reaped havoc of Jerusalem. More than one million people died, thousands of them by crucifixion. Even till today, Israel is one of the most abused of all nations. God has not forgotten their request.

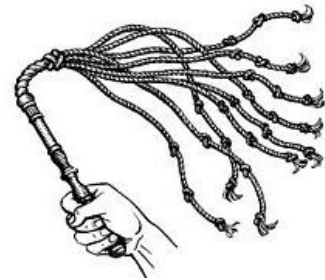
*Mt 27:26 Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

Matthew summarizes these events in this one statement. John gives more details (Jn.19:1-16).

Pilate relented to their request and released Barabbas. Barabbas is a perfect picture of the sinner. The person who is guilty and deserving of punishment is set free because the innocent one takes his place.

Pilate delivered him to be scourged as Jesus had predicted (Mt.20:19). Roman law required all capital sentences to include scourging. Scourging was probably the worse kind of punishment administered by the court system of Jesus' day. The Jews used whips to punish for certain offenses, but their whippings were nothing compared to scourging done by the Romans. Many did not survive scourging.

Scourging was held in public in an attempt to warn any other would-be criminals. The criminal was stripped of his clothes and tied to a post with his arms stretched out above him. The instrument used was a whip commonly called a cat-of-nine tails. It was a whip with nine straps that had rocks and bones tied into each strap. It was designed to lacerate the victim's body. It left the person's backside in a shredded mass of mangled flesh and blood. The lashes from a Roman soldier was delivered violently and without mercy. It was common for the internal organs to be exposed.



The Old Testament restricted the Jews from whipping with more than forty stripes (Dt.25:3). To make sure they did not accidentally violate this command, they stopped at thirty-nine lashes. Paul mentions this (2 Cor.11:24). But, Jesus' scourging was not done by a Jew. It was a Roman scourging so there was no limit to the number of blows. We really have no idea how many blows Jesus endured.

The question arises, if Pilate believed Jesus was innocent why did he have Jesus scourged? If he was innocent, he should have been released without any punishment. Luke tells us Pilate actually wanted to release Jesus. He wrote, "Pilate therefore, *willing to release* Jesus, spake again to them" (Lk 23:20 emphasis added). He also wrote, "And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, *and let him go*" (Lk 23:22 emphasis added). It seems clear that Pilate had Jesus scourged in hopes it would satisfy the Jew's taste for blood and cause them to agree to release Jesus. Of course, it did not.

*Mt 27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.*

A band was 600 soldiers. These soldiers were assigned to serve Pilate during his stay in Jerusalem.

*Mt 27:28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.*

Part of the mistreatment of Jesus included mockery. He had claimed to be a king, so they would make him look like a king. A king must have a robe, so they put a robe on him.

*Mt 27:29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!*

Every king must have a crown. So, they plaited a crown of thorns and thrust it on Jesus' head. Also, every king has a scepter. So, they placed a reed in his hand. They were implying that Jesus, and his kingdom, were like the reed, something that was weak, and of little value.

Bowing before a king showed respect for his position and authority. Of course, they bowed in mockery of Jesus. These same men will bow before Jesus again (Isa.45:23; Rom.14:11; Phil.2:10). They will not mock him then. They offered Jesus no mercy and they will receive none then. They will plead for mercy, but they will find none.

*Mt 27:30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

Nothing is more disrespectful, or more disgusting, than to be spit upon. The striking of the reed on his head drove the thorns deeper into his scalp.

To get a more detailed description, let's take a look at John's recording of these events.

After this mockery, Pilate brought Jesus out to let the crowd get a good look at him. Once again he declared the innocence of Jesus. John wrote, "Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him" (Jn 19:4).

John continued, "Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man" (Jn 19:5–6). By this he meant, "Look at him now. He will not cause you any more trouble".

No doubt, Pilate was attempting to stir some pity for Jesus so the Jews would give up their attack on him. However, the mob was not satisfied, and his attempt failed. John tells us, "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him" (Jn 19:6).

This reveals the wickedness of the crowd more than anything up to this point. It is one thing to demand a man be executed when he is in good physical condition. It is quite another to continue the attack when that man has been whipped to shreds and is standing before you a battered and bleeding mass of flesh.

Pilate had declared Jesus not guilty again, but that would not deter them. The Jews were relentless. They said, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (Jn 19:7).

The law they spoke of is found in the Old Testament and deals with blasphemy (Lev.24:16; Dt.13:1-5). Their criminal charges against Jesus had failed, so they tried to use their Jewish laws to convince Pilate to proceed with his execution. They were implying that, as the Roman governor, it was Pilate's duty to demand the execution of such a vile criminal as Jesus.

John said their comment disturbed Pilate greatly. He was "more afraid" (Jn 19:8). What was it that terrified Pilate? We should remember the fact that many Romans were very superstitious. It is one thing to condemn an innocent man to death, it is quite another to do so to the Son of God. No doubt, Pilate was afraid that Jesus might actually be God's Son. Also, He probably remembered what his wife had warned him about Jesus (Mt.27:19).

Certainly part of the reason Pilate was afraid was because he saw he was not going to be able to appease the Jews. That meant he would be forced to decide what he was to do with Jesus. Pilate was afraid because he knew an uproar from the Jews would cause him problems with Caesar. Part of his responsibility was to keep the Jews under control.

John tells us Pilate took Jesus back into the judgment hall to question him further. Once again, Jesus was completely silent. John wrote, "And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer" (Jn 19:9).

On the surface, it would seem as though Pilate had the upper hand. But Jesus' comments reassure us he had not lost control of the situation. John wrote, "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (Jn 19:10-11).

God had allowed Pilate actions to accomplish His plan. Only God can use the wickedness of man to accomplish His will.

Pilate tried one more time to free Jesus, but was unsuccessful in doing so. John wrote, "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar" (Jn 19:12).

The Jews comment about Pilate not being the friend of Caesar must have sent chills through Pilate. The Jews knew Pilate feared the Roman emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Tiberius Caesar was a ruthless tyrant that punished severely anyone who opposed him. Pilate knew the consequences would not be good if Caesar suspected him of being in opposition to him, or the Roman government. Nothing could be worse for a Roman official than to be accused of not being a friend to Rome. Rome would not tolerate such an unpatriotic attitude.

Pilate brought Jesus to the judgment seat to deliver his decision. John wrote, "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha" (Jn 19:13).

John continued to write, "And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (Jn 19:14-15).

What haunting words. The Jews said they had rather be ruled by ungodly man, than God. That has been proven to be true. For the most part, the Jews are Christ deniers till this day.

## JESUS LED TO CALVARY 27:31b-32

*Mt 27:31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

Jesus had had no sleep, little or nothing to eat or drink, he had been taken back and forth from one interrogation to another, and he had been beaten unmercifully. Yet, they continued to mock him.

The robe they had placed on him had partially sealed the wounds from the scourging. The blood dried and caused the robe to adhere to Jesus' back. When they ripped the robe off, these wounds were ripped open and the bleeding started again. The pain must have been excruciating.

They put Jesus' own raiment on him and led him toward Calvary. They led Jesus to his execution as they did every other criminal. A group of Roman soldiers would surround a convicted prisoner and escort them to the place of execution. They took them through the main streets to make sure as many people saw them as possible. It was a warning to anyone who may be tempted to defy the Roman government. They were making their message clear, you do not violate Roman law and get away with it. People would join this procession as they traveled through the streets. No doubt, the crowd was large for Jesus.

*Mt 27:32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

They came "out" means the procession was on the way out of the city. Executions were always done outside of the city (Num.15:35; 1 Kg.21:13; Heb.13:11-13). If possible, they were done near a highway so as many people as possible could see and be warned to not violate the law of Rome.

Cyrene was a city on the north coast of Africa. A large number of Jews lived there (Acts 2:10; 6:9).

The heavy cross gouged against his mutilated back. His lack of rest, water, and food, plus the loss of blood had weakened him greatly. His body finally gave in. He could go no further. Even though the bible does not say it specifically, Jesus probably fell under the load of the cross. This reminds us of the fact that he was human (Heb.4:15).

They grabbed a man named Simon out of the crowd and compelled him to help Jesus carry his cross. Mark tells us Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mk.15:21).

John tells us Jesus bore his cross (Jn.19:17). So, we know he was able to carry the cross by himself, at least part of the way, to the place of execution. Luke wrote, "and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it *after* Jesus" (Lk 23:26 emphasis added). The word, "after" means "from the rear" or "at the back". This could simply mean Simon was behind Jesus as he walked toward Calvary, but it could also mean Simon carried the back part of the cross while Jesus continued to carry the front part.

There is some debate about whether criminals carried the entire cross or just the top cross member. However, there is nothing in the bible that indicates Jesus carried less than a full cross.

Not all the crowd was against Jesus. Luke wrote, "there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him" (Lk 23:27). At least there were a few who were broken hearted over the horrible treatment of Jesus.

Jesus said to these women, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry" (Lk 23:28-31).

To a Jew, having children was one of the greatest blessings in life. Yet, the time will come when the conditions on earth will be so bad that those who have no children will be considered blessed. It is certainly better to have never had children than to have them and they be exposed to suffering. There is nothing is more disturbing to a mother than to see her children hurting.

Jesus was referring to the time of judgment that will come to pass upon the Jews. The trouble he spoke about was partially fulfilled in 70 AD when Titus attacked. It will be totally fulfilled during the Tribulation Period (Rev.6:16).

These were the last words spoken by Jesus before his crucifixion. It is amazing that Jesus would tell them to weep for themselves instead of weeping for him. But, he always cared for others more than himself. Even though he was in agony and heading to his own execution, he was still trying to be a help to others.

I am afraid we have degraded the cross to nothing more than a piece of jewelry we hang around our neck. By doing so, we miss the fact that it was an awful tool of suffering and death. It was one of the most painful forms of execution ever invented. But, it was also a delightful symbol of love, forgiveness, and grace. The record of the crucifixion can be found in Mark (Mk.15:22-37), Luke (Lk.23:33-46), and John (Jn.19:17-30).

*Mt 27:33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,*

Some believe this place was called "*place of a skull*" because there were skulls laying around from previous executions. That seems unlikely that the Jews would allow skulls to just lay around so near the holy city of Jerusalem. They were very concerned about dead bodies and the danger of becoming ceremonially unclean. It is more likely it got its name from the fact that its rocky hillside looked like a skull.

*Mt 27:34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

What is found in this verse was a fulfillment of a prophecy in the Psalms (Ps.69:21). The "*vinegar*" was a cheap sour wine. The "*gall*" mingled in the wine was a pain relieving narcotic commonly given to those being crucified. By no means, did it take all the pain away. The giving of the gall was not just an act of mercy. The soldiers had an ulterior motive in mind. The gall would relieve the pain somewhat, but it had another purpose. It actually had a calming effect on the victim which caused them to live longer, and therefore, suffer longer.

When Jesus tasted the gall, he refused to drink. Though he was thirsty, he would not accept anything that would lessen the severity of the cross. He would accept the full penalty for our sin. It would not have lessened Jesus' work of atonement had he drunk the gall. It was not the degree of his pain that provided salvation, it was his shedding of blood, and his death.

Jesus refused to drink the gall because he wanted to have his complete mental faculties while on the cross. He needed a clear mind to accomplish that which had to be done. He had seven statements he needed to speak. He had a mother to look after, and a thief to save, before he died.

*Mt 27:35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

The simplicity of Matthew's statement is astounding. He simply wrote, "*And they crucified him*". Matthew totally excluded the details of the crucifixion. In fact, the emphasis of this verse is clearly on the parting of Jesus' garments and not the crucifixion. I believe he did this because he was stressing the fact of the wickedness of man. What could show man's wickedness more than a person who can nail a man to a cross, watch him bleeding, see his agony, and then gamble over his clothing. How could anyone be so heartless?

We see a display of the wickedness of man at the cross, but we also see a display of God's love. While man was trying his best to get rid of Jesus, God was doing His best to draw man to Himself.

Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. The wounds caused by the nails were not fatal but they caused excruciating pain. Our English word "excruciating" comes from two Latin words that mean, "out of the cross". Many would hang on the cross for days before they finally died from exhaustion, dehydration, or suffocation. Some lingered on the cross until they were eaten alive by birds.

The cross was laid on the ground and the criminal was forced to lay upon it. Usually, the Roman soldiers had to restrain the criminal and brutally hold his arms and legs as the nails were driven in. No doubt, many criminals screamed profanities as they were violently nailed to their cross. But, it was very different with Jesus. He did not resist (cf. Jn.10:18). I believe he willingly laid down, extended his arms, and then his legs. I believe as he gently extended his hands he looked straight into the eyes of the soldier who held the hammer.

The positioning of the criminal's body on the cross was very important. The arms were stretched out and a nail was driven in each hand. One foot was set in front of the other with the toes pointing downward, and one nail was driven through both feet.

There is a good bit of discussion about whether the nails were driven through Jesus' hands, or his wrists. Those who believe the nails were driven through his wrists say a nail driven through the palm could not hold the weight of Jesus' body. However, there have been medical tests that have shown a nail driven through either the hand or the wrist could hold the weight of a man's body.

The Old Testament prophecies that speak of his wounded hands use a Hebrew word that means the "hand" (Zech.13:6; Ps.22:16). The same type of thing is true in the New Testament. There is no Greek word for "wrists" in the New Testament. However, there are many New Testament verses that are clearly speaking about Jesus' hands (Mt.8:3; 14:31; Mk.1:41; Lk.5:13; 24:39-40; Jn.20:20,27; Rev.1:16-17; 2:1).

We cannot be certain of the exact position of the nails. That should not trouble us for the exact position of the nails has no effect on the work Jesus accomplished on the cross. In fact, there was no part of Jesus' body that was not wounded. His entire backside was a shredded mass of flesh from the cat-o-nine tails, his head was covered with puncture holes from the crown of thorns, his hands and feet were wounded by the nails, and his side was pierced by the spear. Most of all, his heart was wounded by the rejection of mankind.

Once the criminal was secured firmly, the cross was lifted and dropped into a hole. The jarring of the body as the weight of the cross hit the bottom of the hole must have horrible.

The Romans were experts at the art of execution. They did all they could to make it as painful as possible. They positioned the criminal's body to where the knees were bent at an approximate 45 degree angle. Hanging in this position, the entire weight of the body was supported by the hands and feet where the nails were driven. As the leg muscles tired, their body would slip downward, which placed almost all of their weight on his hands. The weight of the body slumping down made it impossible to breathe properly. They could inhale but they could not exhale. In order to exhale, they had to push down with their feet which lifted the body up. This pushing movement transferred the entire weight of the body to the nail pierced feet. Once again, the leg muscles would grow tired, and the pain in the legs and feet would become unbearable, so the criminal would slump down again. This constant sliding up and down on the rough wood of the cross caused horrible pain to the lacerated back. The hours on the cross brought extreme fatigue. This caused this up and down movement to become more like jerking spasms.

Jesus was covered with sweat, blood, and dirt. No doubt, insects swarmed around him constantly.

Though the bible does not say clearly, more than likely, Jesus was completely nude. The Romans generally crucified their criminals totally nude. There is no reason to assume the ungodly Roman soldiers would treat Jesus better than any other person they had crucified. We should remember, his mother, and other ladies he knew well, were present. This was a reminder of the shame of our sin.

It is vitally important that we realize Jesus was very much in control as he hung on the cross. The nails were not holding him to the cross. The fact is, he was actually holding the nails together. The atoms that formed the nails were being held together by the one who's hands they pierced (Col. 1:18).

The soldiers "*parted his garments*". The parting of his garments fulfilled what had been foretold in the Psalms (Ps.22:18). The Roman authorities allowed the soldiers to keep the clothes of those who were crucified.

Considering what John writes about this event, there were probably four soldiers. John wrote, "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made *four parts*, to every soldier a part..." (Jn 19:23 emphasis added).

And they, "*cast lots*" over his coat. These ungodly soldiers played a game to determine who would get Jesus' coat. John tells us Jesus' coat was without seam. He wrote, "now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout (Jn 19:23b). They did not want to rip such a unique seamless garment, so they gambled to see which soldier would get it. These men gambling over his garments is like someone robbing the person who has been run over and lying in the street bleeding and dying.

*Mt 27:36 And sitting down they watched him there;*

These are some of the most unbelievable words in the bible. They sat down and watched the crucifixion like they were at a ball game. There are times when the cruelty of man is difficult to comprehend.

Part of the reason they stayed and watched was because it was the obligation of the soldiers was to make certain a friend or family member did not try to remove a criminal from a cross.

*Mt 27:37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

A placard stating the name of the criminal and the crime they committed was nailed on the cross above the head of the victim. The fact that the accusation was "*over his head*" lets us know the cross was not the type that was designed like a capitol T.

The gospel writers record different portions of what was on Jesus' placard. Looking at the diagram below, we will see that the placard said, "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS".

Matthew 27:37	THIS IS	JESUS	THE KING OF THE JEWS
Mark 15:26			THE KING OF THE JEWS
Luke 23:38	THIS IS		THE KING OF THE JEWS
John 19:19		JESUS OF NAZARETH	THE KING OF THE JEWS



Pilate had the words written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, to make sure everyone would understand (Jn.19:20). The Jews asked Pilate to change what he had written to, "*he said, I am King of the Jews*" (Jn.19:21 emphasis added). But, Pilate refused. God made sure the truth was proclaimed on this placard. Whether they believed it or not, he was the King of the Jews.

*Mt 27:38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

There were criminals executed on either side of Jesus. Isaiah spoke of this when he wrote, "he was numbered with the transgressors" (Is 53:12). These thieves must have been violent criminals for only the most vile of criminals were crucified. Some believe these thieves were part of the band of Barabbas. And yet, Jesus was placed on the middle cross. The custom of that day was that the most notorious criminal would be placed on the center cross.

*Mt 27:39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,*

Those that "*passed by*" were those who were traveling in and out of the city of Jerusalem. These were the strangers who probably did not even know Jesus. These strangers, the religious bunch (Mt.27:41), the two thieves (Mt.27:44), and the soldiers (Lk.23:36), would mock him while he suffered on the cross.

Jesus not only suffered physical torment, he endured the mental torment of being mocked. Jesus was a man. He was not exempt from the hurt of the words being hurled at him. The fact that he loved those who were mocking him made it even worse.

They were "*wagging their heads*" in derision. The Psalmist had prophesied of this (Ps.22:7; 109:25).

*Mt 27:40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

They continued in their false accusations against Jesus. They tried to use some Jesus' own words against him. Of course, he had never claimed to be able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. But, hatred does not care if the facts are twisted. In essence, they were saying, "Jesus, if you can destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days certainly you can pull out those nails and free yourself".

They used the same strategy the devil used when he tempted Jesus (Mt.4:3). They said, "*If thou be the Son of God*". Little did they realize, Jesus did not have to prove anything to them. God cannot be intimidated.

They asked him to "*come down from the cross*". He could have easily pulled the nails from his hands and feet and come down. In fact, with a simple word, he could have consumed the entire crowd in an instant. However, he would not come down because his work on the cross was the only way to provide forgiveness for sinful mankind.

*Mt 27:41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,*

These wicked men were not satisfied with simply killing Jesus. They had to mock and ridicule him.

Of course, the chief priests, scribes, and elders were the religious Jews. The soldiers may have mocked him in ignorance not fully realizing who he was. But, the religious bunch mocked him willingly. They knew who he claimed to be and still rejected him totally.

*Mt 27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.*

They certainly spoke the truth when they said, "*He saved others, himself he cannot save*". They were right, he had saved others. He had saved the sick from their disease, the blind from their darkness, the dead from their death, and the wicked from their damnation. They were also right about how he could not save himself. He could not save others and himself at the same time. If he was to save others, he had to sacrifice himself.

The same is true of us. If we want to be a help to others, we must sacrifice ourselves. We should sacrifice our lives for others.

If he be the "*King of Israel*". They refused to believe he was their king. He had been born in the little hamlet of Bethlehem. Even though the bible predicted that was where he would be born (Mic.5:2), they did not believe he was the Messiah. They had not expected a king who came in such a lowly manner. They probably expected their king to be born in the great city of Jerusalem. They expected a great ruler.

They said if he would just "*come down from the cross*", they would believe him. Certainly they would not have. They did not believe him when he healed the sick or raised the dead. They did not believe him when he fed the multitude with a little boy's lunch. Later, he did something much more impossible than coming off the cross, he arose from the dead. Yet, they still did not believe him.

*Mt 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

They were unconsciously fulfilling the prophecy found in the Psalms (Ps.22:8, Ps 109:25).

They were right about Jesus claiming to be the "*Son of God*" (Mt.16:15-17; Mk.14:61-62; Jn.5:18; 8:58; 10:30,33,36).

They were also right about Jesus trusting God. He had trusted his Father (Jn.5:30; 1 Pet.2:23). And, he was still trusting the Father as he was hanging on the cross (Lk.23:46). The greatest faith is demonstrated when circumstances are the worse.

However, they were wrong about the Father delivering him. For the Father's will to be done, He could not deliver Jesus from the cross.

Jesus committed himself totally to the Father's will. He realized the Father's will would lead him through difficult places. In like fashion, our Father's will may lead us through difficulties. But, we can do what Jesus did, we can trust the Father.

We should recognize, the Father did deliver Jesus. He delivered him by raising him from the dead. Just as the Father delivered Jesus, in His own time, and in His own way, He will deliver us. We can trust Him.

*Mt 27:44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

There were two thieves crucified with Jesus. At first, both of these thieves mocked Jesus. To "*cast the same in his teeth*" was a way of saying, they said the same as the others who were mocking.

This is one of the most amazing facts in the bible. I am astounded at these two men. They knew they were minutes from death, they were in agony themselves, and yet they joined the mockery of Jesus.

One of these thieves would see his guilt and repent. He rebuked the other thief and said, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation" (Lk 23:40). He then addressed Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom (Lk 23:42). Jesus responded by saying, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise (Lk 23:43). Later that day, one of the thieves went to paradise and one of them went to hell.

I believe the cry of the thief demonstrates real conviction. He wasn't asking to be removed from the cross, he was asking that his sins be forgiven. The person under real conviction won't be looking for a way out of the mess they have gotten themselves into. They will be looking for a way to be forgiven for their sin.

This demonstrates God's grace in such a wonderful way. Here was a man who had spent his life for sin and self. Yet, in the last few moments of his life his call for mercy was heard. Instantly, all his sin was forgiven and his past was erased. The same thing happens to all who repent and believe on Christ.

It would do us well to remember, even though the repenting thief went to paradise, the other thief went to hell. When it comes to calling on Christ for salvation, it is not wise to wait. The bible tells us now is the time to be saved (2 Co 6:2). When the Spirit of God speaks to a person, it is time to be saved.

It is wonderful that this thief was forgiven of his sin and taken to paradise. But, it is still sad that his life was wasted on sin. It is wonderful that a person can be forgiven from the pit of sin. But it would be so much better for them to get saved before they end up in the pit. Then, not only is a soul saved, but a life is saved also.

#### DARKNESS ON THE EARTH

*Mt 27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

Jesus' birth involved a supernatural light (Mt.2:2). His death involved a supernatural darkness.

This darkness lasted from 12 o'clock noon till 3 o'clock in the afternoon. That means it was absolutely dark at the time when the sun would be its brightest.

This darkness was more than regular darkness. Some believe it was an eclipse. But, it lasted three hours, which is way too long to be an eclipse. Also, the crucifixion took place during the time of Passover. Passover took place during the time of the full moon. The sun and the moon are too great a distance apart for there to have been an eclipse.

Some believe it was dark only in the land of Israel. The words, "*over all the land*" could refer to the area around the cross or to the entire earth. I believe the darkness was worldwide because Jesus was dying for the entire world.

Darkness is a picture of God's judgment (Joel 2:31; Mt.22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet.2:17; Rev.16:10-11). Obviously, this darkness was a sign that God the Father had turned His back on His Son.

This darkness reminds us of the darkness of sin (Ps.82:5; Lk.22:53; Jn.3:19-20; Rom.1:21; 13:12; 2 Cor.6:14; Eph.5:11; 1 Jn.1:5-6; 2:9).

This darkness reminds us of the darkness in the Holy of Holies inside the tabernacle and temple. The Holy of Holies was totally dark because there were no windows. The High Priest did his atoning work in the darkness. So it was with our Great High Priest. He was atoning for the world in total darkness.

I believe this darkness was like that which came upon Egypt, it was darkness that could be felt (Ex.10:21-22). It must have been overwhelming. Yet, those around the cross seemed unmoved. You would expect them to fall on their knees and plead for God to have mercy on them.

Mark teaches us Jesus was on the cross for approximately six hours (Mk.15:25 and 34). The darkness lasted for three hours. That tells us the first three hours it was light. That was very important in order to prove it was truly Jesus hanging on that cross. Some still claim someone other than Jesus was crucified.

*Mt 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

This cry is a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy about Jesus (Ps.22:1).

In this verse, Matthew recorded the fourth of seven statements Jesus spoke while on the cross. This is the only statement Matthew recorded. We will examine this statement later.

I think it would be good for us to take a brief look at each of the seven statements Jesus spoke while on the cross.

There were many sounds around the cross. The crack of the hammer on the nails, the mocking cry of the crowd, and the weeping of those who loved Jesus. But the most important sound by far was the words spoken by the Savior. Jesus spoke words that had huge spiritual significance to them.

These were the last words Jesus spoke before he died. Everyone wants to make sure their last words are words that matter. What would you say if you knew your life was about to end?

The following statements are in the order Jesus uttered them but the exact time is impossible to determine.

#### JESUS' FIRST STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

The Son of God was about to speak. What would He say? Would he finally defend himself and verbally attack those who had wrongly prosecuted him? Would he call to his Father and ask Him to deliver him from the cross? No, his first words on the cross were words asking for mercy for those who had hung him there.

The first statement Jesus spoke is recorded by Luke. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Jesus' first words were not even addressed to the people standing around him. They were addressed to the Father.

His words were a prayer. It was not unusual for Jesus to pray. His ministry ended as it started, with prayer. Yet, this prayer was not for himself. It was for those who had hung him on the cross. He could have called fire from heaven to consume them all, yet he asked for mercy for them. How many of us would have prayed such a prayer? When we are hurting, we pray for ourselves, not for others, but Jesus did. When we have been wronged, the last thing we want to do is pray for the one who wronged us, but Jesus did.

But, who was Jesus praying for? Who was "them"? It was everyone in the crowd, it was the ones who drove the nails, and it was me and you. He was praying for all those who are guilty. Every person on earth is as guilty of Jesus' death as the ones who nailed the nails. It was the sin of all mankind that hung him there. Zechariah wrote, "they shall look upon me whom *they have pierced*" (Zech 12:10 emphasis added). Of course, those he was writing about were not the ones who actually drove the nails. However, when they see Jesus, they will realize it was their sin that he had died for. Therefore, it was as though they had pierced him themselves. Sin and unbelief makes every person guilty and Jesus was praying for those who are guilty.

His prayer is enough to save the entire world if they will accept it. However, this prayer was not a blanket request that all the world be forgiven. It does not provide universal forgiveness for all. Each sinner must believe the gospel, repent of their sin, and come to the Father, if they are to receive this forgiveness.

Actually, these words were for the Father and not for man. As Jesus hung on the cross, forgiveness was accomplished in the heart of the Father. However, that forgiveness is not received until an individual asks God to forgive them. I remember hearing about a son who left home and lived a life of horrible sin. Later, he repented, went home, and asked his father to forgive him. His father's response was, "I forgave you the day you left home, but I couldn't grant it to you until now". That is what Jesus' prayer is all about. Those who believe, repent, and go to God, will find forgiveness.

Jesus was actually praying for his own demise. If the Father was to be able to forgive them, He had to pour His wrath on His Son.

Jesus said, "they know not what they do". They had no idea the full extent of what they were doing. They had hung God on a cross. They were rejecting the One who was dying for them. They had just refused the only means of forgiveness.

#### JESUS' SECOND STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

Luke recorded Jesus' second statement. This statement was addressed to one of the thieves being crucified with Jesus. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43).

Jesus made a promise to this man. Someone who deserved to go hell was about to go to heaven. A man who lived his life for sin and self was forgiven just moments before he went to hell. What a wonderful example of the grace of God.

I wonder how much grief this man put his family through. No doubt his parents had big plans for their little boy. But, he had broken their hearts. I wonder, did he have a wife. Was she there watching him die? Did he have children? Were they following his example and already heading down the wrong path?

His statement demonstrates real conviction. He admitted his guilt. He said, "And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Lk.23:41). He knew he deserved what he was getting. He deserved execution and he deserved hell. The person under real conviction won't be looking for a way out of the mess they have gotten themselves into. They will be looking for a way to be forgiven for their sin.

His statement demonstrates real faith. He said, "this man hath done nothing amiss" (Lk 23:41). He believed Jesus was who He claimed to be. He said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He accepted the grace available.

And so, we see in this man that which it takes to be saved. We see repentance and we see faith.

It would do us well to remember, even though the repenting thief went to paradise, the other thief went to hell. When the Spirit of God speaks to a person, it is time to be saved.

#### JESUS' THIRD STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

John recorded Jesus' third statement. It was addressed to his mother, and to the disciple Jesus loved. We assume this was referring to John. Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son". And he said to John, "Behold thy mother" (Jn.19:26-27). Jesus wanted to make sure his mother would be taken care of when he was gone.

Since Joseph isn't mentioned he was probably already dead. It is assumed that Joseph died years before because he was never mentioned after Jesus was at the Temple at the age of twelve.

When a husband died, it was the responsibility of the eldest son to take care of his mother. Of course, Jesus was the eldest son of Mary. But now, Jesus was dying, so he wanted to make sure his mother was taken care of after His death. Jesus always takes care of his own.

John accepted the responsibility Jesus gave him. The book of John tells us he took Jesus' mother as his own from that moment (Jn 19:27b). John was committed to doing God's will whether it was preaching the Word, or simply taking care of Jesus' mother. Nothing done for Jesus was too big and nothing was too small for John. Since Jesus asked him, it was an honor to take care of Mary. Any time God asks us to do anything, it is an honor.

#### JESUS' FOURTH STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

Matthew recorded Jesus' fourth statement. He said, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" (Mt 27:46). Matthew also gave the interpretation of Jesus' words. It was, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*". The word "*forsaken*" means, "to desert or abandon". This is the only time in the synoptic gospels when Jesus addressed His Father without calling Him His Father.

This was something Jesus had never experienced before. He had been forsaken by Israel (Jn. 1:11), by Judas (Mt. 26:15), his own disciples (Mt. 26:56), and even by his own family (Jn. 7:5), but he had never been forsaken by his Father. It also was something he would never experience again.

He had been forsaken by almost everyone. But, he did not ask Peter why he forsook him. He did not ask the other disciples why they forsook him. He did not ask Judas why he forsook him. But, he did ask his Father why He forsook him. He asked that question to make us ask the same question. Why, did the Father forsake him?

The Father forsook Jesus because He cannot look upon sin (Hab.1:13). He had to turn His back on His Son because Jesus took the sin of the world upon himself when he hung on the cross (Isa.53:6; 1 Pet.2:24; 1 Jn.2:2). Jesus was not a martyr dying for good cause, he was a sacrifice dying for sin.

When he hung on the cross, Jesus took the sin of the world upon himself (Isa.53:4-6; 2 Cor.5:21; Gal.3:13; 1 Pet.2:24). God judged Jesus as though he was a sinner. The undiluted wrath of God was poured out on Jesus as he hung on the cross.

God, the Father viewed His Son as a sinner, but not just a sinner, the worse sinner, but not just the worse sinner, as all sinners. He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God (cf. 2 Cor.5:21).

However, that does not mean he actually became a sinner. Jesus remained absolutely holy.

This was a statement of victory as much a statement of agony. Because He forsook His Son, God is able to accept the sinner who comes to Him by faith. That is why the bible can say there is no condemnation to those who know the Lord (Rom.8:1). He absorbed every drop of judgment the Father poured out that day.

We discover several important facts from Jesus' statement. One, it teaches us just how bad sin is. Sin is so wicked it took the sacrifice of the perfect Son of God to pay for it. Sin is bad enough to cause God the Father to turn His back on His own Son. Two, it teaches us how holy God is. God is too holy to ignore sin. He has to deal with it, even if that sin is on His own Son. If there was ever going to be a time when God was going to overlook sin, it would have been then. Three, it teaches us how much God loves us. He loved us enough to be willing to reject His own Son that He might not have to reject us.

#### JESUS' FIFTH STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

John recorded Jesus' fifth statement. Jesus said, "I thirst" (Jn 19:28). Imagine, the God of heaven was thirsty. The One who made the oceans, the One who brought water from the rock, was asking for water.

I believe this was more than a request for water. This revealed another thirst He had. He thirsted to accomplish the Father's will. He thirsted for sinners to be saved. He thirsted for believers to give their all to the Father's will. I cannot get over the fact that our Savior died thirsty.

#### JESUS' SIXTH STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

John recorded Jesus' sixth statement. Jesus said, "It is finished" (Jn.19:30). That for which he had come, had been done. It was finished because he had done everything necessary to provide salvation. Nothing else needs to be done. Nothing else can be done.

The words "It is finished" is actually one Greek word that means "paid in full". It carries with it the idea of something being completed. Merchants used this word to indicate a bill had been paid in full. Artists used this word when they finished their paintings.

Jesus had finished the work he had come to do. The price of sin had been paid. The holiness of God had been satisfied. The defeat of the devil had been accomplished. The curse had been lifted. The way of forgiveness had been made available.

#### JESUS' SEVENTH STATEMENT ON THE CROSS

Luke recorded the last statement Jesus while on the cross. Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk.23:46).

Luke tells us Jesus "cried with a loud voice" (Lk 23:46). This reveals that fact that Jesus still had strength. By that time, most criminals would be so exhausted they would barely be able to speak above a whisper.

As we will see later, Jesus released his spirit. He gave up his life at the exact moment he was supposed to. He embraced death with victory. His death was not a failure. It was the greatest victory ever wrought. Because he did, we who are saved can do the same.

Now, let's go back to our study of Matthew.

*Mt 27:47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

The word "Eli" and the name for Elijah is very close in the original language.

Some believe these people pretended to misunderstand Jesus' words that they might use it to mock him even more. Whether these truly misunderstood Jesus' words or simply used this to scorn him further, we cannot be certain. Either way, their reaction was heartless.

Their reference to Elijah probably came about because they believed Elijah would come before the Messiah. They were saying if God would not come to assist him, maybe Elijah would.

*Mt 27:48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

This act was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Ps.69:21).

John tells us this was done when Jesus said, "I thirst" (Jn.19:28). The "*reed*" spoken of was a hyssop stalk (Jn.19:29).

This may have been an act of mercy. It may have been one of the very few attempts to offer Jesus some comfort. Or, it could have been an attempt to provide some fluids to the body of Jesus in order to prolong his life, and lengthen his suffering. We are not told who this person was, so it is impossible to determine why he did what he did.

A "*sponge*" was used because raising a cup to his lips would have been quite difficult.

The "*vinegar*" was a common drink of the Roman soldiers. It was a light wine that had turned sour and mixed with water. It was not the same as the wine mingled with gall they had tried to give him earlier (Mt.27:34).

John tells us Jesus drank the vinegar (Jn.19:30).

*Mt 27:49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

The act of mercy by the one was interrupted by the rest. Even after his hours of agony, the majority of the crowd still lacked any mercy whatsoever. His misery had not softened their hearts at all.

What is equally as disturbing is the fact that they had not been alarmed by the three hours of darkness. Were their hearts so hard that it did not occur to them that the God of heaven might be upset about what they were doing?

Their talk about Elijah came from their misunderstanding of an Old Testament prophecy (Mal.4:5-6). Jesus had already identified John the baptist as that Elijah (Mt.17:10-13).

## JESUS' DEATH 27:50-56

*Mt 27:50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

We step on to holy ground with this verse. The Son of God died. The Lord of life gave His life. There are no words in the human vocabulary that can express the truth of this verse adequately.

Jesus cried with a "*loud voice*". It means he literally screamed to the top of his voice. This shows Jesus was not slowly succumbing to the death process. His life was not slowly ebbing away.

But, notice Matthew said Jesus cried "*again*" with a loud voice. That seems to imply he spoke at least two statements in a loud voice. These probably refer to the last two statements he uttered while on the cross.

The first of these last words were recorded by John. Jesus said, "It is finished" (Jn.19:30). As I mentioned when dealing with the seven statements of Jesus, he had done that which he came to do. It was finished because he had done everything necessary to provide salvation. Nothing else needs to be done. Nothing else can be done.

The words "It is finished" is actually one Greek word that means "paid in full". It carries with it the idea of something being completed. Jesus had finished the work he had come to do. The price of sin had been paid. The holiness of God had been satisfied. The defeat of the devil had been accomplished. The curse had been lifted. The way of forgiveness had been made available.

The second of these last words were recorded by Luke. He wrote, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Lk 23:46).

He "*yielded up the ghost*". The word, "*yielded*" means, "to send away" or "to dismiss". The word, "*ghost*" means, "spirit".

Jesus gave his life willingly. He said he had the power to lay down his life, and the power to take it again (Jn.10:18). Jesus said the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (Jn.10:11). However, the words, "*yielded up the ghost*" mean much more than the fact that he was willing to die. They mean, he allowed himself to die at the exact moment he determined. Jesus did not hang on the cross until death overtook him. The wounds did not take his life. He was not overcome by death. He literally, by his own volition, allowed his life to leave his body.

Only he had the ability to release his spirit and die. No other person has the ability. We may drink poison, but we will be at the mercy of the poison. We could shoot ourselves, but we are at the mercy of the bullet. Only Jesus had the power to choose the exact moment he was to die, and to cause it to happen.

Some believe Satan was glad when Jesus finally died on the cross. Nothing could be further from the truth. Lucifer knew enough about the bible to realize the cross meant his absolute defeat. God had promised a seed would come and crush his head (Gen.3:15). The devil tried his best to stop Jesus from even being born, but he failed. He tried to kill Jesus after he was born, but he failed (Mt.2:16-18). He had tried to get Jesus to by-pass the cross, but he failed (Mt.4:8-9). He had tried to kill him later in life, but he failed (Jn.10:39). He tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross by tempting him to sin, but he failed (Mt.4:1-11). He tried to stop him in Gethsemane, and he failed (Mt.26:36-46). He failed every attempt to stop Calvary.

*Mt 27:51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;*

The "*veil of the temple*" was the curtain that separated the holy place from the holy of holies (Ex.26:33). No one could go beyond this veil other than the High Priest, and he could go just one time a year (Lev.16:2-4).

This veil was large and thick. It would have been impossible for any man, or group of men, to tear it.

The veil was a reminder of how sin separates us from God. The rent veil shows us we have access to God through the blood of Christ. Because of Calvary, we can go into His presence.

The veil was torn at the exact moment Jesus died. Obviously, that means there was a connection between the two events. The fact it was torn from top to bottom shows us it was done by God and not by man.

The Old Testament worshiper seeking atonement from their sin had to go to the priest, who would go into the holy of holies on their behalf. The death of Christ ended with that system. His death fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifice system because He was the supreme sacrifice that would take away sin. The Old Testament sacrifice merely covered sin for another year. His sacrifice took away sin forever. There was no need for animal sacrifices because the supreme sacrifice had been offered (Heb.9:28). There is a new and better way (Heb.10:20; Eph.2:18). Now, we have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. We need no man to get us to God (Heb.9:11). There is one mediator, that is Jesus (1 Tim.2:5). Also, all believers have been made priests. We can approach God ourselves, because of Jesus Christ (1 Pet.2:9; Rev.5:10).

The death of Jesus took place at three o'clock in the afternoon. The priests were busy in the temple with their usual procedures. That means, several of these priests were there when the veil ripped into. This may be one of the reasons why a large number of the priests believed later (Acts 6:7). They were forced to face the fact that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

Tradition tells us they repaired the veil and continued their religious ceremonies. However, they were wasting their time going through a process that was not acknowledged by God. We can do the same type of thing when we go through our religious activities without the presence and power of God. Our efforts are futile.

Not only did the veil rip in two when Jesus died, but "*the earth did quake*". By no means was this a normal earthquake. The word, "*quake*", means, "to move to and fro" or "to throw into a tremor". I believe, as there was darkness around the entire world, this was a shaking of the entire globe. God wanted everyone to know something unusual had just happened.

Also, some of the rocks around Jerusalem split open. The word, "*rent*" means, "to split" or "to divide". There are rocks there today that show the evidence of this event. It took a great force to split a rock. But, it was no problem for our God.

*Mt 27:52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,*

This event is recorded only by Matthew. The exact moment Jesus died, some of the graves near Jerusalem were opened. The word, "*graves*" can mean, "grave", "sepulchre", or "tomb". Some of these graves would have been tombs cut into rock, and some would have been graves in the ground. The poor and unclaimed were buried in graveyards.

Notice, only the graves of the righteous were opened. That proves God was in control of the earthquake and used it as He desired. God's power is great but it is not out of control. Our God controls all of creation. Nahum tells us He has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm (Nam.1:3). That which seems so out of control to us, like a whirlwind or storm, is very much in His control. Even in the chaos of a tornado, not a blade of grass moves unless God decrees it.

Matthew used the word "*slept*" when talking about those who died as believers. Death for the child of God is viewed as sleep (Lk.8:52; 1 Cor.15:18; 1 Th.4:14-15). For the believer, death is like sleep, it is temporary and followed by an awakening. The bible does not teach soul sleep. This sleep refers to the body, not the soul. When believers die, they are absent from the body but present with the Lord (2 Cor.5:6-8; Phil.1:23). When unbelievers die, they go straight to hell to be punished (Lk.16:22-23).

The word, "*arose*" means, "awaken", which continues the idea of the bodies of saints being asleep.

*Mt 27:53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

These graves remained open until "*after his resurrection*". Certainly no one would attempt to fill them during the holy week less they become ceremonially unclean.

This verse shows us the saints did not come out of their graves until after Jesus' resurrection. None of these saints rose before Jesus. He rose first. He is the first-fruits of them that sleep (1 Cor.15:20,23).

The fact that their graves were opened when Jesus died and they rose after Jesus' resurrection shows the connection between Jesus' death and His resurrection.

These awakened saints "*appeared unto many*". We are not told who these saints were. Though we cannot be certain, it would seem likely they were people who were known by those still living in Jerusalem. Imagine the shock of those in the city when they saw their deceased acquaintances alive. Surely some of these saints went back to see those loved ones they had left behind when they died. I would have loved to have been there when late uncle Bill came walking into the house.

Those who put Jesus to death thought they were ending the work of Jesus, but they were actually just helping to get it started. This awakening was proof that Jesus had won the victory over death. It was proof of the resurrection power of our Lord. It is a reminder of the day when all in the graves shall awake.

There is a great deal of discussion about this event.

First, some believe these saints were, like Lazarus, raised physically, and they died again. One problem with this view is the fact that Matthew says these saints "*appeared*" in the city of Jerusalem. That seems to suggest these saints were seen for a brief time and not that they stayed there until they all died again.

Second, some believe these saints were a part of the Old Testament saints Jesus led from Paradise to heaven. The bible says Jesus "led captivity captive". It also says before he ascended, he descended (Eph.4:8-10). He descended to the lower parts of the earth where the Old Testament saints resided in what was called Abraham's bosom (Lk.16:22). He then escorted those saints to the Father's house. Those who hold to this view believe the Lord had some of these saints go into Jerusalem on their way from Paradise to heaven. They waited for years for Him to die and raise again that He might bring them out.

Jesus' return to heaven reminds us of the return of a victorious king. When a king defeated his enemy he would lead a victory procession back to his home town. This procession would include the spoils he had gained by his victory, and the prisoners he had taken captive. When Jesus returned to heaven, he took with him those who had once been the children of the wicked one. He had conquered Satan, death, hell, and the grave. He entered heaven's gate triumphant. We talk about the time when Jesus walked into Jerusalem and they cried "Hosanna" and we call that His triumphal entry. But, I say His real triumphal entry was when He reentered heaven with all the saints that He had led out of Paradise. He had won the battle over sin and Satan.

With all that being said, in my opinion, Matthew's record of this event does not give us enough information to enable us to be certain about which view, if either, is correct. This is one of those places in Scripture where a little more information would be greatly appreciated. However, God told us what He wanted us to know for now.

If we are not careful, the questions we have about this event will overshadow what we do know. We know this event was connected to Jesus' own death and resurrection. We know it revealed the victory Jesus won on Calvary. We know it proves Jesus was alive and well. We know it offers all saints the promise of their own resurrection.

As this point, John recorded events not found in Matthew. Please read John 19:31-37. John tells us the Jews requested Pilate to have the legs of those on the crosses be broken (Jn.19:31). The legs being broken would bring a quicker death because the person on the cross could not push up to breath. They made this request that their bodies not remain on the crosses because it was the day of preparation. How hypocritical, they did not mind putting the Son of God to death, but they did not want to violate the Sabbath.

Pilate granted their request and commanded their legs be broken. The soldiers broke the legs of both the thieves on either side of Jesus. However, when they came to Jesus, they found He was already dead (Jn.19:32-33). This kept them from breaking His legs. Old Testament prophecy had predicted that none of His bones would be broken (Ps.34:20). This comes from God's command to not break the bones of the sacrifices (Ex.12:46).

John continues to tell us that when the soldier saw that Jesus was dead, he thrust his spear into His side. He probably did this to make certain he was dead. From this wound came forth blood and water (Jn.19:34). The human heart is surrounded by a membrane called the pericardium. The pericardium contains fluid that resembles water. The spear must have penetrated the pericardium and the heart, which caused blood and water to come forth.

Some have said the water and blood flowing from Jesus said indicated he died of a ruptured heart. However, the Scripture tells us plainly, he deliberately allowed his life to leave his body (Lk.23:46). His death was a supernatural one.

His bones not being broken and the piercing of his side were both prophesied in the Old Testament (Ps.34:20 and (Ps.22:16). Both would happen as God had said. God had decreed none of His bones be broken, so there was not enough power in all of the Roman army to break the legs of Jesus. At the same time, the Roman soldier, even though he was acting outside of the commands of his superiors, thrust the spear in Jesus' side. Both happened exactly as God had spoken.

The place in His side will be one of the wounds Jesus carries yet today (Jn.20:27). Of course, the others are the wounds in his hands (Zech.12:10; 13:6). These wounds will be the only thing man will put in heaven.

*Mt 27:54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

A "*centurion*" was a Roman military officer who was in charge of 100 men. This centurion was one of those assigned to the crucifixion of Jesus. It is possible that he was the one totally in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus. And "*they that were with him*" probably refers to the men under his authority.

Mark tells us the centurion was the one who actually uttered the words, but he must have been speaking for his men as well (Mk.15:39). Maybe he and his men were discussing the events they had just experienced. They all know something was unusual about the man on the middle cross.



No doubt, this centurion and his men had participated in many executions. But, they had never seen anything like this one. Something about this crucifixion had gotten their attention. Matthew said they were, "*watching Jesus*".

No doubt, the unusual manner of Jesus had stirred their interest. They also saw the "*earthquake*" and the other "*things that were done*". These unusual events had accomplished what God had intended. It all drew attention to His Son.

They also saw the earthquake. They were sure it was not an ordinary earthquake. To begin with, the timing made it clear it was an act of God. The earthquake came the instant Jesus died. The centurion and his men understood this to be of the hand of God, and they "*feared greatly*".

Mark wrote, "And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). The earthquake had gotten the attention of these men, but it was Jesus that really got a hold of their hearts. Their fear came from conviction over their sin. There is a good chance these men had led rough and wicked lives. But, the convicting power of a holy God had broken them. Jesus' prayer about the Father forgiving them was already being answered. I fully expect to meet this centurion and some of his men in heaven.

*Mt 27:55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:*

John was the only one of Jesus' twelve disciples who was at the cross (Jn.19:35). However, many of the women who believed were there. The presence of women in the ministry of Jesus is astounding. Often, they were the ones who stood with Christ even more than the men (Lk.8:3). This is so at the cross. When most of His disciples had fled, there were women who remained faithful.

These women were the last to accompany Jesus at the cross and the first to greet Him after His resurrection.

The body of Christ, and the local church, would be in trouble without its ladies. They are essential to its operation.

*Mt 27:56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.*

Mary Magdalene was the one who Jesus cast out seven demons (Lk.8:2). Of course, Zebedee's children were James and John.

#### JESUS' BURIAL 27:57-60

*Mt 27:57 When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:*

Joseph was a "*rich man*". Luke tells us he was a good man, a just man, and a member of the Sanhedrin (Lk.23:50). John tells us he was a "disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews" (Jn.19:37). Though he was on the Sanhedrin, which played a big part in the crucifixion, Joseph had refused to consent to the death of Christ (Lk.23:51).

*Mt 27:58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

Since this was a Roman execution, the Jews had to get permission from a Roman official before Jesus' body could be taken from the cross. Joseph asked Pilate for permission to retrieve the body of Jesus.

Pilate "*commanded the body to be delivered*". Mark tells us Pilate was surprised when he heard about Jesus dying so soon. He called for the centurion and asked if Jesus was indeed dead (Mk.15:44). Being assured that Jesus was dead, he released the body to Joseph. Mark also tells us Joseph took the body from the cross (Mk.15:45).

I find it amazing that none of Jesus' twelve disciples took care of His burial. They should have been the ones who claimed his body. Not just Peter, but all the disciples had promised to never deny him (Mt. 26:35). They let him down even after His death.

*Mt 27:59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,*

The Jews took the burial of their dead quite seriously. They believed in showing respect to the dead.

The word, "*wrapped*" means, "to wind up in". They did not embalm dead bodies as we do. They usually buried the same day the person died because of decomposition. The body of the deceased was washed and then wrapped in long clean cloths somewhat like a bandage is applied to an injured leg.

They continued this wrapping until they reached the neck, inserting the spices as they went. The spices helped to deal with the smell from decomposition. John tells us Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes weighing about a hundred pounds and assisted Joseph with the burial of Christ (Jn.19:39). Mark tells us Joseph purchased the linen to wrap Jesus' body (Mk.15:46). Joseph and Nicodemus "*wrapped*" the body of Jesus in such a fashion. This seems to refute the claims about shroud of Turin.

This preparation for burial was a long and tedious process. As we will discover later, Joseph and Nicodemus did not have time to complete this task because of the approaching Sabbath.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome, were watching when Joseph and Nicodemus placed Jesus' body in the tomb. As we will see, they would rest the Sabbath and return on Sunday morning intending to finish the anointing (Mk.16:1 and Lk.23:55-24:1).

*Mt 27:60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*

The usual tomb during Jesus' day would have been in a cave or cut out of a rocky cliff. There were times when large families, or even groups of families, would use the same tomb. The body of the deceased would be placed on a slab or on a shelf that was cut into the wall of the tomb. About a year later, family members would return and put the bones in a box called an ossuary. They marked this box with information that described the deceased and placed it in the back of the tomb. This provided room for the next person to be placed in the tomb.

TOMB WITH CORPSE AND OSSUARIES



Old Testament prophecy had predicted His grave would be with the rich (Isa.53:9). Considering the fact He did not even own any property of His own, and He was executed as a common criminal, it is amazing that He would be buried in a rich tomb. The body of a crucified criminal was usually cast into a pit or left on the cross to the animals and the elements. But, God determined the body of His Son would not suffer such an end. Even the burial of Christ was under the control of God. His burial was as much a miracle as His resurrection.

John tells us the tomb was near by and in a garden (Jn.19:41-42). That means this tomb was close to the place where executions were conducted. It is odd that a rich man would own a tomb so close to such a place. To say the least, it was not in the best of neighborhoods. I wonder if some of his family or friends asked him why he was purchasing land and making a tomb in such an undesirable location. Maybe he did not even understand it himself. It would not have been the first time God led one of His children to do an explainable act. God made sure His Son had a place to be buried when the time came.

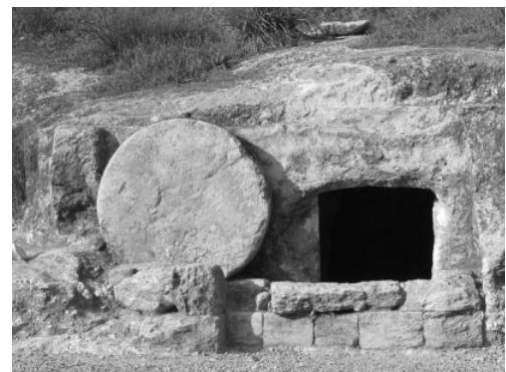
Joseph may have been a secret disciple before, but his faith was no longer a secret. Taking this stand could have cost him greatly. He could have easily been arrested himself. He could have been disowned by the Sanhedrin. He was willing to handle the dead body of Jesus even though it caused him to be unclean ceremonially. He was willing to give his own tomb to Jesus. We should remember, he did this even though Jesus was dead. When the faith of most was gone, Joseph continued to believe.

Joseph's tomb was "*new*". Luke and John add that no one had ever been buried in this tomb (Lk.23:53; Jn.19:41). Jesus began His life in a virgin womb and ended His life in a virgin tomb.

After placing the body in the tomb, Joseph "*rolled a great stone to the door*". A round stone was rolled in front of the door of their tombs to keep the animals out and the smell in.

And so, the Son of God had to be buried in a borrowed tomb. He refused the things we take for granted. He denied himself the comforts of life. He was born in a stable and never owned a home of his own. The God who owns all the universe didn't even own enough land to be buried in.

*Mt 27:61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*



Jesus' mother is not mentioned here. She had probably been escorted away and perhaps was at John's house (cf. Jn.19:26-27).

Mark tells us the "*other Mary*" was the mother of James the less and Jesus (Mk.15:40, 47). These ladies, who loved Jesus in His life, loved Him still in His death. They stayed close to make sure they knew where Jesus would be laid. Perhaps, even then, they were planning to finish the work of wrapping and perfuming the body of Jesus (Mk.16:1; Lk.23:56-24:1).

Their love for Jesus was made obvious by them being the last to leave His tomb and the first to return.

*Mt 27:62 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,*

Only Matthew recorded this request by the Jews to secure the tomb. Once again, these two groups who usually hated each other had joined forces against their common enemy. Even after His death, their hatred of Jesus consumed them.

The "*next day*" would not be the next day as far as our calendar would read. The Jewish day ended at sunset. So, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate after sundown. These ungodly men would not wait until morning to speak to Pilate.

*Mt 27:63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.*

The chief priests and Pharisees addressed Pilate respectfully. The word, "*Sir*" was a word that refers to someone in supreme authority. To say the least, Pilate had not been a friend to them, yet they were willing to humble themselves before him in their attempt to discredit Jesus. This is a perfect example of how low people will stoop when their sin nature is in control. How much better would it have been if they had humbled themselves before Jesus in the same fashion.

They were right, Jesus had talked about rising again after three days (Mt.12:40; Lk.18:32-33).

These chief priests and Pharisees said "*while he was yet alive*". And by these words, they were acknowledging the fact that he was dead. This is important because some would say later that He had not really died.

Isn't it interesting that the unbelievers remembered that he said he would raise from the dead, but his disciples seem to have forgotten it? It is sad when his foes believed more than his friends. The skeptics were believing, and the believers were skeptical. Not one of his disciples said anything about staying close to the tomb and waiting for Him to rise. They should have been thrilled because they were seeing what he had foretold taking place right before their eyes. Yet, they ran away and hid. This certainly makes me think about the circumstances of our day. God told us things were going to get really bad just before His Son returns (2 Tim.3:1). But, instead of being excited about what we are seeing, we live totally defeated lives.

*Mt 27:64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*

They asked Pilate to secure the tomb, "*lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away*". Jesus was dead but they were not satisfied. They wanted to stop the movement He had started. They would not stop until the name of Jesus was totally done away with. They did not believe Jesus would rise from the grave, but they wanted to do all they could to stop the disciples from stealing the body and claiming he had.

These men did not realize it but their request to secure the tomb would provide even more proof of Jesus' resurrection. Imagine, the enemies of Jesus actually helped provide proof of His resurrection.

The chief priests and Pharisees did not realize it, but the last thing on the disciples' minds was trying to steal the body. While this religious bunch was thinking about the disciples stealing the body of Jesus, the frightened disciples were hiding like whipped puppies. Jesus had told them several times that he would raise from the dead (Mt.16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mk.8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:33; Jn.20:9). But, they did not believe it. To them, Jesus was dead and all hope was gone.

There were only two ways Jesus' body could get out of that tomb. One, the disciples could steal it. Two, God could raise Him from the dead. So, guarding the tomb was ridiculous. The cowardly disciples certainly had no intentions of trying to steal His body, and attempting to guard it from God was total foolishness.

The word, "*error*" means, "fraud" or "deceive". They were saying if He convinced people He had risen from the dead (the last error), it would be worse than Him convincing them He was the Messiah (the first error). Jesus influenced many when He was alive, but convincing the people He had actually risen from the dead would do more in His death than in His life. They knew Jesus was dead, yet they still feared His power.

*Mt 27:65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.*

Pilate told them "*Ye have a watch*". Some believe Pilate was referring to the Jewish Temple guards. However, it seems more likely he was referring to the Roman soldiers that had been assigned to the Jews to protect the Temple and keep order during the time of Passover. The word, "*watch*" is a Greek word that is used to describe a Roman sentry. They are called "soldiers" later (Mt.28:12). Either way, he gave them liberty to use all the forces at their disposal to make certain the body of Jesus stayed in the tomb.

Pilate told them to use these soldiers and "*make it as sure as ye can*". There is a good chance that the chief priests and Pharisees accompanied the Roman soldiers as they went to guard the tomb. It is very unlikely that these Jews would have trusted the Roman soldiers enough to not join them in watching the tomb.

Much speculation has been made about the number of soldiers who were assigned to keep watch over the tomb. We know there was more than one because Matthew said, "*some of the watch came into the city*" (Mt.28:11 emphasis added).

It was customary among the Romans to appoint sixteen soldiers who would divide into groups of four. Each of these four groups would keep guard in three hours shifts. Some believe Pilate was telling them to use as many soldiers as they desired. The fact is, we do not know because the bible does not say.

*Mt 27:66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

Of course there was only one entrance to the tomb. They did all they could to make that entry secure.

The "*seal*" involved a cord being stretched around the stone at the door of the tomb and fastened with wax with an official seal pressed in it. This way, if anyone entered the tomb the seal would be broken.

The "*watch*" spoken of in this verse is the soldiers referred to in the previous verse.

And so, the tomb was made secure. There was the stone (Mt.27:60), the soldiers (Mt.27:65), and the seal (Mt.27:66) to keep the body of Jesus in the tomb. The truth is, they had it so secure, only God could have gotten Jesus out of that tomb. And guess what, He did. They may have set the soldiers, sealed the stone, and secured the sepulcher, but they could not stop the Savior.

No doubt, these Jewish renegades were waiting anxiously for the third day. Surely they planned to roll the stone away, bring out the lifeless body, and prove to the world that this Jesus had been an impostor all along. How mistaken they would be.

### THE KING'S MAJESTY

The agony of Jesus had come to an end. The time of His majesty was drawing closer and He will ascend to His rightful throne.

### JESUS' RESURRECTION 28:1-8

As we go into the final chapter of this book we should not look at it as finally getting close to the end. If anything, this chapter is the climax of the book. It is the purpose behind the entire book. As with any good book, the ending is not just the end, it is the highlight of the story. So, it is with the chapter we are about to look into. It is the goal for the book of Matthew.

As we investigate the events dealing with the resurrection, we must remember the news of Jesus' death and resurrection produced a lot of excitement around Jerusalem. The women and the disciples who are mentioned were separated at times. We must realize also, the gospel writers did not attempt to give us an exhaustive explanation of these events. Neither writer intended to give us every detail of the events, nor did they attempt to record the events in the order they happened. For these reasons, putting the chronology of the events can be difficult.

When we think about it, there was great wisdom in the manner in which the gospel writers recorded their accounts. Had the four accounts harmonized perfectly, the skeptics would have claimed they had conspired together. And of course, since there are some differences to the four accounts, the skeptics claim they contradict each other. The fact is, those who refuse to believe will always find a way to try to deny the truth.

In order to get the best view of Jesus' resurrection it is vitally important to read the accounts penned by the other gospel writers. Please read Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-49, and John 20:1-29.

Christianity is the only religion with a living Savior. All other religions have leaders who are dead. If Jesus rose from the dead, He has authority over sin and Satan. If He rose, He has authority over life and death. And, if He rose, He has authority over you and me. That means, we should obey Him. It means He has the right to tell us how to live. Jesus will have the last word. The last person you will answer to, will be Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in all human history. All the other great events combined are not as great as His resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christian faith. Without His bodily resurrection there is nothing to base our faith on. Paul said if Christ is not risen, our preaching, and our faith, is vain (1 Cor.15:14). Paul also said, if Jesus be not risen, "we are found false witnesses of God". Every preacher who ever delivered God's Word was a liar. Every message ever preached, every tract ever given, every church service ever attended, was a waste of time. If Christ is not risen we are yet in our sin (1 Cor.15:17). In other words, the power of sin was not broken if He did not rise. Paul continued by saying, "they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (1 Cor.15:18).

The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of our own resurrection (Jn.14:19). If He did not rise, neither will we. The resurrection proves the heavenly Father was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. Had the cross not satisfied the holiness of the Father, He would have never raised Jesus.

We must not miss the importance of Christ's resurrection. We should emphasize his crucifixion but the crucifixion would be meaningless if it were not for his resurrection. His resurrection proved his crucifixion accomplished what was required to satisfy the holiness of God (Isa.53:11). Had He not risen there would be no forgiveness for our sin (Rom.3:25), and no resurrection of believers (1 Cor.15:14).

His resurrection means He is alive today. He was much more than a martyr that died for a good cause. He is a living Savior who walks with us daily.

God promised the body His Son would never experience corruption (Ps.16:10). That means Jesus had to raise from the dead before decomposition set in. Luke tells us it was impossible for death to hold the Son of God (Acts 2:24). How could the Lord of life be the slave of death?

Please read these verses (Jn.10:10; 11:25; 14:19; Rom.1:4; 8:11; 1 Cor.15:1-8, 22; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4).

One of the greatest proofs that Jesus is alive is the changed lives of those who have believed on Him (2 Cor.5:17). The resurrection of Christ is best proven by the lives of those He has saved. He who lives, lives in those He has forgiven (Col.1:27). A changed life is the greatest proof of a living Lord.

There is little wonder why the devil fights the truth of the resurrection as he does. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, it does not matter what else He said or did. If He did not raise, we just as well throw away our bibles, leave our churches, and walk blindly into a hopeless future. If He is not alive we have no hope for today or for what lies beyond the grave.

However, the good news is, He did rise from the dead. And, if He rose, our faith is certain. If He rose, we can believe everything else He said. If He rose, He is alive at this moment and he is overseeing every detail of our lives. If He rose, there is life beyond the grave and there is a reason to live.

The entire Trinity was involved in the resurrection of Jesus. The bible teaches the Father (Rom.6:4; Gal.1:1; 1 Pet.1:3), the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:11), and Jesus Himself (Jn.10:18) were responsible for the resurrection.

## THEORIES ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The devil refuses to give up. He failed to keep Jesus from being born, he failed to keep Him off the cross, and he failed to keep him in the grave. So, now he is doing his best to convince everyone the resurrection did not happen. Here are some of the theories given in an attempt to deny the resurrection.

- The swoon theory

This is the belief that Jesus did not really die on the cross but was simply unconscious. Then, in the coolness of the tomb, he revived.

This theory is not possible because, the soldiers charged with the responsibility of crucifying Jesus were experts at their duty. They were totally dedicated to their task and they did it well. They were also experts in making certain the criminal was truly dead. Had they allowed a criminal to live they would have been put to death themselves. There is no doubt about it, they made sure Jesus was really dead.

This theory is not possible because there were people who handled Jesus' body after He was taken down from the cross. Joseph took the body down from the cross and carried it to where he prepared it for burial. He and Nicodemus handled the body while they were wrapping it with the grave clothes. Certainly, these men would have not continued this preparation and put Jesus in the tomb if there had been any sign of life.

This theory is not possible because it is absolutely impossible. It expects us to believe Jesus survived the scourging and the loss of blood involved, six hours hanging on the cross and further loss of blood, the spear that pierced His heart, three days in a tomb with no food or water, then He woke up with no medical assistance, moved the very heavy stone by Himself, overcame the Roman soldiers in His weakened condition, and walked several miles on feet that had been pierced by nails.

A note of interest: Even if Jesus had somehow lived through the agony of the cross, the piercing of His side would have killed Him. The blood and water indicated His heart had been severed by the soldier's spear.

- The never buried theory

This theory says Jesus was never actually buried but was cast into a pit somewhere.

This theory is not possible because there is no evidence at all that even hints that this happened. Also, if He was never buried why did Pilate order that the tomb be made secure? If He had been thrown into a pit, why didn't they just go and get the body when they started talking about Him being raised from the dead?

- The hallucination theory

This theory says everyone who thought they saw Jesus was hallucinating. This suggests that his followers wanted Him to be alive so badly that they convinced themselves they had seen Him.

This theory is not possible because there were over five hundred people who saw Him at one time. People talked to Him, handled Him, and ate with Him. Also, the bible makes it clear that His followers did not expect Him to rise. They were not expecting to see Him. And, if it was just a hallucination, where was the body?

- The wrong tomb theory

This theory suggests the women were so heartbroken they went to the wrong place and found an empty tomb instead of Jesus'.

This theory is not possible because, these women were not that ignorant. If anything, the fact they were heartbroken would cause them to make certain they went to the right tomb. There were several women, surely all of them would not have been wrong about the location of the tomb.

Also, the women were not the only ones who went to His tomb. Peter and John went to the tomb (Lk. 24:12; Jn. 20:3). It would have been impossible for them all to have gone to the wrong tomb.

And, even if the women, and the disciples had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb, certainly Joseph of Arimathaea would have corrected them. Surely, he knew where his own tomb was.

- The disciples stole the body theory

This theory says the disciples stole the body, hid it, and claimed Jesus had risen from the dead.

This theory is impossible because it was the time of Passover. The area in and around the city of Jerusalem was overrun with people. The area outside of the city was filled with people camping everywhere. It would have been impossible for the disciples to have taken the body of Jesus past this crowd of people without someone seeing them. Also, mingled among these people would have been many Roman guards paroling the area. Surely one of these guards would have noticed eleven men carrying a dead body.

This theory is not possible because, ten out of the remaining eleven disciples were put to death for their stand for Jesus. No matter how loyal they were to the cause of Jesus, all eleven would not have been willing to die for something they knew was a lie.

This theory is impossible because, had they stolen His body they certainly would not have taken time to fold the grave clothes and napkin as they were found (Jn.20:5-7). They would have simply taken the body quickly with the wrappings intact. John tells us Peter went in and saw the grave clothes. He wrote, "Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie" (Jn.20:6). The word he used that is translated "lie" means, "to lie outstretched". That speaks of a fixed and undisturbed position. The wrappings had not been cut, unrolled, loosened, or disturbed in any manner. It literally means the linen strips used to wrap the body of Jesus were still in the exact shape they were in when His body was inside. In other words, the grave clothes looked like an empty cocoon. This was nothing short of a miracle considering the fact that the spices used when they wrapped His body would have solidified and become like gum. Had any human stolen the body and left the grave clothes, they would have had to rip these wrappings apart, or cut them off. Even if Jesus would have physically revived, He could not have removed the wrappings and left them in the manner they were found. The only way that could have happened would have been for the body of Christ to have passed through them. That certainly was no problem for Jesus, for He passed through walls later (Jn.20:19).

Also, the napkin that had been around Jesus' head was folded neatly and placed in a separate place (Jn.20:7). This was one more proof that his body had not been stolen.

How amazing, God even has His way with rags. This was such proof that when John saw the grave clothes, it convinced him that Jesus had risen (Jn.20:8).

These theories reveal the extremes people will go to in order to not believe the truth. In an effort to deny the clear facts they device theories that are even more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself.

We should not doubt His resurrection. The facts prove He came out of the grave. Any lawyer would love to take a case where there was as much evidence. No one doubts the fact of Abraham Lincoln's death. There is more evidence about Jesus' resurrection than there is about the death of President Lincoln.

And now we have arrived at the last chapter of Matthew. This chapter deals with the resurrection of Christ and what happened afterward. Before we take a look at the last chapter I think it would do us well to take an overall view of the events connected to the resurrection of Christ.

## RECORDED EVENTS AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

## DAY ONE AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

STEP 1	Jesus rose.	Mt.28:1-4
STEP 2	Sunday morning, an angel descended from heaven causing a great earthquake. He rolled the stone away from the tomb. The guards were frightened.	Mt.28:2-4
STEP 3	The women arrived at the tomb, saw the stone rolled from the door. Mary Magdalene left the other women at the tomb and ran to tell Peter and John	Jn.20:2
STEP 4	The women who stayed at the tomb saw two angels. One of the angels told them Jesus had risen and instructed them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. They left to find the disciples.	Mt.28:5-8 Mk.16:2-8 Lk.24:1-8
STEP 5	These women headed out to tell the disciples.	Mk.16:7-8
STEP 6	Having received information from Mary Magdalene, Peter and John headed to the tomb. John outran Peter, arrived at the tomb first but did not go in. Peter arrived at the tomb, went in, and saw the linen clothes.	Jn.20:3-10
STEP 7	Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb alone. She looked into the sepulchre, saw two angels, and spoke with one of the them. She saw Jesus. Jesus told her to go and tell the disciples that He had risen. She went and told the disciples.	Jn.20:11-18
STEP 8	As the women who saw the angels at the tomb were on their way to find the disciples Jesus appeared to them. He told them to go and tell His disciples.	Mt.28:9-10
STEP 9	The soldiers who had guarded the tomb reported to the chief priests about the missing body. They were bribed to say the body was stolen by the disciples.	Mt.28:11-15
STEP 10	Jesus appeared to Simon Peter	Lk.24:34
STEP 11	Jesus appeared to two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. They went and told the disciples	Lk.24:13-35
STEP 12	Jesus appeared to ten disciples in a locked room. Thomas was not present.	Mk.16:14-18 Lk.24:36-49 Jn.20:19-24

## EIGHT DAYS AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

STEP 13	Eight days later, which would be the next Sunday, Jesus appeared once again to the "eleven". This time, Thomas was present.	Jn.20:26-29
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## UNCERTAIN TIME AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

The timing of some of Jesus' appearances after His resurrection cannot be given with certainty.

STEP 14	Jesus appeared to seven disciples while they were fishing. Jesus addressed Peter about his love.	Jn.21:1-25
STEP 15	Jesus appeared to more than 500.	1 Cor.15:6
STEP 16	Jesus met His disciples in Galilee and gave "The Great Commission"	Mt.28:16-20
STEP 17	Jesus appeared to James at an unknown time	1 Cor.15:7
STEP 18	Jesus may have appeared to the disciples on occasions not recorded.	Acts 1:3

## FORTY DAYS AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION (HIS ASCENSION)

STEP 19	Jesus led His disciples to Bethany, lifted His hands and blessed them. He ascended up into heaven in a cloud. The disciples watched as He ascended. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy	Mk.16:19 Lk.24:50-53 Acts 1:6-11
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Now, let's take a look at these events as recorded in Scripture. Once again, it is important that we remember Matthew did not record in chronological order.

(STEP 1 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step one involves the resurrection of Christ (Mt.28:1-4). Jesus rose sometime between sundown on Saturday and the dawning of Sunday morning. We are not told the precise moment this took place.

*Mt 28:1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.*

Matthew began his explanation of these events by telling us "*Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*" were on their way to Jesus' tomb early Sunday morning. Read also Mark 16:1 and John 20:1.

What they experience at the tomb is recorded in verses 5-8.

The "*other Mary*" was the mother James and Joses (cf. Mt.27:56). Luke tells us Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them (Lk 24:10). Mark tells us Salome was with them (Mk 16:1). The absence Jesus' mother is interesting to me. Perhaps she was too heartbroken to assist with the anointing of the body of Jesus.

The phrase, "*In the end of the sabbath*" is full of meaning.

First, this phrase simply tells us the end of the Sabbath day had come.

The Jewish calendar counts days differently than we do. We begin a new day at midnight. But, the Jewish calendar begins a new day at sundown. God counted the day starting with the evening during the six days of creation (Gen.1:5).. When God gave the Jews instructions about the holy days, they were to observed "even unto even" (Lev.23:32). This is why they wanted to take the bodies off the crosses, and why Joseph and Nicodemus were hurrying to place Jesus' body in the tomb. The Sabbath would begin at sundown and all work had to cease at that point.

Second, this phrase tells us the Jewish Sabbath came to an official end when Jesus rose from the dead.

This truly was the *end* of the Sabbath. Jesus fulfilled the law (Mt.5:17). The New Testament believer is no longer under the law (Rom.10:4). New Testament believers worship on the first day of the week because Jesus rose on the first day of the week. The early church met to worship on Sunday and so should we (Jn.20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.16:2; Col.2:16). There is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath. Sunday is the Lord's Day and not the Sabbath. We certainly should honor the Lord's Day but it is not a day of rest as the Old Testament Sabbath. No where in the New Testament are believers commanded to observe the Sabbath.

Third, this phrase forces us to ask, which Sabbath was Matthew referring to?

There were two kinds of Sabbaths in the Jewish law. There was the weekly Sabbath that was observed on the seventh day of the week. And, there were annual Sabbaths that were observed once a year (Lev.23). The weekly Sabbath always fell on Saturday, but the annual Sabbaths could fall on any day of the week.

To determine which Sabbath Matthew was referring to in this verse, we must ask ourselves, what day of the week did Jesus die. Many believe He died on Friday because He was crucified the day before the Sabbath. But, Jesus said He would be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Mt.12:40). There is no way to get three days and three nights from Friday to Sunday morning.

A common explanation to this problem is to say the Jews counted any portion of a day as a whole. However, we must find the answers to our questions from the bible, and not from man's tradition. We must keep in mind, the bible is completely silent about the exact day of the week Jesus was crucified. However, the bible does say Jesus was crucified the day before the Sabbath (Mk.15:42-43; Jn.19:31). But, once again, we must ask, which Sabbath?

John helps us with the answer when he tells us they took Jesus' body off the cross because the following day was a "high" day (Jn.19:31). That means, it was a special Sabbath, and not a weekly Sabbath. The high day John was referring to was Passover. So, Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, the day before Passover.

Therefore, the Sabbath Matthew was referring to in verse one was the weekly Sabbath that came on the seventh day, which would be Saturday.



These women went to the tomb, "*as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week*". As we have mentioned, the Jewish day ended at sundown. So, they came to the tomb early Sunday morning.

The word, "*dawn*" means, "to begin to grow light". Mark tells us after the Sabbath was past these women came to the tomb at the rising of the sun (Mk 16:1-2). John tells us it was so early it was still dark (Jn.20:1). So, they headed for the tomb while it was still dark and arrived just as the sun began to rise.

These women were not coming to the tomb in faith. This act demonstrated their great love for Jesus, but it also demonstrated the fact that they, like the disciples, did not expect Him to rise again. They were not expecting to see a risen Jesus. Mark tells us they were coming to anoint the dead body of Jesus (Mk.16:1). They may have not come in faith, but they did come. And, as we have already said, those who are willing to be where the Lord is moving will receive great benefits.

Before we move on, we need take a look at what Jesus was doing for the three days and three nights His body was in the tomb.

To begin with, as we have discussed previously, the bible teaches us Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth. Jesus said He would be in the *heart of the earth* for three days and three nights (Mt.12:40 emphasis added). Jesus told the thief on the cross, "*To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*" (Lk.23:43 emphasis added). During Old Testament times, the place the bible calls "paradise" was in the center of the earth (cf. Lu.23:43). Paradise consisted of two compartments. One compartment was a place of peace. The Old Testament saints who had died, resided there. The other compartment was a place of punishment. The Old Testament sinners who had died, resided there.

Sometime between Jesus' death and resurrection, He went to the center of the earth and proclaimed a message to those confined there. Peter tells us Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison (1 Pet.3:18-20). I believe He proclaimed the fact the He had just died on the cross. It was a message of victory to those who were in the place of peace, and a message of defeat to those who were in the place of punishment. Perhaps Jesus stood on the outskirts of Paradise and spoke where those in either side of paradise could hear. Maybe He proclaimed to the sinners in the punishment side that, because of Calvary, their doom was sealed. Any hope they had of being set free from their torment was in vain because He had won the victory over sin and Satan (1 Pet.3:22; Col. 2:15). Maybe He proclaimed to the saints that, because of Calvary, their victory had come, and they were about to be ushered into the Father's house.

Paul also gives us some insight to Jesus' activity between His death and resurrection. He said Jesus descended before He ascended (Eph.4:8-10). He descended to where the Old Testament saints resided, and then ascended to escort those saints to the Father's house.

It is important to realize, Jesus did not go into the place of punishment. The idea that Jesus had to go to hell and suffer in order to complete the payment for sin is totally unbiblical.

Also, during the three days and three nights, I believe, Jesus was doing the work of a High Priest. Once a year, the Old Testament High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the sacrificial blood that their sin might atoned.

The atonement for sin has always been by blood. It began with the animal that was slain to provide the skins for Adam and Eve (Gen.3:7). The Old Testament sacrifices required blood (Lev.17:11). The blood had to be applied to the door when judgment came through Egypt (Ex 12:23). It took more than just the death of the lamb, the blood had to be applied.

When God gave Moses the instructions of how to build the Tabernacle, He talked about it being a "pattern" (Ex.25:9,40). This certainly sounds like the earthy Holy of Holies was designed after a heavenly equivalent. The earthly priests were an "example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb.8:5).

The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood *he entered in once into the holy place*, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb 9:12 emphasis added). This verse certainly seems to indicate that Jesus applied His own blood in the Holy of Holies in heaven.

It would seem Jesus was in the process of doing this High Priestly work when He spoke to Mary at the tomb. He said, "Touch me not; for I am *not yet ascended to my Father*: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend unto my Father*, and your Father; and to my God, and your God (Jn 20:17 emphasis).

And so, I believe, Jesus gave His life on the cross, and then applied His blood to the Holy of Holies in heaven.

(STEP 2 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step two involves an earthquake and an announcement from an angel (Mt.28:2-4). Matthew described the circumstances that took place before the women arrived at the tomb in verses 2-4.

*Mt 28:2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.*

The words, "*there was*" indicates Jesus had risen, and the "*great earthquake*" had already happened before these women arrived at the tomb. Jesus' resurrection did not cause the earthquake. This verse says, "for" the angel of the Lord descended from heaven. The angel landing on earth caused the earth to shake. This should remind us of the power of angels. They are created beings, and they are far inferior to God, but they do have great power.

There were actually two angels (cf. Lk.24:4). One angel was more prominent and did the speaking. A variation between one and two is found in other places in Scripture. We find it in reference to the demon possessed men (Mt.8:28 and Mk.5:2), and the two blind men (Mt.20:30 and Mk.10:46).

The angel "*rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it*". He did not roll the stone away in order to let Jesus out. Jesus was gone before the stone was rolled away. The angel said, "He is not here: for he is risen" (v.6). Jesus did not raise from the dead and then have sit in the tomb waiting for someone to let Him out. The angel rolled the stone away to let the disciples in, not to let Jesus out.

Mark tells us the angels had the appearance of a man (Mk.16:5). Their general shape was similar to a man's but, as we will see, they were anything but men.

*Mt 28:3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow;*

The word, "*countenance*" means, "sight" or "appearance". This speaks of more than just his face, it speaks of his entire person. He was not just bright, he was bright like "*lightening*". Imagine looking at a streak of lightning flashing right in front of your face. That certainly explains why they were afraid.

His garments were "*white as snow*". His garments were consistent to the message he came to proclaim. His message was a message of glory. He was not dressed in black like a messenger of doom might be. His message was not one of doom, his message was one of delight.

White garments are an indication of purity (Dan.7:9; Acts 1:10; Rev.19:8,14). The description of these angels seems similar to Jesus' appearance when He was transfigured (Mk.9:3). It would seem as though the saints will wear such attire in heaven (Rev.4:4).

*Mt 28:4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*

It was no small feat to frighten a rough and tough Roman soldier. They were accustomed to the horror of battle and the attack of the strongest of enemies. Yet, they were like frightened little puppies when a couple of angels revealed themselves to them. Many a sinner has bragged about how they will speak their minds to God when they stand before Him. But, they, like these soldiers, will be speechless.

*Mt 28:5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.*

(STEP 3 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step three involves the women who came to the tomb and Mary Magdalene. Matthew did not record this event, please read John 20:2).

When Mary Magdalene saw the open sepulchre, she left the other women at the tomb and ran to tell Peter and John (cf. Jn.20:2). She did not know about the resurrection, all she knew was the stone was rolled away, and the tomb was open.

(STEP 4 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step four involves the women who were left at the tomb after Mary Magdalene departed (Mt.28:5-8). Read also Mark 16:2-8 and Luke 24:1-8.

The women mentioned in verse one arrived at the tomb. As previously mentioned, the words, "*there was*" in verse two indicates the earthquake had already happened and Jesus had risen before these women arrived at the tomb.

The women were unaware of the supernatural occurrence that had taken place overnight. Jesus rose some time between Saturday after sundown and sunrise Sunday morning. The angels were waiting for their arrival.

I am amazed about how the Lord led Matthew to record the events dealing with the resurrection of Christ. He did not try to convince anyone. He used no fanfare or fireworks. He simply stated the facts and let everyone decide whether they will accept or reject them.

After all, it is history, not fantasy. It was the greatest miracle ever known to mankind, there was no reason to make more out of it than there was. God has always just spoken the truth as it was and let man decide what he will do with it.

Luke tells us the women went in the tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus, but He was not there. This puzzled them greatly. As they were thinking of what all this meant, the angels appeared before them (Lk.24:1-4).

The angel said, "*Fear not ye*". The Greek tense of this statement is, "stop being afraid". Luke tells us these women were terrified. He wrote, "And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth" (Lk 24:5). Notice, they bowed their heads. That tells us their fear was a holy fear and not just a fear of the circumstances. They were suddenly aware of the presence of holiness.

Notice, there was no harsh rebuke. The angel did not scold them for their lack of faith or tell them they should have believed more. There was only compassion.

It is interesting to note, these angels gave no message of encouragement to the guards who watched the tomb. They did not say, "Fear not" to them. The reason, they had a reason to fear. Those who do not know the grace of God have a lot to be afraid of.

*Mt 28:6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

Jesus was no longer there because He had "*risen*". Luke tells us the angel also said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead. He is not here, but is risen" (Lk.24:5).

The women were invited to come and look at the place where Jesus had been laid. The angel explained what had happened by saying, "The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again (Lk 24:7).

He did not just say, "He is risen". He said, "He is risen, *as he said*" (emphasis added). He reminded the women of the fact that Jesus had told them about His death and resurrection. Then, a wonderful thing happened, they remembered what Jesus had said about his death and resurrection (Lk 24:8). If we can remember what God says, we can get help in our times of fear.

I find it amazing that no one actually saw Jesus raise from the dead. I would expect a detailed, step by step, description of how it happened. Yet, God simply said, "he is risen". And, to be honest, if we are willing to believe God, that is all He needs to say. Since no one actually saw Jesus raise from the dead, all of mankind is level ground. No one has an advantage. We all must accept it by faith.

*Mt 28:7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.*

The angel told the women to "*go quickly*". The message of Jesus' resurrection was something the frightened disciples needed to hear as soon as possible.

They were to tell the disciples "*he is risen from the dead*". The words of the angel should have thrilled the disciples. The mission of these women was the same for all believers. We are to tell others what we know about Jesus.

The angel said, "*he goeth before you into Galilee*". Jesus had mentioned this earlier (Mt.26:31). The fact that he promised to meet them in Galilee proved their failure would not be final. They would recover from their fall. This part of the message must have thrilled the disciples. It meant, not only was their Lord alive, but it meant He was still willing to work with them. In spite of their absolute failure, He still loved them, and He still had something to say to them.

The message included, "*there shall ye see him*". The disciples were actually going to see Him again. This tells us Jesus had a literal, physical body. His body was glorified and able to pass through locked doors (Jn.20:19). Yet, it was a body in which he walked, talked, and ate (Jn.21:5,17). The glorified bodies of believers will be like His body (1 Jn.3:2).

The angel ended his speech to these women by saying, "*I have told you*". I wonder if this did not prick the hearts of the disciples when they heard this part of the message. After all, Jesus had told them before about how He would suffer, die, and raise again (Mt.26:31-32). But, they had not listened. This time, they would.

Mark records this event and includes something Matthew did not. The angel's complete message was, "But go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you (Mk 16:7 emphasis added). Jesus wanted Peter to know that he was included. No doubt, after Peter's denial of Jesus, he thought he had failed to such a degree as to never be used of the Lord again. But, it was like Jesus sent a special little note just to Peter. I am so glad our God still restores the fallen. I am glad no matter how far we fall, failure does not have to be final.

*Mt 28:8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.*

(STEP 5 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step five involves the women going to find the disciples to tell them about Jesus' resurrection.

Matthew did not record this event, please read Mark 16:7-8. They went tell the disciples but being overcome with fear they did not tell anyone along the way.

Their emotions were described as "*fear and great joy*". What an unusual mixture of emotions. As they were running towards the disciples, they were slowly, but surely, beginning to realize what had just happened. As they realized, He was alive, their fear was turning to joy.

I am delighted with the way this verse speaks of the emotions of these women. That tells me God wants us to be more than robots who are heartlessly obeying His every command. He actually wants us to feel what we believe. Though our faith is not dependent on our feelings, our faith is a faith we can feel. Hallelujah!

(STEP 6 FROM ABOVE LIST)

Step six involves Peter and John going to the tomb. Matthew did not record this event. Please read John 20:3-10.

Having received the information from Mary Magdalene, Peter and John headed to the tomb. John outran Peter, arrived at the tomb first but did not go in (Jn.20:3). Perhaps this speaks of John's nature. He did not tread quickly when it came to spiritual matters. Those who are hasty around the things of God reveal a lack of discernment.

Then Peter arrived and went quickly into the tomb. This certainly reveals his impulsive nature. John wrote, "Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (Jn 20:6-7).

As previously stated, the linen graves cloths were in the exact form as when Jesus' body was in them. When He rose, His body simply passed through the cloths and left behind an empty cocoon. Also, the napkin that had been around His head had been neatly folded and laid in a place by itself. Simply seeing the clothes was enough to cause John to believe Jesus was alive (Jn.20:8).

We must keep in mind, those who believed Jesus' resurrection did not believe because of some mystical feeling they had. They believed because of the overwhelming evidence of His resurrection. God does not ask us to believe a fairy tale. He gives us the evidence and lets us decide whether we will believe it.

John wrote, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead" (Jn 20:9). They did not understand the Old Testament that spoke of the resurrection of Christ (Ps.16:10; 110:1). Also, Jesus had spoken to them about His resurrection (Mt.12:40; 16:21; Mk.8:31; 9:31; Lk.9:22). Even though they had heard the words, they did not truly understand them.

The fact is, Peter and John, and all the disciples, had heard enough to where they should have been expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. Yet, they did not. They went to that tomb with the intentions of investigating the disappearance of a body, not the resurrection of one.

Even though they did not understand the Scripture about the resurrection, the evidence before them was undeniable. It was the evidence that convinced them. Peter and John may not have completely understood the Scripture about Jesus' resurrection, but that did not make it untrue. God's Word is true, whether we believe it or not.

There being nothing else they could do, Peter and John left the tomb and went home (Jn.20:10).

(STEP 7 FROM LIST ABOVE)

Step seven involves Mary Magdalene returning to the tomb alone. Matthew did not record this event, please read Mark 16:9-10 and John 20:11-18.

After telling Peter and John, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb, but stood outside weeping (Jn.20:11). Some believe she arrived before Peter and John left but I believe they left before she arrived. If she had been there while Peter and John were there, surely they would have told her about the grave clothes, and she would not have been so heartbroken.

She was weeping because her heart was broken. At that time, she had not heard about Jesus' resurrection. She had left the tomb before the angel spoke to the women (v.6). So, she was still thinking Jesus was dead.

She stooped down, looked into the sepulchre and saw two angels. One angel was sitting at the head, and one at the foot, of the place where Jesus had laid (Jn.20:11-12).

One of the angels asked Mary, "Woman, why weepest thou". To which, she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him (Jn.20:13). Not knowing Jesus was risen, Mary thought someone had taken Jesus' body from the tomb. Her ignorance kept her in sorrow. Had she simply known the truth, her tears would have been tears of joy, instead of grief. How often do we grieve, fear, or worry, because we do not know, or do not believe, the truth found in Scripture?

For some reason, Mary turned around. We do not know if she heard a sound, or if she was intending to leave the tomb. Having turned, she saw Jesus standing, did not recognize Him, but mistook him for the gardener (Jn.20:14).

We cannot be certain as to why Mary did not recognize Jesus at first. Her tears may have blurred her vision. Perhaps her grief so consumed her that she wasn't thinking straight. She may not have recognized Him because she simply was not expecting to see Him. Jesus was the last person on earth she expected to see at that moment. It may have been that God supernaturally prevented her from recognizing Jesus.

Mark tells us Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mk.16:9). To me, it is somewhat surprising that He did not appear first to His earthly mother or one of His disciples.

In her grief, she did not realize, Jesus was close at hand. Jesus is often closer to us than we realize. He said he would never leave us, nor forsake us (Heb.13:5).

Jesus said, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou". He asked the very same question the angel had asked. She offered to take the body of Jesus (Jn 20:15). Her love for Jesus overlooked her inability. There was no way she would have been able to carry the body by herself, but she loved Him enough to do her best. She was willing.

Then Jesus called her by name, and she realized who He was (Jn.20:16). Perhaps it was the way He spoke her name that made her realize it was Him. Certainly, she had heard Him call her name before. Whatever the reason, as soon as He called her name, she immediately knew who He was.

Mary called Jesus, "Rabboni" (Jn.20:16). Rabboni was the most honorable of all titles used by the Jews.

Jesus told Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Jn 20:17). The words, "Touch me not" mean, "cling not to me". As I have previously mentioned in my comments about verse one of this chapter, I believe Jesus was in the process of doing the High Priestly work at this point. He said, "I am *not yet ascended to my Father*: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend unto my Father*, and your Father; and to my God, and your God (Jn 20:17 emphasis). He gave His life on the cross and then applied His blood to the Holy of Holies in heaven. And so, I believe, Jesus was telling Mary to not hinder Him from His work as the heavenly High Priest.

This was the first time Jesus ever called His disciples "brethren". They were more than His friends, they were His family.

By the way, Jesus did know the spiritual state of those He was speaking to. And, He called them "brethren". Even though they had forsaken Him, they were still brethren. Even though, they had run when He needed them most, they were still brethren. Even though they were hiding at that very instant, He still called them brethren. My friend, does this not prove we are eternally saved? If they can do what they did and still be brethren, certainly nothing we do will forfeit our place in God's family.

Mary Magdalene did as Jesus requested, she went and told the disciples that He had risen. Unfortunately, they did not believe her (Mk. 16:10-11; Jn.20:18).

(STEP 8 FROM ABOVE LIST)

Step eight involves the women seeing Jesus (Mt.28:9-10).

*Mt 28:9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him.*

While Mary Magdalene was at the tomb, the women who had seen the angels were on their way to "*tell his disciples*". On the way, "*Jesus met them*". Once again, it was women who Jesus revealed Himself to.

The term, "*All hail*" literally means, "Hello". In Jesus' day, this was a simple expression of joyful greeting. I stand amazed at the simplicity of Jesus' statement. He had endured the cross, three days of burial, risen from the dead, and the first thing He said to His followers was "Hey, good to see you".

I think I would have stepped right in the faces of the disciples, planted my feet, raised both arms, and proclaimed with a voice like thunder, "It is I, I have risen".

They were so elated to see Jesus "*they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him*". Notice, Jesus did not tell them to release Him as He had done Mary Magdalene earlier. Perhaps this indicates He had ascended to the Father and presented His blood since He appeared to Mary Magdalene.

Words can not express the emotions of the women. Their fear was replaced with faith, their despair with delight. Surely, their faith had been resurrected. When He died, what faith they had died with Him, when He was buried, their faith was buried with Him. But, now He was alive, and so was their faith.

They "*worshipped him*". They recognized He was more than a man. They knew He was God and deserved their worship. Notice, Jesus did not stop them from worshipping Him. Only God can rightfully accept worship (cf. Rev.22:9).

*Mt 28:10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

The Greek tense of the phrase, "*Be not afraid*" means, "stop being afraid". If He was alive there was not reason for fear. And so it is with us. If the Lord of Lords is alive, we have nothing to fear.

He said, "*go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee*". What a wonderful display of God's grace and mercy. The disciples had failed Him when He was on the cross. Most of them had not even come to His grave to mourn His death. Yet, He still reached out to them. Most of us would have said, "Don't tell them, if they do not care enough to be here, let them suffer a little longer". But, that wasn't the heart of Jesus. He wanted them to know as soon as possible, so they could stop hurting. As with them, there have been many times when my good Savior has visited me when He should have left me to suffer in my self-made torment.

Galilee was about seventy miles north of the city of Jerusalem. Why would Jesus tell His disciples to meet Him so far away? This question is especially reasonable considering the fact that Jesus would tell His disciples to return to Jerusalem to wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk.24:49; Acts 1:4).

Going to Galilee would take the disciples out of the hostile environment of Jerusalem. Most of the Jewish leaders were around Jerusalem, so the danger of them being arrested or killed would be less away from Jerusalem.

Galilee was home for the disciples. There is just something about home that gives comfort. Jesus knew the disciples would need the security of home because of the fear and uncertainty they would be experiencing after His death.

Galilee would remind the disciples of the many miracles Jesus had done there. Perhaps they walked by the spot where Jesus had healed a blind man and another place where he had touched a leper. This had to help stir their faith in Jesus. They needed those memories to assist their faith for what was ahead.

Galilee was a place that we would call "on the wrong side of the tracks". The "common" folks lived there. Much of Jesus' ministry had been to common folks. He would send His disciples to the same type of people.

They were to tell the disciples, "*they shall see me*". As previously mentioned, though glorified, Jesus had a literal, physical body.

(STEP 9 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step nine involves the soldiers who were guarding the tomb (Mt.28:11-15).

*Mt 28:11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.*

As the women were going to tell the disciples about seeing Jesus, some of the soldiers who guarded the tomb went to report to the chief priests. They reported to the chief priests instead of Pilate because Pilate had assigned them to the control of the chief priests (cf. Mt.27:65). With this particular assignment, their responsibility was to the chief priests and not to Pilate. Also, they were afraid to report to Pilate. A guard who allowed their prisoner to escape would usually be put to death.

The guards told the chief priests, "*all the things that were done*". That means they told them everything they knew. They told them about the earthquake, the angels, the stone rolled away, and the body of Christ being gone. So, that means, the chief priests had all the details of the resurrection of Jesus. It means, they were one of the first to hear about what could have only been explained by, Jesus had risen from the dead. How did they respond? We are about to find out. It also means, one of the first to proclaim Jesus' disappearance were men who did not even believe He was who He claimed to be.

*Mt 28:12-13 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.*

They "*assembled with the elders*" means the Sanhedrin met together quickly. The words, "*had taken counsel*" mean this was an official meeting of the Sanhedrin. They called an official meeting to decide what they should do about the event that had taken place at the tomb and with the guards who were witnesses.

Their decision was to bribe the guards to say, "*His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept*". These religious hypocrites were desperate to explain away the disappearance of the body of Jesus. Their decision was absolutely ridiculous, but it was the best explanation they could devise short of admitting He had risen from the dead. It would have been all but impossible for all the guards to have fallen asleep at the same time. Had they been asleep, it would have been impossible for anyone to roll the huge stone away from the door of the tomb without waking them. And, the obvious question is, if they were asleep, how did they know His disciples stole the body? They knew the disciples could not, and would not, steal the body of Jesus but they were ready to accept any explanation other than the actual truth.

The chief priests had all the facts, but they refused to believe them. They knew what had happened had to be supernatural, yet they refused to accept the facts. They refused to even examine the evidence. It is amazing how someone would rather believe what they know to be a lie than to accept what they know to be the truth. In spite of all they had seen and heard, they were still unrepentant, and refused the truth.

The word, "*large*" means "large" but it carries with it the idea of "ample" or "enough". In other words, the amount they gave the guards was enough to buy their silence. How much would it take for you to sell out? Unfortunately, many are selling Jesus out for much less than the guards received.

The chief priests paid a great sum of money. Sin always costs a lot.

*Mt 28:14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.*

Their comment would be absolutely comical if it wasn't so sad. They said, *if this come the governor's ears*". How short sighted these wicked men were. They had no idea what far reaching effect these events would be. They were hoping the governor would not hear about Jesus' disappearance. Little did they realize what had just happened would change the course of the world.

The word, "*persuade*" means, "to convince". It also has the idea of "pacifying". In other words, Pilate was like a big baby who had to have everything go his way for him to be happy. Unfortunately, they probably could have persuaded him. After all, they had convinced him to crucify Jesus.

They promised to keep the guards safe from Pilate. The word, "*secure*" means, "without care". In other words, they were promising to so persuade Pilate to where they would not even have to give a second thought about him taking action against them.

*Mt 28:15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

So, the guards and the chief priests knew the truth, but the truth did not matter to them. The guards were content with the money, and the chief priests were content to get rid of Jesus.

The lie was spread and believed. It was "*reported commonly among the Jews*". Matthew was writing somewhere between eight and ten years after the fact, and this was still the commonly accepted explanation to what happened at the tomb.

The words, "*commonly reported*" actually mean, "blazed abroad". This news spread like wildfire. It is amazing how a lie is told quicker than the truth.

Most believed the lie. What an example of how popular opinion can be totally wrong. I cannot help but think of our modern day "geniuses" who proclaim unashamedly how the universe is the result evolution. Just because something is popular does not mean it is true.

As I read this account I am wondering why did God use so much time on the reaction of the enemies of Christ. Why did he not just ignore their wicked and hard hearted action? They certainly did not deserve to take up space in God's Word. I believe, just as he had done when they gambled over His robe (refer to our notes on Mt.27:35) it is because God wanted to show the results of sin. This shows just how far a person can go when they allow self and sin to control their lives.

(STEP 10 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step ten involves Jesus appearing to Simon Peter. Matthew did not record this, please read Luke 24:34. Luke simply tells us Jesus had appeared to Peter and does not give any of the details. What a meeting this must have been. The last time Peter had seen Jesus was when he denied Him and their eyes met (Lk.22:61-62).

(STEP 11 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step eleven involves Jesus appearing to two disciples of the road to Emmaus. Matthew did not record this event, please read Mark 16:12-13 and Luke 24:13-35.

Jesus appeared to two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. Emmaus was a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. I assume they were heading home. It would seem unlikely for them to invite Jesus to spend the night if they were not at their own home (cf. Lk.24:29).

One of these disciples was named Cleopas (Lk.24:18). We cannot be certain, but the other may have been his wife. His wife was at the cross (Jn.19:25). Undoubtedly they had been to Jerusalem to observe Passover. It would seem they believed in Jesus but were heading home brokenhearted because of His death. Apparently, they had not heard the testimony of those who had actually seen Jesus alive. They knew the tomb was empty, the women had seen the angels, the angels had told them Jesus had risen, and some of the disciples had gone to the tomb finding it empty. They had not come to a conclusion about it all. Like most Jews, they were expecting a mighty deliverer from the Roman oppression. As far as they knew, Jesus was dead and their dream of the Messiah was also dead. Brokenhearted and defeated, they headed home.

Luke tells us they "*reasoned*" as they walked. The word, "*reasoned*" means, "to investigate" or "discuss". They were honestly examining the facts they were aware of in an effort to make some sense out of what had happened. As they walked and talked, Jesus joined them (Lk.24:14-15).

They did not recognize Jesus at first. Mark tells us Jesus appeared "in another form" (Mk.16:12). What exactly is meant by "another form" is not explained.

Their eyes were "holden that they should not know him" (Lk.24:16). It seems as though this was an act of God for later their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus (Lk.24:31).

The same God who gives us our abilities, can limit them if He desires. Perhaps their eyes were restrained that they would believe because of the Scripture Jesus would discuss with them and not just because they saw Jesus. God wants His people to believe Him simply because of what He has said.

As they walked, Jesus asked them what they were talking about. Cleopas was surprised that anyone could be unaware of the events that had happened in Jerusalem. He spoke of all that had happened over the last few days (Lk.24:17-20).

One of the most relevant matters in his conversation was what he said about them trusting Jesus. He said, "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (Lk.24:21). They had believed Jesus, but now they were wondering if they had been deceived. They were doubting because what had happened was not what they had expected. There was no need to stop trusting Jesus just because they did not understand what He was doing. We may not always understand Him, but we can always trust Him.

Cleopas said, "and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done". The third day had started the night before at six o'clock. It was now late afternoon on Sunday. Several hours had passed since the third day had begun and they had yet to see Jesus. Surely, they were wondering, if He has risen, where is He? If He was indeed alive, would He not have revealed Himself to everyone by then?

This is especially true because they, like the other disciples, probably expected Jesus, if He was alive, to aggressively overthrow Rome and set up the kingdom (cf. Acts 1:6). Certainly, if He was alive, He would have already started His move on Rome and they would be aware of it. So, they were confused to say the least.

Jesus rebuked them for their spiritual blindness. He said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Lk 24:25). The word, "fool" means, "unintelligent". Their problem was they did not know the Scriptures. Had they simply known what the Old Testament said, they would have known there was no reason for doubt.

Jesus said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things*, and to enter into his glory" (Lk 24:25–26 emphasis added). What had happened to Jesus was exactly what had been foretold in the Old Testament. So, Cleopas and his companion had the facts they needed. They knew Jesus' name and where He was from. They knew He was a prophet who was mighty in deed and word. They knew He had promised to redeem Israel. They knew He had been crucified. And, they knew some had said He had risen from the dead. They had the facts, but they had not processed them. The words, "slow of heart" indicate they had enough information to where they should have already believed.

These two disciples made the same mistake we often make. They believed the portion of Scripture that pleased them and ignored the ones that did not.

If Jesus rightfully rebuked those disciples, how much more can He rebuke we who have the completed canon of Scripture? Do we not deserve a sharp rebuke for all we have heard but not applied to our lives?

We know we should talk right (Eph.4:29), always tell the truth (Eph.4:25), be kind, merciful, forgiving (Col.3:12-13), be filled with the Spirit (Eph.5:18), pray without ceasing (1 Th.5:17), trust the Lord with all our hearts (Pro.3:5-6), and be fruitful in every good work (Col.1:10). We know also, we are not to gossip (Ps.34:13; Eph.4:29), complain (Phil.2:14), judge wrongly (Mat.7:3-5), worry (Phil.4:6), or love the world (1 Jn.2:15). But, in spite of knowing all this, we seldom practice what we know, which is sin in itself (Jam.4:17).

Jesus' solution to helping these disciples was giving them more truth. He opened the Old Testament and showed them the things that had happened had been prophesied (Lk.24:25-27). What had taken place was according to God's design. It is truth that overcomes doubt, eliminates confusion, and erases fear.

Jesus went home with them. As they were about to partake of a meal, He blessed the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. Then, Jesus simply vanished out of their sight (Lk.24:30-31).

They uttered words that have been repeated many times by God's people. They said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures" (Lk.24:32). I find it interesting that they did not comment about the wonder of seeing Him in a glorified body. But they did speak of how their hearts burned while He opened the Word of God. This should remind us of the power of the Word.

They hurried back to Jerusalem, found the "eleven" and told them what had happened. The news was too good for them to wait till morning. I would have loved to see them heading back to Jerusalem. With all the excitement of Passover, the cross, the tomb, and walking around seven miles to get home, they had to be exhausted. And yet, even though it was probably late, they made their way back to Jerusalem. Somehow, I have the feeling they just about skipped all the way back to Jerusalem. Finding out your Savior is alive will put some pep in your step.

Speaking of these two disciples, Mark wrote, " And they went and told it unto the *residue*" (Mk 16:13 emphasis added). The word, "residue" is speaking of the disciples who were not of the original eleven. Luke described the residue with the words, "and them the were with them" (Lk 24:33).



Unfortunately, even with all the evidence, which included Peter's testimony about seeing Jesus, there were some who still did not believe (Mk.16:12-13).

These two disciples, having received the peace of knowing Jesus was alive, had a desire to share that peace with others. So it is with any work of God. The work of God's grace in our hearts will always include a desire for others to experience what we have.

A note of interest: The term, "The eleven" had become a term used to describe the disciples who were remaining after Judas' defection. When this term is used, it does not necessarily mean all eleven disciples were present. This is true of the event we have just discussed (Lk.24:33). We see another example of this in the next appearance of Jesus. Mark tells us Jesus appeared unto the "eleven" but he also tells us Thomas was not present at that time.

(STEP 12 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step twelve involves Jesus appearing to ten disciples in a locked room. Matthew did not record this event, please read Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-24).

On Sunday evening Jesus appeared to the ten disciples who were in a locked room partaking of a meal (Jn.20:19). Judas was dead and Thomas was not present. The locked doors may have been sufficient to keep the Jews out, but they had no power to keep Jesus out.

At first, Jesus *calmed* them. He said, "Peace be unto you" (Lk.24:36). The disciples were terrified. The bible used three words (terrified, affrighted, and troubled) to describe their fear (Lk.24:37-38). They were afraid of the Jews (Jn.20:19). There was still a danger of the Jews hunting down those who had followed Jesus. Their hatred for Jesus, and anyone connected to Him, did not end when Jesus died.

They were also frightened because they thought He was a ghost (Lk.24:37).

And, I believe part of their fear was because of the possibility that what they were seeing really was Jesus. They had failed Him when He was arrested, when He was crucified, and even after His death. This was the first time He had revealed Himself to them as a group since His resurrection. I believe they were afraid because they did not want to face Him.

Jesus assured them it was really Him. He showed them His hands, side, and feet, and told them to touch Him to make sure He was real (Lk.24:39-40; Jn.20:20). The wounds were still in Jesus' hands, side, and feet. Those wounds will be an eternal reminder of what it cost to purchase our forgiveness (cf. Zech.13:6). The wounds are marks of honor, not of deformity. They speak of victory, and not of flaw.

Then, Jesus *confronted* them. Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mk.16:14; Lk.24:38). He may have rebuked them, but He still treated them better than they deserved. He said nothing about how they had failed Him during His arrest, crucifixion, and afterward. I am so glad our God does not treat us as we actually deserve (cf. Ps.103:10).

He rebuked them because they refused to believe the testimony of those who had seen Him alive (Mk.16:14). They struggled to believe totally even after they saw Him (Lk.24:41). The words, "they believed not for joy" mean the thought of Him actually being alive was simply too good to be true.

They shared a meal with Jesus (Lk.24:41-43). This teaches us a glorified body, though not a requirement for survival, is capable of eating food (cf. Jn.21:9-13; Rev.22:2). Jesus' body tells us a good bit about our glorified body (Phil.3:21). A glorified body is similar to the natural body in appearance and function. Jesus looked like a man, he walked, talked, and ate. However, the glorified body is not limited like a natural body. Jesus was able to pass through walls and travel from one place to another instantly. The glorified body is designed with eternity in mind (1 Cor.15:39-50; 2 Cor.5:1-4). It is incorruptible (1 Cor.15:53-54).

Luke tells us Jesus said, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Lk 24:44). The Old Testament had spoken of the events that had taken place. Had there been no cross, there would have been no remission of sins (Lk 24:46-47).

Jesus opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scripture (Lk 24:45). The only way any of us can understand the Word of God, is for the Holy Spirit to open our understanding (1 Cor.2:14). He turns the light on, and we "see" what God said.

And finally, Jesus *commissioned* them. He had a mission for each of His disciples (Jn 20:21-23).

For the second time, Jesus said, "Peace be unto you" (Jn 20:21 cf. Jn 20:19). This time, He spoke of peace because He was about to send them into a hostile world. His statement was more than Him just wishing they would somehow have peace. He was literally giving them the peace they would need for the task ahead. It is one thing for us to wish a sick friend to be well. It is quite another to have the ability to make them well.

Jesus has the ability to dispense peace. He had said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I *give* unto you: not as the world giveth, *give* I unto you" (Jn 14:27 emphasis added). He said, "my" peace give I unto you. The same peace He had, He can give to us. Jesus had a peace that allowed Him to sleep while in a ship in a stormy sea. That same peace, He wants to give to us. There is no need for fear anything, anytime.

Jesus said, "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (Jn.20:21b). The word "send" has the idea of sending out with authority. Jesus granted them the right to go in His Name. They were going in His place. All New Testament believers are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Christ on earth.

Jesus "breathed on them" (Jn.20:22). He was about to send them on a mission. If they were to accomplish this task, they had to have a power greater than their own. He was giving them the means whereby they could accomplish this mission.

When he breathed on them He said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (Jn.20:22b). Jesus had spoken earlier about this event. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, He had said to the disciples "he dwelleth *with* you, and shall be *in* you" (Jn 14:17 emphasis added). This reveals the necessity of His Spirit to do the work God desired.

This is the only time recorded that Jesus "breathed" on someone. The word literally means, "to blow at or on". Also, this is the only time the Greek word translated "breathed" is used in the New Testament.

The bible likens the Spirit of God to breath or wind (Ezk.37:5; Jn.3:8; Acts 2:2). Like God breathed into Adam the breath of physical life (Gen.2:7), Jesus breathed spiritual power into the disciples. Just as Adam was powerless before the breath of God entered, so believers are powerless without the spiritual breath of God. Only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can we be the servants God wants us to be.

Some believe Jesus was merely preparing the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. However, I believe this was more than just a promise about a future event. Certainly, the *fullness* of the Holy Spirit did not come upon the disciples until the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-4; 42-47; Jn.14:16-17), but I believe they received the indwelling Spirit here. This seems to be confirmed by what Mark wrote about these disciples. He wrote of how the Lord worked with them with "signs following" (Mk 16:20).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God would come and go as He was needed for the task at hand. There are times in the Old Testament where the Spirit of God was "upon" the child of God (Num.24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:5-6, 19; 15:14-15; 1 Sam.10:10; 16:13; 2 Kgs.3:15). There are also times in the Old Testament where the Spirit of God was "in" the child of God (Num.27:18). Peter wrote about the Spirit being "in" them (1 Pet.1:11). However, this entering of the Spirit of God was selective and temporary. Once the task was completed, the Holy Spirit departed. That is why David asked that the Spirit not be taken from him (Ps.51:11). The Holy Spirit coming upon a person did not always indicate the person's spiritual condition. At times, God used ungodly men to accomplish a desire task (cf. 1 Sam.16:14; Judges 16:28).

The disciples certainly were not perfect after Jesus breathed on them but I believe they were different. They still had issues to work through, but they were different. Luke's description of them after Jesus ascended shows us they were no longer bound by fear. He wrote, "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Lk 24:52-53).

On the day of Pentecost the disciples were baptized by the Holy Spirit and received the fullness of His power (Acts 1:8; 2:4). Since Pentecost, every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the moment of their salvation (Rom.8:9). This indwelling of the Spirit is permanent (1 Cor.3:16; 6:19). When speaking of the Spirit of Christ, Paul said, "dwell in your hearts" (Eph.3:17). The word, "dwell" carries with it the idea of feeling at home. We should live in such a way that the Holy Spirit would be comfortable in our bodies.

We must remember the days after Jesus' resurrection were a transition period from the Old Testament system to the New Testament system. There were certain factors true during this time and only during this time.

Jesus continued by saying, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).

The word "remit" means "to pardon or forgive". Jesus was giving his disciples the privilege of announcing God's terms of how a person could receive the forgiveness of sin. He had spoken of this earlier (Mt.16:19; 18:18). He was certainly not giving them the authority to forgive sin themselves. Only God has the authority to forgive sin. Jesus was not establishing a priesthood here. He was not establishing a group of men who were to hear the confessions of people who had sinned. Jesus is the only mediator between man and God (1 Tim.2:5). Jesus was not giving the disciples the authority to forgive the sins of others. No where in the New Testament is such a practice taught. No where in Scripture do we find these disciples, nor anyone else, claiming to have the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus was simply giving them the authority to speak what God had said. The bible clearly teaches that God forgives the sin of those who come to Him in faith and repentance (Acts 2:38-39; 8:37; 10:43; 11:14; 13:39; 16:31). Therefore, the disciples, without fear, could promise forgiveness to the repentant and believing sinner. God has given us have the same authority.

Jesus gave His disciples the authority to tell people they would *not* be forgiven. Jesus continued by saying, "...and whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained". The word "retain" means "to seize or hold". Just as the disciples could tell people they could be forgiven, they also were given the authority to tell people if they refused God's way of forgiveness, their sin would not be forgiven.

This was the first time Jesus sent His disciples out with the completed gospel message. These disciples were to proclaim a message of complete forgiveness. In truth, God saved on credit in the Old Testament because the payment for sin had not been accomplished. Sin was merely covered until the sacrifice of the Lamb of God provided the complete removal of sin. But, in these verses we see the work of Calvary had been accomplished. The payment for sin had been finalized and complete forgiveness was available.

This reveals the wonder of the cross. The sin of Adam had been dealt with, and now, Jesus was sending His disciples out to proclaim the message. Complete forgiveness was available to those who would come to God on His grounds, and judgment was certain for those who refused. Whoever complied to the conditions of the gospel message would have their sins forgiven, and whoever did not, their sins would not be forgiven.

Examples of this commission is seen when Peter preached at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:43), and when Paul preached in Antioch (Acts 13:38-39). They clearly said forgiveness is granted by Jesus, and Jesus alone.

It is interesting to note, the message for the modern believer is still the same as it was for these disciples. We are to tell exactly what they told.

Just like the disciples, we can say to all, if you receive God's gospel message, you will be forgiven, if you do not, you will not be forgiven.

Mark's record includes a part of the conversation not recorded by Matthew. Please read Mark 16:14-18.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk 16:16). He was not saying baptism is required for salvation. He was speaking of the importance of an outward evidence of true salvation. Genuine salvation always produces evidence. James taught genuine salvation is proven by good works (Jam.2:14-20). Baptism is an outward evidence of genuine salvation. It is an outward sign of the inward work of salvation. It shows the world we have died, been buried, and have risen with Christ. The early New Testament believers assumed all those who got saved would be baptized. The fact that baptism is not required for salvation is made evident because the second part of the verse says the lost are condemned because of their unbelief, not because their failure to be baptized.

Jesus spoke of five supernatural signs that would accompany the ministry of His disciples (Mk.16:17-18). These signs would confirm the disciples to be true servants of God. They would be able to cast out demons (Acts 8:7; 16:18), speak in tongues (Acts 2:4), take up deadly snakes (Acts 28:3-5), drink deadly poison, and they would be able to bring healing to the sick (Acts 28:8). These signs were for the early New Testament believers and are no longer a necessary for the modern believer (2 Cor.12:12; Heb.2:3-4). In our day, the completed Word of God confirms the believer (Rom.16:17; Tit.3:10; 2 Jn.10). To determine if someone is from God and speaking the truth, we compare what they say with what the bible says. Jesus was not implying His disciples intentionally handle snakes or drink poison as some practice today. He was talking about an accidental snake bite or drinking of poison.

Some time later, Thomas returned to the group of disciples. We are not told why Thomas was not present when Jesus came. They told him about Jesus' appearance, but he did not believe them. He said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (Jn 20:25). He was a man who battled fear (cf. Jn.11:16), and doubt (Jn.14:5). This is the only place in the bible where "nails" are mentioned by name.

He not only refused to believe Jesus' words about raising from the dead, he refused to believe the testimony of the other disciples. To be honest, the other disciples had to have the same evidence Thomas demanded. They did not totally believe until Jesus showed them His hands, side, and feet (Lk.24:38-39). John wrote, "he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord (Jn. 20:20 emphasis added).

#### EIGHT DAYS AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

(STEP 13 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step thirteen involves Jesus appearing to eleven disciples. Matthew did not record this event. Please read John 20:26-29.

Eight days later, Jesus appeared once again to the "eleven". They were assembled together the next Sunday morning. This is one of the examples of God's people meeting on Sunday to worship after Jesus' resurrection (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.16:2; 2 Cor.9:12). Thomas was present this time (Jn 20:26).

As He had done eight days earlier, Jesus said, "Peace be unto you".

Jesus turned directly to Thomas and said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (Jn 20:27). He offered to let Thomas examine his wounds. Thomas had said he would not believe unless he saw and felt the prints in Jesus' hands and side (v.25). I wonder if Jesus extended his hands towards Thomas as He spoke these words.

Jesus' admonition to Thomas was, "be not faithless, but believing". He went straight to Thomas' problem, his lack of faith. Jesus always deals directly with our flaws. We should not play around with doubt. It is one of our greatest enemies. Doubt hurts the Father, stifles the Spirit, and cripples the Christian. We should fight it as wholeheartedly as we would the devil himself.

Jesus told Thomas to not be faithless, but he also told him to believe. The word, "believing" is speaking of trusting. Jesus is trustworthy. We can trust God with what we do not understand or cannot explain.

This is one more example of Jesus' extraordinary mercy towards an undeserving disciple. At the very least, Thomas deserved rebuke, but he received understanding.

Thomas recognized Jesus. He said, "My Lord and my God" (Jn.20:28). His statement acknowledges the fact that Jesus is God.

Jesus told Thomas he was blessed because he had seen and believed. But, He went on to say those who believe without seeing are more blessed (Jn 20:29). Seeing Jesus alive thrilled Thomas. But, how much better would it have been had he believed earlier? He would not have spent the week in misery and fear. How much time do we spend in misery because of our lack of faith?

Not only does lack of faith hinder us, it hurts God. Without faith, we cannot please Him (Heb.11:6). That means, our lack of faith grieves Him.

Our faith should be based on what God has said. If we believe what He said, we don't have to see. Having to see before we believe is doubting what God has said.

We are not told whether Thomas actually placed his finger in Jesus' side. I personally do not believe he did. Jesus said Thomas believed because he saw Him, but said nothing about him touching Him.

Jesus was not content to leave Thomas as he was. He desired Thomas to move into the realm of faith. He desires the same for us. God wants us to grow spiritually. If He is not content with our present condition, should we be?

#### UNCERTAIN TIME AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

The timing of some of Jesus' appearances after His resurrection cannot be given with certainty.

(STEP 14 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step fourteen involves Jesus appearing to seven disciples while they were fishing. Matthew did not record this event. Please read John 21:1-25.

This was the third time Jesus had appeared to the disciples collectively (Jn.21:14). He appeared to the ten (Jn.20:19), the eleven (Jn.20:26), and to the seven (Jn.21:2).

Seven of the disciples were gathered at the Sea of Tiberias (Jn.21:2). Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee (Jn.6:1). Jesus had told His disciples He would meet them in Galilee (Mt.28:7,10,16). Please read the comments on Matthew 28:10 about why Jesus met His disciples in Galilee.

The first question that arises is, where were the other four disciples. Since Jesus had told them all to meet Him in Galilee, they should have been there. As we will see, Jesus used this occasion as an object lesson for the ministry that laid ahead.

While they were waiting for Jesus, Peter spoke up and said, "I go a fishing" (Jn 21:3). As with so many other times, Peter was the first to speak. There is little doubt of the fact that Peter was the leader among the disciples.

We cannot be certain about Peter's reason for deciding to go fishing.

Some believe Peter was abandoning his ministry and going back to his old profession of fishing. If this is the case, it is likely he made this decision because of how disappointed he was in himself. No doubt, he saw himself as a failure as a disciple of Jesus. Perhaps he determined to go back to the one thing he thought he could do well. However, if this was the case, he was about to find out God was not going to allow him to walk away from the ministry quite so easily. He was about to discover, the God who had helped him with his fishing, was the God who could hinder his fishing.

However, some believe Peter simply wanted to do something while they were waiting on Jesus. The obvious activity was fishing. He had been a fisherman by trade before his call to follow Jesus. A catch of fish would provide food for himself and the other disciples. And, the sell of any extra fish would help them in their daily needs.

No matter what the reason for their fishing, Jesus was going to use this experience to teach them a lesson.

As always, when one person leads, another follows. The rest of this group decided to go fishing also. They said to Peter, "We also go with thee" (Jn.21:3).

They fished all night but caught nothing (Jn.21:3).

Peter, Andrew, James, and John, had been expert fishermen and had fished in the Sea of Galilee on many occasions. So, they definitely knew how to fish. Yet, after an entire night of using every trick they knew, they had not caught a single fish. This in itself is a miracle. They were using nets, so to not catch even one fish after fishing all night was unheard of. The God who could draw the fish into the net is the God who could draw the fish away from the net. The God who gives blessings can withhold His blessings. God was showing them how insufficient their self-effort was. We can do the best we can, but without the work of the Spirit of God, all our labor is useless.

When morning came, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not recognize Him (Jn.21:4). Perhaps their eyes were restrained as others had been (Lk.24:16; Jn.20:14). Perhaps it was not light enough for them to recognize Him even though they were only about one hundred yards away (Jn.21:8).

From the shore, Jesus asked the disciples if they had caught anything. Their sad response was, "no" (Jn.21:5). They had to admit their failure before they would ever have success. Admitting our failure is difficult but it is better to admit failure than to deny it.

Still standing on the shore, Jesus gave them instructions. He said, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find". Humanly speaking, this was a strange command. Did He think they had not tried the other side of the boat? Certainly they had tried every side.

The disciples followed Jesus' instructions and caught so many fish that they were unable to draw them in the ship (Jn.21:6). In the same place they had fished all night and caught nothing, they caught a great catch. The key to their success was the fact that he promised. If they did what He said, they would catch fish. We can always trust the promises of God.

The strange thing about their obedience is the fact that they obeyed even though they were not aware that it was Jesus speaking. Perhaps Jesus simply spoke with such authority, they were compelled to obey. Had they not, they would have gone without and never experienced the great miracle.

There are times when the leadership of the Lord comes through an "urge". The Holy Spirit assures us somehow and we simply know it is the right thing to do. For this reason, we need to be especially sensitive to the Spirit of God.

Jesus told them to "Cast the net". He did not instruct them to fish a different way. They did not need to change their method, they simply needed to obey the Lord. Which side of the boat they cast the nets was not the important factor. Obeying Jesus was the important factor. So it is with us. In this modern day of modern methods, we do not need to update our procedure or discover a different method. We simply need to obey the Lord.

Somehow, John recognized the stranger on the shore. He said to Peter, "It is the Lord" (Jn.21:7). Perhaps he looked closer and realized it was Jesus. Perhaps this reminded him of another time when Jesus provided a miraculous catch (Lk.5:1-6). Maybe he realized it was Jesus because only Jesus could have given such a promise and produced such a catch of fish. John was the one who recognized Jesus first among the disciples. He was always the one who seemed the closest to Jesus. Obviously, the closer we are to Jesus, the better we will know Him.

When Peter heard it was Jesus, he immediately put on his fisher's coat and jumped into the water to go shore. He jumped in because he could swim or wade quicker than the boat could get to shore. To get to shore, they would have to transfer from the larger fishing boat to a smaller boat which was able to come all the way to the shore. Peter did not want to wait. We must commend Peter for his quick response to the presence of the Lord. His quick exit of the ship and path to Jesus seems to be an indicator he was not out of God's will by fishing. He had tried running from Jesus before and had learned how foolish that was. He was learning, getting to Jesus as fast as you can is the best idea no matter what the situation.

John tells us Peter was "naked". That word does not always mean totally nude. It is used often to signify the absence of the outer garment (1 Sam.19:24; 2 Sam.6:14,20; Job 22:6). Peter had removed his outer garment to make it easier to fish. However, when he realized the man on the shore was Jesus, he made sure he was presentable before he approached Him. This should be a lesson to those who claim God is not interested in our appearance. As Moses removed his shoes in God's presence, we should have the utmost respect for the presence of God.

Realizing it was Jesus, Peter forgot completely about the fish. The other disciples moved from the larger fishing boat to a "little" boat and rowed to shore, dragging the net of fish with them (Jn.21:8). Had they not, the fish would have been lost. They could not haul them in the ship, but they were not about to let them go.

Once again we see the servant's heart of Jesus, for when the disciples reached the shore, they found a breakfast of fish and bread which Jesus had prepared for them.

No doubt, this meal was produced miraculously by the Lord.

Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught to include with the meal (Jn.21:9-10). Peter drew the net into shore and found there was 153 fish in it. Once again we see the initiative of Peter. He didn't take time to wait for the other disciples to help. Another miracle is seen here. Such a catch would have weighed in excess of 300 pounds, yet the net had not broken (Jn.21:11).

We are not told why there were 153 fish caught. The idea of some that there were 153 species of fish in the Sea is incorrect.

John tells us, "none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (Jn 21:1). The Greek word translated "ask" means, "to interrogate". The thought of this statement is the disciples did not ask for proof that it was Him, as they had done previously. By this time, their doubt about Him being alive had disappeared.

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

We dare not miss the lessons of this fishing expedition.

- God uses the circumstances of our lives to teach us great truths

As Jesus had said before, the disciples would be fishing for men (Mt.4:19). He used this fishing expedition to teach them several valuable lessons. He was about to send them out into the world to be fishers of men. They would need the lessons they had learned during this fishing expedition.

- Doing the will of God is vitally important

No matter what the circumstances, doing the will of God should be the most important thing in our lives.

- Trying to work on our own will produce nothing

All the effort of the disciples was completely unfruitful. All our self-effort will produce nothing.

- When we do it God's way, He will bless our effort

When they followed the instructions of Jesus, they caught a multitude of fish. In the very same spot where they had tried their best and caught nothing. Only by following the instructions of God could they hope to be successful. And, only by the blessing of God, could they ever hope to be fishers of men.

- Jesus knows where the fish are

When they cast the net where Jesus instructed, they caught fish. We need to allow the Lord to direct us to those He wants us to reach. When He touches us to speak to others, He is able to touch them to listen.

- He will protect that which He provides

The net should have broken, but it did not. The salvation He provides is not only able to catch us, it is able to hold us. Also, we can trust God to protect the ministry where He places us.

- God always gives the best

The Greek word of the fish Jesus had prepared is different than the fish the disciples caught. The fish Jesus prepared were small fish. The fish the disciples caught were large fish (Jn.21:11). The Sea of Galilee had many species of fish but the smaller ones were the most tasty. The Lord always gives the best to those who will follow Him.

- By following His instructions, the disciples caught more than Jesus had

The breakfast Jesus prepared amounted to a very few small fish. The disciples' catch was a multitude of fish. Jesus had told the disciples they would do greater works than He (Jn.14:12). There is no telling what God might do through the person who totally obeys Him.

- God blesses the effort of His people

God uses man to accomplish His will. All their self-effort accomplished nothing. However, catching the multitude of fish did involve them putting forth the effort. Jesus' instructions involved the nets and the boat. These items were valuable only when the disciples put forth the effort to use them. Had they not cast the net, there would have been no catch. Our techniques without the power of God are useless. Yet, God does use our efforts in accomplishing His will through us. There is no place for laziness in the work of God.

#### JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH PETER

After the meal, Jesus had a personal conversation with Peter. Matthew does not record this conversation. Please read John 21:15-24.

Jesus had already revealed himself to Peter on the day of His resurrection (Lk.24:31; 1 Cor.15:5). We are not told what was said on that occasion. But, at this meeting, we are given the details of their conversation.

As we know, Peter had failed the Lord miserably (Mt.26:69-75). He had repented and been forgiven. This conversation with Peter was to confirm the restoration of his ministry for the Lord. If he was to go in the name of Christ he had to have the approval of Christ. We cannot serve without the endorsement of our Lord. In this conversation, Jesus was reassuring Peter his ministry was not over. In fact, the greatest days of his service for Jesus was yet ahead.

These questions coincided with Peter's denials. He had denied Jesus three times, Jesus would ask him three times if he loved Him. He had failed Jesus three times, Jesus would commission him to service three times.

Jesus did not question Peter about his dedication, his knowledge, his faith, or his sincerity. He questioned Peter about his love. The greatest need for any disciple is not dedication, determination, or even dependability. The greatest need is love. Love is the most powerful emotion and the greatest motivator on earth. Jesus said true love will cause a person to lay down their lives for the one they love (Jn.15:13). He also said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Mt 22:37). The first requirement for the servant of God, is that they love Him.

Jesus started His walk with Peter by saying, "Follow me" (Mt.4:19). Following Christ calls for sacrifice. Sacrifice is giving up that which we care about. If we truly love God, we will gladly sacrifice those things in our lives that would not please Him.

When there is genuine love, nothing is too small. The smallest of gestures mean so much when they are done by someone who truly loves us.

When there is genuine love, nothing is too big. The biggest of sacrifices are not too big when we really love the person. The person who truly loves Jesus will be willing to abandon all their personal desires, plans, and goals, and give their all to Him. Love makes the difference.

Jesus was about to turn the responsibility of His mission over to these disciples. These flawed, fearful, and failing men were to carry on where Jesus had left off. Their determination was not going to be enough to make them successful in this mission. The thing that would keep them faithful was the fact that they genuinely loved Jesus. A love for God is one thing that will keep us going when our world is falling apart.

It is interesting to note this was the third time Jesus had shown Himself to the disciples since His resurrection (v.14). The emphasis on three cannot be a coincidence.

#### JESUS' FIRST QUESTION

Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these" (Jn 21:15).

Much ink has been spilled in the attempt to explain what Jesus meant by the words "more than these". For the most part, there are three schools of thought about this issue.

One, Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Him more than the other disciples did. This is possible for he had believed his love for Jesus was greater (Mt.26:33). That was one of the reasons for his downfall.

Two, Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Him more than he loved the disciples. This is possible for there no doubt about Peter's love for the disciples. They had spent years together and had become very close. A requirement for him being a good disciple was that he loved Jesus more than he loved others.

Three, Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Him more than he loved the boat and the nets that represented his old life of fishing. A requirement for him being a good disciple was him being willing to turn his back on that old profession and go with Jesus.

I personally believe Jesus was asking, "Peter, do you love me more than the other disciples love me". I believe that because Jesus was dealing with the personal issues Peter and he had obviously thought he loved Jesus more than they did. He had bragged about how he would not forsake Jesus even if others did (Mt.26:33; Lk.22:33; Jn.13:37).

Certainly Jesus knew the answer to the question before He asked it. The question was not for Him, it was for Peter. To answer this question, Peter had to search his heart.

The Greek word translated "lovest" in this instance refers to the highest form of love. It speaks of love in its purest sense. It is the type of love God has for us.

Peter's response was, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (Jn.21:15). It is important to notice, the Greek word translated "love" in his statement is "phileo". It is a word that refers to brotherly love or the type of love we have for a friend. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him with an all consuming love and Peter said, "Jesus, you know you are my friend". Peter made no claim of having a greater love on this occasion. He had learned by his failure that he did not love Jesus near as much as he thought he did.

Notice, Peter said, "Lord, thou *knowest*". God does know the heart of all people. If we look at Peter's actions we would assume he did not love Jesus very much. Yet, even though he had failed the Lord miserably, he really did love Him. Thank the Lord, the same can be true of us. There are times when our actions make it appear as though we do not love Him very much. But, He knows we really do love Him in spite of the way we live. There are times, like Paul, we do not do the things we want to do (Rom.7:15). I am glad that our God knows how it breaks our heart when we fail Him.

Jesus responded to Peter's comment by saying, "Feed my lambs". The word "Feed" had the idea of providing the food needed. The word "lambs" refers to baby, or young, sheep. The primary thought here was the feeding of the young lambs. As a shepherd had the responsibility to make sure his little lambs were fed, Peter was to make sure God's little ones were fed properly.

Jesus knew Peter would be dealing with some young converts and some immature believers. These "little lambs" would need to be fed. It would be his responsibility to preach and teach the Word of God to these believers.

The most important requirement for feeding the sheep was loving the Great Shepherd. This reminds us of how the primary duty of a pastor is to study and deliver the Word of God (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim.5:17-18; 2 Tim.4:2).

Notice, even though Peter had admitted to the fact that he had less than a perfect love for the Lord, Jesus still gave him a job to do. We do not have to be perfect for the Lord to use us.

If that were so, none of us would have any hope of being used. That is not to say we can live any way we want to and expect God to use us greatly. Peter, though still flawed, was honestly dedicated to improving and becoming more of what God wanted him to become. That, I believe, is the key. Our love for God should be something that is constantly growing. Paul talked about love increasing more and more (1 Th.4:9-10).

Jesus was saying, "Peter, if you love me, help those I love". Our love for Christ is proven by our love for people.

#### JESUS' SECOND QUESTION

Jesus was not finished with Peter. He asked the second time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me" (Jn 21:16). As Peter had denied the Lord the second time, Jesus asked about his love the second time.

This time, Jesus left off the words, "more than these". Here, He was simply asking, "Peter, do you really love me". Peter had realized he did not love Jesus more than the other disciples loved Jesus. Now, Jesus was forcing him to examine whether he really loved Him at all.

Peter responded by saying, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (Jn.21:16). Once again, Peter used the word for love that means to be really fond of. At least Peter was learning to be honest about himself.

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (Jn.21:16). He used the word "sheep" here instead of "lambs". Whereas "lambs" spoke of baby sheep, this word referred to the adult sheep in the flock.

This Greek word that is translated "Feed" means, "to tend". It involves more than simply feeding sheep, as in verse fifteen. It speaks of feeding, guiding, protecting, and disciplining the sheep. It carries with it the idea of doing all the shepherd does.

Jesus knew part of Peter's ministry would involve helping believers to develop their own walk with the Lord. That would include everything from tenderly teaching to severe discipline. As the shepherd tends to the flock, the pastor should tend to the church.

It is interesting that Peter was assigned to tending to God's sheep. Sheep are weak, fearful, and depend totally on the shepherd. Those things were true of Peter himself. He was assigned to take care of people who were a lot like himself.

This instruction was not to Peter only, but to all the disciples. Peter would give the same instruction to the elders of the church (1 Pet.5:1-3). This instruction is for all those who read the words in the book of Matthew.

Notice, Jesus called the sheep, "my" sheep. The church belongs to Jesus. Sheep are weak, helpless, and ignorant. They need constant supervision. Jesus said He loved them all and wanted them taken care of.

#### JESUS' THIRD QUESTION

Finally, Jesus asked Peter the third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me" (Jn.21:17). As Peter had denied the Lord the third time, Jesus asked about his love the third time.

The first two times, Jesus used a word that meant a deeply affectionate and supreme love. Peter responded with a word that meant a strong friendship. This time, Jesus used the same word for love that Peter had been using. Jesus was saying, "Peter, are you even my friend". Honestly, Peter's actions would have made it appear as though Jesus was not even his friend. A real friend does not treat a friend the way Peter treated Jesus.

This grieved Peter's heart (Jn.21:17). Jesus' questions had cut him to the heart. They had forced him to look a good look at himself and he did not like what he saw.

And finally, Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep". Peter had a job to do. And, the one who assigned him this position was the very one he had denied three times. Jesus' command assured Peter he was forgiven and was going in the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus continued His conversation with Peter by saying "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (Jn 21:18). He was referring to the manner in which Peter would die (Jn 21:19).

The day would come when Peter would be taken prisoner. He would be bound and carried to a place he did not want to go. As Jesus predicted, Peter would be killed because of his stand for Christ. Tradition tells us Peter was put to death by Nero. He was crucified upside down. When Peter learned he would be crucified, he requested he be crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to die as His Savior had.



And then Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me" (Jn.21:22). He told Peter to end his ministry as he had begun it, by following Him (cf. Mt.4:19).

In spite of the fact that following Jesus would cost Peter his life, Jesus told him to follow anyway. Jesus had asked Peter if he really loved Him. We will follow that which we love. We gladly serve that which we love.

What an abrupt return to the Lord's ministry. Peter was instructed to take care of the sheep and told about how he would die a martyr's death at the same time. For most people, the news about impending death would be devastating. But, I believe it thrilled Peter. It assured him the next time he would be put to the test, he would not fail. Considering Peter's devastation after his failure, I believe, I believe, this delighted him.

#### PETER ASKED JESUS ABOUT JOHN

John tells us Peter turned about (Jn.21:20).

As difficult as it is to believe, Peter asked Jesus what John would do (Jn 21:20–21). How could he ask such a question after the conversation he had just had with Jesus? It would seem he would have been so humbled that he would never have asked about the condition of any one else on earth.

Jesus' response was abrupt and without hesitation. He said "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me (Jn 21:22). I want to cry "Amen, Jesus" when I read those words.

I believe we can put an emphasis on the word "thou" in this verse without doing damage to the Scripture. Jesus was saying, "Peter, *you* follow me no matter what anyone else does". We must concentrate on our own walk (1 Cor.3:10; Col.4:17; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Jn.8).

Jesus was not saying we should not be concerned about the welfare of others. He had just told Peter to feed the sheep, so He certainly wants us to be concerned. But, Jesus was saying we are not to be concerned about the will of God for others. God deals with each individual on a personal level. We should let God deal with them and stay out of their business.

Jesus' comment about John led to a rumor that said John would not die (Jn.21:23).

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

- Our love for Christ is the key to our service for Him

Jesus did not ask Peter if he was dedicated or determined. He did not ask him if he had avoided all forms of sin. But, He did ask Peter if he loved Him. If we truly love God, we will be dedicated and we will avoid sin.

How would Jesus ask you the question He asked Peter? What is it that competes with Christ in your life? Do you love Him more than ----- ?

- Public failure requires public acknowledgment

Jesus questioned Peter while the other disciples were present. He had denied the Lord in front of witnesses, so he was questioned in front of witnesses. Also, the disciples needed to hear the conversation between Jesus and Peter. They needed to know Peter was truly forgiven and totally restored.

- Our love for Christ should be ever growing

Peter could not honestly say he loved the Lord with a love that had no limits. But, there is little doubt that he desired to achieve that type of love. Hopefully, our love for our Lord is growing daily.

Peter's response certainly revealed a lack in Peter's love for Jesus. But, it also revealed the fact that Peter had learned some things about himself. There had been a time had been when Peter was quick to brag about his love and commitment to Jesus (Mt.26:33,35). But, now Peter was hesitant to even say he loved the Lord.

- God does not forget sin

Peter had denied Jesus three times. Each of Jesus' questions coincided with these denials. That doesn't mean God had not forgiven Peter. It does mean Jesus was wanting Peter to remember his failure and learn from it.

Contrary to the teaching of some, God does not forget our sin. Some believe God forgets our sin because He said "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb.8:12). God never said He *could* not remember our sins. He said He *would* not remember our sins. The word "remember" means, "to bear in mind". God said He would never bring up sin that has been forgiven. Our God is not absent-minded.

The words, "fire of coals" is found only twice in the New Testament. The other occasion is when Peter was warming by the fire of coals when he denied Jesus (Jn.18:18). I wonder if the fire Jesus had prepared reminded him of the fire he had warmed by when he denied the Lord.

- God's forgiveness is complete

Jesus commissioned Peter three times in an attempt to assure him he had been forgiven for all three denials. His failure had been forgiven.

Though God does not forget our sin, He certainly does forgive our sin. That is exactly what He meant when He said He would not remember our sins. Once He forgives, He will never bring them up again.

- Failure is not final

Peter had failed the Lord miserably, but Jesus restored him to his position of service here. Jesus said, "Feed my lambs". Peter would become the leader of the early church. God would use him greatly.

- We are accountable only for our own walk

Jesus told Peter to not worry about what John was doing. We should be concerned about the spiritual well-being of others, but what they do should not determine whether we walk with God or not.

(STEP 15 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step fifteen involves Jesus appearing to more than five hundred at once (1 Cor.15:6). Some have speculated about when this meeting took place. Since the bible does not tell us, I will not offer my opinion.

Some of those included in this number were still alive when Paul penned the book of 1 Corinthians. That means someone could ask them about their experience of seeing the risen Christ. The fact there were over five hundred proves the resurrection was not just the imagination of a handful of Jesus' closest disciples. It also tells us the mission of Christ is for more than just a chosen few. We all have a mission. Imagine the excitement when all of the five hundred went and told everyone they knew about seeing Jesus alive.

(STEP 16 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step sixteen involves Jesus meeting with His disciples in Galilee and giving what is commonly called "The Great Commission" (Mt.28:16-20). These words are a command, not a suggestion. To fail to follow it's instruction is to fail God.

It is important to realize, there is one command in the Great Commission. This command involves two components. These components could be described as, reaching and teaching. The church is to reach the lost and then teach them all that Jesus said and did.

Sadly, the average church fails to carry out the Great Commission. Unfortunately, many of those who obey the first part end up completely ignoring the second part. Yet, it is just as much a part of Jesus' command. We are called upon to assist believers in their spiritual development.

The church is keep these two functions in the proper balance. We should not emphasize evangelism to such a degree that we fail to teach. At the same time, we are not to emphasize teaching, and ignore evangelism.

*Mt 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

The word, "*appointed*" means, "to assign". We are not told exactly when Jesus told the disciples to meet Him at this mountain. We do know Jesus had instructed the disciples to meet Him in Galilee (Mt.26:32, 28:7,10). However, this is the first mention of Him meeting them at a mountain.

We cannot be certain, but some believe this mountain to be Mt. Tabor, on which He had been transfigured (cf. Mt.17:1-2). This certainly seems reasonable since Mt. Tabor is fairly close to the Sea of Galilee, where the disciples had been fishing (Jn.21:1-13).

And so, the disciples doing what good disciples do. They were following the instructions of their leader.

*Mt 28:17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.*

The word, "*worshipped*", means, "to do reverence" or "to adore". It can also mean, "to prostrate oneself". They worshipped Him because they saw who He was. They saw Him as the holy, all powerful, God of heaven and earth. They worshipped Him because they saw what He had done. They saw Him as the redeemer of all mankind. No doubt, they were overwhelmed by the fact that He had willingly given His life for them. What a glorious experience this must have been.

The word, "*doubted*" means, "to waver in opinion". As is often true, while some were worshipping, some were questioning. The doubt spoken of here does not speak of a settled unbelief. It speaks of uncertainty. These men had a wide array of emotions and thoughts. If we are honest, we would have to admit to the same struggles in our faith. We have periods where we experience what seems to be an unshakable faith. And yet, at a moments notice, our faith can be over swept with waves of fear and uncertainty.

Someone may wonder why this was added. Why did Matthew have to tell us that some were doubting? The reason is simple, he added was because it was true. That is one of the reasons why we can be sure the bible is truly the Word of God. If man wrote the bible they would have left this part out. But, God tells the truth, even when it isn't pretty. God shows us the truth, all the time.

*Mt 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

The word, "*power*" means, "authority". Jesus had all the authority of the universe.

*Mt 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

The word, "*therefore*" points us back to verse eighteen where Jesus reminded the disciples that He had authority over heaven and earth. That meant, He had authority to send the disciples out with the message of the gospel. Jesus gave them the authority to go in His name and to speak on His behalf. We do not go in our own power. We can rest in the power He had given us and trust Him to use us as we go.

Jesus said, "*Go*". The disciples were to go where the people were. There is no room for laziness with the gospel. There was no printing press, no television, and no radio, to aid them. The only way they could do what Jesus told them was to go person to person. God's plan has always been that those who have heard tell those who have not heard that they might believe and tell others who have not heard.

The admonition to the church today is still the same. We are not to sit in the church and expect them to come to us. We are to go to the highways and hedges and tell them about the way of salvation (Lk.14:23). Someone has rightly said, "Witnessing is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread".

Jesus said, go "*ye*". Of course He was speaking to the disciples who were in His presence. But, these words apply to every believer of every generation. That means, they are spoken directly to me. I could rightly change "*ye*" to "*me*".

The word "*teach*" in this verse means "make disciples". These disciples were to go and make other disciples. Making a disciple implied two things. First, it implied reaching the lost for Christ. Only a believer can be a true disciple. Second, it implied helping the new convert to mature spiritually. We make disciples by reaching the lost and teaching them to walk with God.

This commission was vitally important for they were going out to speak to Jews who believed their religious system was sufficient to make them right with God. These Jews still believed Jesus was a fraud. The disciples had to convince them Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was predicted in the Old Testament. They would never believe in Jesus until they were convinced Jesus was the One the Old Testament spoke about.

The New Testament was not God's plan B. It was not something that was tacked on to the Old Testament. It was the completion of the Old Testament. Jesus is the primary subject of both, Old and New Testament.

This commission was vitally important for they were going out to speak to Gentiles who had never believed anything of a spiritual nature. These Gentiles had to be convinced that they were sinners, needed forgiveness, and the cross was the only way to obtain that forgiveness.

The disciples had to convince everyone they were not inventing a new religion. They could not use the New Testament because it had not been written. So, they used the Old Testament. The Old Testament made it clear that the cross had been the plan of God all along (Gen.3:15; 22:18; Num.21:9; Isa.7:14; 40:3-4; 45:22; 49:6; 53:1-9; 60:2; 61:1; Ps.8:5-6; 22:1; 22:8; 22:15-16; 22:18; 16:10; 31:5; 41:9; 69:4; 69:21; 118:22; 117:1; Hos.11:1; Joel 2:32; Mic.5:2; Zech.9:9; 11:12-13; 12:10; Mal.1:11).

Jesus shocked the disciples when He used the word "*all*". He was sending them to all nations, to all people, and to all races. This was a drastic change from what they were used to. He had told them to go only to the house of Israel (Mt.10:6; 15:24). But, now He was sending them to the entire world (cf. Acts 1:8). Israel had officially denied their Messiah (cf. Jn.1:11). God had sat them aside and had turned to the Gentiles. By the grace of God, individual Jews could still be saved, but as a nation, Israel had been cut off, and the Gentiles had been grafted in (Rom.11:20). This had been predicted in the Old Testament (Isa.52:10).

Salvation being available to a Gentile had never sat well with the Jews. They saw the Law as something especially for the Jew. Even these disciples would struggle with salvation being offered to the Gentile. Peter wrestled over it at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:1-48).

Part of Jesus' instruction was, "*baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*". We see the Trinity in these words. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are co-equal. Being baptized "in the name of" implied a union with and a dedication to. It meant the person being baptized was devoting their lives to the Being in whose name their baptism was administered.

Jesus was teaching the importance of baptism here. Baptism is a sign we are saved and not a requirement for salvation. It is a sign to the world we have turned our backs on our old life and are following Christ. For this reason, baptism should not be taken lightly. Baptism is one of the two church ordinances. The other being, the Lord's Table, or communion.

Notice Jesus did not mention anything about circumcision. This is another indicator that the old system of the Jews had been fulfilled by Christ.

*Mt 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

This is second part of the Great Commission. The disciples were to teach those they won to Christ. They were to teach "*all things*" that Jesus had taught them. We are to do the same. It is not our message, it is His.

The word, "*observe*" means, "to obey". God expects us to obey. The word "*observe*" also means, "to guard". We are to guard ourselves to make sure the devil doesn't take away that which the Lord has sown in our hearts (Mt.13:19).

Jesus began this commission by telling them He had all power. He concluded it by saying, "*I am with you always*". They could go without fear, expecting His power to enable them. Of course, the totality of this power would not come until Pentecost (Acts 1:4). His presence promises us protection, power, and peace.

This commission should force us to focus on the lost world around us. We get so caught up with our daily lives it is easy to forget about them. Even church activities can distract us from reaching the lost. Our preaching, teaching, singing, and even worship can sidetrack us from reaching out to the unsaved. When we allow to this happen, even these good things can become wrong. All of these are vitally important for our Christian walk, but they are to be an aid to prepare us to witness as Jesus commanded. This means, we can do all of these very good things and still fall short of the will of God by not sharing Christ to those around us.

#### OTHER APPEARANCES AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION

(STEP 17 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step seventeen involves Jesus appearing to James at an unknown time (1 Cor.15:7). This was the James who was the brother of Jesus (Mt.13:55; Gal.1:19). This appearance is significant for James became a recognized leader of the church in early church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18) and would later pen the book by his name (Jam.1:1).

(STEP 18 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step eighteen involves Jesus appearing to the disciples on occasions not recorded. Luke wrote, "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). We really do not know how many times Jesus revealed Himself after His resurrection.

The words, "infallible proofs" speak of evidence that is so convincing it cannot be denied. No thinking and honest person could see the evidence and still deny His resurrection.

#### FORTY DAYS AFTER JESUS' RESURRECTION (HIS ASCENSION)

(STEP 19 IN ABOVE LIST)

Step nineteen involves Jesus leading His disciples to Bethany, lifting His hands, blessing them, ascending back to heaven, and sitting down at the Father's right hand.

Matthew did not record this event. Please read Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-53, and Acts 1:6-11.

The disciples had returned from Galilee by this time. Luke tells us Jesus led the disciples towards Bethany (Lk.24:50). He was more specific when he penned the book of Acts where he said Jesus led them to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). The Mount of Olives stood between Bethany and Jerusalem. He will return to the Mount of Olives at His second coming the end of the Tribulation Period (Zech.14:4).

The disciples were still thinking about the kingdom. They asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Their question was not an unreasonable one. John the baptist and Jesus had talked about the kingdom (Mk.1:15; Lk.17:22-24). They had been taught all their lives that the kingdom was coming. Since Jesus was alive again, it was only natural they would wonder if the kingdom was at hand.

Jesus' reply let them know that there are some things that God keeps to Himself. He said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). There are some things the Lord will not tell us (Dt.29:29).

Jesus directed their attention to that which they should be focused on. It was not yet time for the kingdom and they had a job to do. Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In essence Jesus was telling them to not be concerned about what they did not know, but be concentrate on what they did know. Namely, it was time to tell the world about Him.

These words were a command they were to obey and a prediction about what they would do.

Jesus started these comments with the most important part of His subject, that being, the disciples would receive "power" when the Holy Spirit came.

The disciples would be used to spread the gospel. However, to do so effectively, they would need the power of God. Their own ingenuity would not accomplish the task. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until that power came. The Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost and provide them with the power they needed. Literally, the disciples would become tools in the hand of the Holy Spirit.

The good news is, we do not have to wait. We can claim by faith the same power the disciples had.

The word translated "witnesses" is from a word that means "martyrs". This does not necessarily mean all those who are His witnesses will be put to death for talking about Jesus. It does imply, however, the idea of dying out to ourselves in an effort to tell share Christ to the world around us.

These disciples were to be His witness "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus' instructions for witnessing involved an ever expanding outreach. Earlier, they had been told to go only to the people of Israel and to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans (Mt.10:5). But now, their commission was enlarged to include the entire population of the earth. No one was to be excluded. Jesus told them to start where they were, in Jerusalem. This was the place where Judaism had its headquarters. It was the place where Jesus had been crucified. It was a place that was still a hot spot for anyone speaking about Jesus. Yet, Jesus told them to begin their witnessing there. We should witness in the same fashion, we should start where we are and go to the uttermost part of the earth.

The disciples did preach in Jerusalem, Judaea, and Samaria (Acts 8:1). In spite of the danger, the apostles were led to stay in Jerusalem at this particular time. Certainly the leaders would need to be at the center of operations of this infant evangelism effort. They were miraculously protected by the hand of God even in the ever present danger (Acts 5:18-21,25,29,40,42). Sadly, other than John, all of the original eleven would eventually become martyrs.

The words, "uttermost part" mean "farthest" or "final". He was sending them out to the farthest part of the earth and to the last person on earth. These words also carry with them the idea of the "lowest". They were to be willing to go to the lowest person on earth. They were not to go out seeking for those who could help them make a name for themselves. They were building a church, not a business. They were going after the poor and the rich, the moral and the immoral, the loved and the hated. They were going after sinners of all kinds.

Notice, this mission does not end until the uttermost part of the earth is reached. As long as there is someone, somewhere, who has not heard, we are not finished.

Luke continued by writing, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). What an amazing sight this must have been. It was His power and not the cloud that lifted Him into heaven. He merely passed through the cloud as He ascended.

Luke wrote in his gospel account, "he lifted up his hands, and blessed them" (Lk 24:50). This was more than Him simply wishing them well. He was bestowing a divine blessing on them. The last act of our Savior before He left this world was placing a blessing upon His disciples. By doing so, He was placing them under the watch care of His Father. They certainly needed His blessing because of the difficulties that laid ahead.

Seeing Him rise into the heavens stirred in the disciples a realization of who He was. They did exactly what any of us would do. They focused their gaze on Jesus as He ascended and watched even after He had gone out of sight.

Luke wrote about two angels who approached the disciples and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:10-11). This refers to the second coming of Jesus and not the Rapture. When Jesus returns in the Rapture, all believers will meet Him in the air (1 Th.4:17). At the second coming, He will descend to the earth (Zech.14:4; Rev.1:7).

The angel's admonition certainly applies to us today. Many are so busy searching prophecy they have forgotten to carry out the command of the Great Commission.

#### THE DISCIPLES RETURNED TO JERUSALEM

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and went to an upper room (Acts 1:12-14). Luke tells us they returned with great joy (Lk.24:50-53).

After returning to Jerusalem, the disciples spent much of their time in the Temple (Lk.24:53). This was the first meeting place for the church (Acts 2:46; 5:21, 42). Their fear had been replaced with excitement. They spent much of their time in worship and praise. They longed for the promise of His power. No doubt, seeing Him ascend had given them a renewed faith and their expectations were high.

Mark wrote, "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mk 16:20). Even though they were not completely endued with power until Pentecost, God used them mightily.

When Jesus ascended He sat down at the right hand of God (Mk.16:19; Heb.1:3). He had accomplished His mission and had arrived home victorious. The right hand of a throne was a place of honor.

Jesus returned to heaven after living in a world that, for the most part, did not want Him. The Creator had paid a visit to His creation and they did not even recognize who He was. Yet, He willingly died for the very ones who rejected Him.

It had been forty days since Jesus had risen from the dead. He had been busy with His disciples during that time. He had assured them He was alive (Lk.24:36-40). He had instructed them about the Old Testament Scripture (Lk.24:45-48). They needed this instruction because of the false teaching of the Pharisees they had been exposed to. He had instructed them to declare the way of forgiveness (Lk.24:47). And, He had instructed them to stay in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Holy Spirit (Lk.24:48). To say the least, it had been a busy forty days

## HIS ASCENSION ACCOMPLISHED MANY WONDER THINGS

His ascension made it possible for Him to send the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples (Jn.16:7). Had He not sent the Spirit, the disciples would have been left alone in a world that hated them, with a task they could not accomplish.

His ascension made it possible that He receive the glory He had left when He became a man. His prayer was answered (Jn.17:5). Jesus never ceased from being God. However, He did temporarily give up His glory while on earth.

His ascension made it possible for Him to regain His rightful place on the throne of heaven (Eph.1:20-22; Heb.2:7-8).

His ascension made it possible for Him to be recognized as God by all of creation (Phil.2:8-11).

His ascension made it possible for the defeat of the devil's work to be completed (1 Jn.3:8; Heb.2:14). Jesus will eventually cast him in the Lake of Fire (Rev.20:10).

His ascension made it possible for the saints to receive spiritual gifts to enable them to do the work God (Eph.4:8).

His ascension made it possible for Him to began the work on the home for the saints (Jn.14:2-3).

His ascension made it possible for Him to become our High Priest and intercessor (Heb.4:14-15; 7:25).

His ascension made it possible for Him to eventually return to this earth and finish the work He began (Rev.19:5-10).

And so we come to the end of the book written by a Jew, to the Jews, about a Jew. However, even though this book was written primarily to the Jew, it is for all the world. The truth found in Matthew is for every person on earth. Matthew has told us about a God who became a man and dealt among men. He has taught us this God is more than a dictator barking down commands from heaven. This God is a God who wants to be known. He is a God who reveals Himself to all who will hear Him. He is a God who has opened His heart to those He created, and had invited them to know Him, love Him, and follow Him.

Some would say Jesus' life had been an absolute failure. But, what He accomplished opened up the way to heaven for any who will believe. Have you accepted Him? Do you know Him as your personal Savior? If not, will you please right now turn from your sin, believe, and call on Him to forgive you (Rom.10:9-10,13).