

By Rick Shoemaker

JESUS HEALS A PARALYZED MAN 9:1-8

Jesus continues his working of miracles to demonstrate his authority and power. However, he is about to do something he has not done before. He is going to forgive sins.

To this point, Jesus was known as a preacher, a teacher, a miracle worker, but now he forgives sin. To say the least, this will stir up controversy.

Mt 9:1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Jesus left the country of the Gadarenes and went to Capernaum.

We need to have same mindset that Jesus had. He was asked to leave by a bunch of pig farmers, but he did not quit. He continued to do good, he continued to preach, he kept doing his father's will. There will be times when people reject us, and our message, but we should not quit. There are others who will want to hear. Keep going, keep telling, keep doing right, no matter what.

Capernaum was the place where Jesus called home for the time being (cf. Mat. 4:13). It seems as though he stayed at Peter's house while in Capernaum (Mat. 8:14).

Mt 9:2 And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

This is one of most wonderful examples of compassion in the bible. Four men (Mk.2:3) had a burden for this man. They cared enough about this paralytic to where they went to extreme measures to get him to Jesus. Mark and Luke give us a more detailed description of this event.

These men actually tore up the roof of the house to get the sick man to Jesus (Mk.2:3-12 and Lk.5:18-26).

Jesus addresses the most important of this man's needs. He deals with his sin issues. God is concerned about our physical needs, but he is more concerned about our spiritual needs. To have the power to remove sickness was wonderful, but how much better to be able to remove sin.

Jesus tells the man to "be of good cheer" because his sins have been forgiven. What great a delight it is to know that our sins are forgiven. It is a thrill to realize the God of heaven holds nothing against us. We are no longer chargeable because he has declared us innocent of our sin.

Our brother, H.G. Spafford knew what he was saying when he wrote, "My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul".

These events are the result of the faith of the four men. This verse says, "Jesus seeing their faith". They believed Jesus could help their friend. Their faith moved them to bring the sick man to Jesus. Their faith caused them to break up the roof. Their faith moved the Lord to heal him. In like fashion, our faith moves God. Without faith, it is impossible to please him (Heb.11:6).

Mt 9:3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

As usual, someone had to complain about what Jesus is doing. The scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy. The word blaspheme means to speak evil against, or to injure with words. To blaspheme God would be to speak in a way that would dishonor his name.

Blasphemy also has the idea of claiming to do something that only God can do. That is what the scribes were accusing Jesus of doing. Only God can forgive sin. The fact is, they were right.

If Jesus was not God, he would have been guilty of blasphemy. But, he was God, and therefore, able to forgive sin.

Mt 9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

They had said nothing aloud, but Jesus knew their thoughts. This also, is something only God can do. He knows our thoughts also.

Mt 9:5 For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

There has been much discussion about Jesus' comment in this verse. When Jesus said "whether is easier", was he referring to forgiving the man's sin, or healing the man's sickness?

I personally believe Jesus was referring to forgiving the man's sin when he said "whether is easier". I think his sin problem, just like with all of us, was much more difficult to fix than his body.

There is no greater miracle on earth, than the miracle of being forgiven.

The damage of sin is worse than the damage any physical affliction can cause. The hold of sin is severe. It would do us well to recognize how wonderful the miracle of forgiveness is. If God has forgiven your sin, you have experienced the most wonderful miracle ever. Thank the Lord!

Mt 9:6 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

Jesus heals the man. In essence, his ability to do the second miracle (healing) proved he was able to do the first miracle (forgiving). The external miracle was proof of the internal miracle.

Once again, Jesus proves he is who he claims to be. The scribes could not refute what had happened for the man was obviously healed. Jesus' work took away any argument they could have offered. In fact, their attempt to discredit Jesus backfired. By showing he had power to heal, he was also showing his power to forgive sin.

I love it when the Lord shuts down the arguments of the world. Try as they may, they are no match to the almighty God of heaven.

Jesus' wording ("the Son of man hath power") shows us he meant the power to forgive, and to heal was within himself. He did not just receive the power from God, he was God.

These verses teach us only God can really forgive sin. Someone may steal from us. Later, they come to ask our forgiveness, and even return what they stole. We can forgive them. However, that does not do away with their sin. We can forgive them for their injustice to us, but that does not absolve their wrong. In wronging us, they sinned against us, and against God. Only God can truly forgive and absolve sin. I'm glad our sins are *gone*.

Jesus told him to take the old, dirty, stinking pallet he had laid on. It was a testimony to all who saw him. They had seen him lying on that bed for a long time. Now, he's walking, and that old pallet is a sign of a God who can change lives.

Mt 9:7 And he arose, and departed to his house.

The power of God touched this man, he was totally healed. He did as Jesus said, he went home. I would have loved to have seen his family when he first walked through the door.

I'm glad he didn't head to the closet beer joint, or the closest temple to a false god. When God touches us, we are different. We don't do what we used to do (2 Cor.5:17).

Mt 9:8 But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

Jesus' work had done what he intended. Many believed. Unfortunately, many still refused to believe. Nothing had changed. God reveals his mighty works every day, but so many reject his work, and walk on in spiritual blindness.

THE KING CALLS MATTHEW 9:9-13

Every king has his subjects. Every leader has those who follow. But, this king is not your average king. This king chooses the most unlikely people. He did not choose from the who's who of society. He picked the ones who no one else would have chosen.

One reason why he chose who he did was that God might get the glory for what was done through them. He still picks those who most would discard (1 Co 1:27; 1 Co 1:29; 2 Co 12:9-10; 2 Co 3:5).

Mt 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

Jesus calls Matthew (the writer of the book of Matthew). Matthew was a Jew. This verse helps to prove the bible is the word of God, and not of man. Had Matthew been the author of these words he certainly would have used words like, I, me, or mine. Instead, he pens down what the Holy Spirit told him to write and put no emphasis on himself.

Matthew was sitting "at the receipt of custom". That tells us he was a tax collector. The receipt of custom was the place where the Romans collected taxes. Tax collectors were hated by all people, especially by the Jews.

The Romans expected taxes to be paid. Many tax collectors would demand the people pay more than the Romans required. Then they would keep the extra for themselves. To make matters worse, many of the tax collectors were Jews themselves. So the Jews were being cheated by fellow Jews.

You can hardly blame the Jews for despising the tax collectors. Many of them were living in poverty. How would you feel if you can barely feed your family, and a fellow Jew is cheating you?

Jesus simply says, "follow me", and Matthew did. We must not exclude the work of the Holy Spirit in his call, or his obedience. The Holy Spirit moved in the heart of Matthew, and he listened. Many have heard that call since then.

Some would say it takes a lot of courage to leave everything behind like Matthew did. However, when the Holy Spirit calls, he gives grace to follow. There's nothing as sweet as following the leading of our Lord.

Some might ask why anyone would leave the comforts of home and go as a missionary to the jungles of Africa. The answer is simple. If God puts that burden in one of his children, they not only will be willing to go, they will want to go. The person doing what God asks will be happier in the dark jungles of Africa, than in the luxuries of America.

It's important to keep in mind. God's protection and provision is for those who are in his will. When we are where the Lord wants us, he will protect and provide. If we step out of his will, we cannot be sure of either his protection or provision.

Mt 9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

Jesus is invited to a meal at the house of an unnamed friend. Matthew does not tell us whose house it is, but Luke lets us know that it is Matthew's house (Lk.5:29). Once again we see the leadership of the Holy Spirit in Matthew not mentioning his own name.

Many "publicans and sinners" came to this gathering. In all probability, these were some of Matthew's friends from his old life. Luke tells us Matthew invited them (Lk5:29). No doubt, Matthew wanted them to hear the words of Christ.

This is a commendable action. Even though we are admonished to avoid those who do not walk in a godly manner (Ps.1:1; Pro.1:10; Pro.4:14; 2 Cor.6:14-18; Jam.4:4), that does not mean we should not try our best to win them to Christ. Jesus certainly was a friend of sinners.

We should be friends enough to win them but not close enough to be affected by their lifestyle. Many Christians have so isolated themselves they have no contact with those who are lost. We should guard ourselves from the world, but as Christians we are admonished to "go out into the highways and hedges" (Lk.14:23).

Mt 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

An orthodox Jew would not associate with such sinners as these. Notice, they asked the disciples instead of going directly to Jesus.

Mt 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Jesus responded to their question. His entire mission on earth is summarized in what he says here. He came to help those who needed help (Lk.19:10; Lk.15:4-7; Lk.15:32; Mt.18:11).

Jesus said those who are well do not need a physician. He saw himself as a spiritual physician. He came to those who could not help themselves.

Jesus not only speaks of the sick in this verse, but he speaks of the physician. Of course, he was the physician he was referring to. A physician is the one who has the knowledge and ability to assist those who are sick.

Sin is pictured as sickness in the bible (Ps.41:4; Ps.6:3; Ps.103:3).

Jesus is the great physician. He is the only one who can heal our sin sickness.

The Pharisees thought they did not have any need of help. They truly believed they lived good enough to please God. Oh how, they missed it.

Mt 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Jesus said, "go and learn what that meaneth". This was a common phrase used as a rebuke to those who did not know something they should have known.

The only hope they have is to accept what Jesus said. He did not change his words to accommodate their beliefs. He never will.

Jesus' statement for them to learn what he meant implies there was something they were ignorant about. Their eyes needed to be opened. He told them to go away until they learned this. Until they learned they were in need of the great physician they could not be helped.

There is no help for the person who will not admit they have a need. Jesus said he came to call the sinners to repentance, not the righteous. Those who think they are righteous think they have no need to repent.

Jesus also said when they learned they were sinners he would have mercy. God would much rather act in mercy than in judgment. He has no delight in having to deal with the wicked (Eze 33:11).

He was and is "calling sinners to repentance". The word "repentance" means reversal. It literally means to turn around and go in a different direction. True repentance starts in the heart. No one will repent until they recognize they have sinned against a holy God. Real repentance involves brokenness about our sin. The publican would not even look toward heaven as he cried "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk.18:13).

Repentance is not turning over a new leaf, nor is it a work of the flesh. Repentance comes from a work of conviction accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the sinning person. The Holy Spirit convicts the person of their behavior. As a result, they are sorry for who they are and what they have done. They “turn” from their sin and to the Lord for forgiveness.

Some believe repentance is merely a change of mind about our sin. Repentance is a change of mind, but it is more than that. A drunk may change his mind about drinking when he wakes up with a hangover. He may say, “I’m never going to drink again”. This does not necessarily mean he has repented. He is just sorry that his drinking has made he feel so bad. He will probably get drunk again.

But, if that same drunk wakes up and sees his drinking as sin. He will say, “I’m never going to drink again”. This time he not only sees his drinking as something that makes him feel bad, he sees his drinking as a sin. He turns from his drinking and to God because he wants to be forgiven. This is repentance.

Some believe salvation can be received by simply believing and repentance is not necessary. They site verses like Acts 16:30-31 in an attempt to prove their point. In those verses, the jailer asks Paul, “what must I do to be saved”. Paul answers by saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”. These folks are quick to point out that Paul told the jailer he had to believe and did not say anything about repenting. But they miss one important factor. The jailer was obviously already under conviction. He came in “trembling”. There was no reason for Paul to tell this man he needed to repent. It was obvious that he was already repenting. That’s why he asked what he had to do in order to be saved.

Repentance is more than just feeling sorry for our sin. Judas was sorry, but he did not repent (Mat.27:3).

Repentance is not reformation. Many people make a promise to stop their bad habits every New Year. However, most New Year’s resolutions don’t last more than a couple of days.

Simply put, repentance is turning *away* from sin but it is also turning *to* the Lord. Repentance is necessary for true salvation.

The God of heaven longs for sinners to come to him, but they must come his way. God says to the sinner, “Seek ye the LORD”, but he also says “Let the wicked forsake his way” (Isa. 55:6-7). He says “Wash you, make you clean” but he says in the same verse, “put away the evil of your doings” (Isa.1:16).

The New Testament says the same. Those who are lost are told, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19). Many other verses speak of the need to repent (Pro.28:13; Ezk.3:19; 18:21; 18:27; 33:16; Hos.1:2; Lk.15:10; Jn.3:8; Acts 26:20; Jam.4:8-10).

JESUS ANSWERS QUESTIONS ABOUT FASTING 9:14-15

Mt 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

These are the disciples of John the baptist. According to Luke, the ones who asked this question were the same ones who had been talking with Jesus (Lk.5:30-33). It seems as though the Pharisees and the disciples of John agreed together to ask this question of Jesus.

It certainly surprises us to discover the disciples of John and the Pharisees have teamed up. We must realize, it is probable that John has already been placed in prison by this time (Lk.3:19-20) and his disciples are struggling to understand.

John the baptist was actually the last Old Testament prophet. He was the forerunner of the Messiah (Lk.1:17). A forerunner went before an official in an attempt to prepare the people for his arrival.

John pointed people to Jesus. He made it very clear that he was not the Messiah (Jn.1:23-27; 1:29-30; 3:28-31; Acts 19:4). In spite of all John did to point people to Jesus there were some who refused to follow Jesus. Some of them even got jealous of Jesus but John still points them toward the Lord (Jn.3:26-31).

Some of John’s disciples were wondering why they and the Pharisees fasted but Jesus’ disciples did not fast. John’s disciples did as their leader, they fasted often.

The Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews. They fasted often but many of them did it to impress and not for spiritual reasons (Mat.6:16-18). They fasted about trivial matters. The Jews were instructed to fast once a year at the Day of Atonement (Lev.23:26-32).

We should note, Jesus did fast at least once that we know of, but he did it privately (Mat.4:1-2).

Fasting should not a discarded practice. I’m convinced it has a viable part in our lives today. It should be done privately and as the Holy Spirit leads us.

The bible has much to say about fasting (Neh.1:4; Ezra 9:5-8 and 8:21-22; 2 Sam.12:15-17; 2 Chr. 20:2-3; Isa.58:6; Ps. 35:13-14 and 69:10; Dan.10:3; Mat.4:2 and 6:16-18; Acts 13:3 and 14:23).

Mt 9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

Jesus explains his comments about fasting by referring to a wedding celebration. The Jewish wedding celebration lasted a week. No one would be expected to fast during such a joyous occasion. It would actually be considered rude to do so.

While Jesus (the bridegroom) was with his disciples. It was a time of celebration, not a time to fast. There is coming a time when "*the bridegroom shall be taken from them*". This is the first mention in the book of Matthew about Jesus' death and departure. The time will come when his disciples will have plenty to fast about. The days of joy would not last forever.

Fasting, rightly done, was connected to times of sorrow and fervent prayer. There was too much joy while Jesus walked the earth for them to fast. Also, fasting is done when we want to seek the Lord. His disciples didn't have to seek him for he was with them.

When the bridegroom is taken away then is the time to fast. The day will come when Jesus' disciples will fast. After Calvary, his disciples will have plenty to fast about.

THE TWO COVENANTS 9:16-17

Mt 9:16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

Jesus gives two illustrations to explain what was happening. Jesus' words also are intended to inform those who were listening about a change that was about to take place. The Old Testament system has fulfilled what it was intended to do. The New Testament system is coming.

He is trying to get them understand about the two covenants. The Old and New Testaments are both ordained by God, but they are totally different. Jesus wants them to understand the two cannot be mixed. Law and grace will not mix.

His first illustration was that of a garment. Especially in their day, they did not mix fabrics. They would not use a new piece of material to repair a tear in an old garment. When the garment was washed, the new fabric would shrink and tear the garment, making the whole worse.

Jesus lets them know a new day has come. The Old Testament system had fulfilled its purpose. The Lord has come, bringing with him the new and better way (Gal.3:19; Heb.7:22; 9:15; 12:24)

Mt 9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

Jesus' second illustration was that of wine bottles. The wine bottles of Jesus' day were made of sheep, goat, or ox skin. After time these skins would become brittle and would rupture easily. When new wine was put in old bottles, it would ferment, expand and burst the bottle. A bottle made of new skins was flexible and strong enough to withstand this expansion.

As already stated, Jesus is trying to get them to understand how you cannot mix two totally different things. The old covenant was good; it accomplished what God intended it to do. But the new was coming and would replace the old.

Notice what Jesus says about "*both are preserved*". What a wonder these words are. The Old and New Testaments have their place. Even though the Old is fulfilled by the New, that does not mean it had no value (Mat.5:17-18). The Law shows us we are sinners (Rom.3:19). It shows us our good works are not good enough (Rom.7:7). It points us to Jesus and his work on Calvary (Rom.10:4; Gal.2:16, 3:24).

The New brings us grace (Jn.8:32; 8:36, Rom.5:20-21, 8:2).

As wonderful as the Law is, we must move on to the New Testament. We are no longer under the Law (Gal.3:25).

JESUS DOES MORE MIRACLES 9:18-34

Mt 9:18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

While Jesus was still speaking, "*there came a certain ruler*", telling Jesus about his daughter. Luke tells us this ruler's name is Jairus and he had only one daughter who was twelve years old (Lk.8:40-42).

Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue. A ruler of the synagogue was responsible for looking after the building, its contents, and the arrangements for the services.

Mark says Jairus' daughter is at the point of death (Mk.5:23). No doubt, when Jairus left to find Jesus his daughter was in such bad shape he realizes that she may have already died. He is saying she is dying or already dead. Luke tells us as they were heading to Jairus' house they received word that the girl had died. (Lk.8:49).

Jairus came and worshipped Jesus. He realized his only hope was Jesus. How heart breaking this must have been. No doubt, Jairus loved his daughter. She was his little girl. Somehow, he had heard about what Jesus had done for others. He believed he could do the same type of thing for him.

Jairus realized how hopeless the situation was. He had no power to help the one he loved. If Jesus didn't help, there was nowhere else to turn.

Dear friend, what problem is there in your life that you cannot fix? Will you believe as Jairus did? Will you take that need to the only one who can help you?

Mt 9:19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

How it must have thrilled Jairus when Jesus rises and follows him. As far as we know, Jesus didn't speak a word; he "*arose, and followed him*". His disciples followed. I'm so glad we have a God who comes where we are. It's one thing for us to follow Jesus, but here we find him following the one in need.

JESUS HEALS A WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD 9:20-22

Mt 9:20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:

As they are on the way to Jairus' house a woman with an issue of blood touches Jesus. The lady had been afflicted with this problem for twelve years. She had spent all she had on doctors who could not help her (Mk.5:25-28; Lk.8:43-48).

Mt 9:21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

She believed if she could merely touch the hem of his garment she would be healed. The hem spoken of here was probably one of the four tassels sewn at the bottom corners of garments as described in Num.15:38 and Dt. 22:12.

Mark 5:29 says she was healed immediately of her plague. Her physical healing had taken place, but Jesus is not finished with his work on her.

Mt 9:22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

Luke tells us more about the conversation between Jesus and this lady (Lk.8:43-48). Jesus asked "*who touched me*". The disciples were surprised he would notice anyone touching him since there were crowds of people pressing against them. Jesus knew power had gone from him so he asked who touched him.

This does not imply that Jesus had no control over his power. There is no doubt; Jesus was always, totally in control.

Many of the multitudes had touched the Lord that day. There was only one who touched him by faith. Do we touch him by faith? When we pray, do we expect him to answer? I'm afraid we doubt even when we pray?

Mark says she came "*fearing and trembling*".

Jesus said, "*Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole*". Does this mean she got saved at this point? It is difficult to be certain but it sure does seem so. She was healed from her infirmity the instant she touched Jesus so it would seem Jesus is speaking of more than physical healing at this point.

This conversation must have been torment for Jairus. I'm sure he was not untouched by the condition of this lady, but his focus was on his daughter. We would do well to learn from this. Jesus had the situation very much in control. Aren't you glad your Savior is able to help you and the millions of others who need his help, at the exact same moment?

JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER 9:23-26

Mt 9:23 And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

They continue to Jairus' house to find people mourning the death of his daughter. It was common to have paid mourners at funerals. These "mourners" would cry, wail and cry out the name of the deceased. The "minstrels" were flute players.

The quickness of their moving in on this child's death shows they had no sympathy. They simply wanted to make their money and leave as quickly as possible.

This certainly doesn't mean there were none there who are truly heart broken. Jairus would not have traveled to find Jesus had he not loved his daughter. No doubt, many others truly were heart-broken.

Mt 9:24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

Jesus, more or less, just told them to get out of his way. He shocked them all by announcing that the girl was not really dead, but only asleep. Of course, they did not believe the Lord. They had touched the dead body. They had begun the preparations for burial.

Jesus said she wasn't dead but merely asleep. He is not saying they had made a mistake in thinking she was dead. He is saying she will be alive soon.

I am so glad that our problems are not difficult to him. Of course, she was really dead but that meant nothing to him. He was about to wake her from death. Even death has no power of the Lord of life.

They laughed and scorned him. So is the heart of the unbeliever. They can see only what is factual. They don't see beyond the problem. They see things only as they are, not as God can make them.

Mt 9:25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

She, who was dead, is now alive. What a wonder. I'd love to hear what the scoffers had to say now. I'd sure like to have seen Jairus' response.

Mt 9:26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

As with Jesus' other miracles, those who saw what happened told everyone they knew.

Some interesting points about the raising of Jairus' daughter.

- The need was great

You can't find a worse problem than being dead. What problem do you have that is impossible?

- Most of the people had given up

They were preparing for a funeral, not a miracle. They laughed and scorned Jesus when he dared to say there was hope.

- One man still believed

As far as we know, Jairus was the only one who believed.

Maybe no one else believes your problem can be fixed. They may think you are refusing to face reality. Maybe it is impossible. Maybe it seems that all hope is gone. But remember Jesus is still able.

- No one could deny what happened

Can we not trust our God? Where are the ones who will believe the impossible? When will someone finally believe that God is still God?

One thing is certain, when he moves, when he works, when he does what can't be done, even those who did not believe will have to admit....IT WAS GOD!

JESUS HEALS TWO BLIND MEN 9:27-34

Mt 9:27 And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.

Only Matthew records this account of these blind men being healed. This is the first account in the New Testament of Jesus healing the blind. There was no instance in the Old Testament of a blind person receiving their sight. This truly was an outstanding miracle.

Notice, there were two blind men. We are not told who they were but somehow these two men had found each other. When you're hurting it helps a little to find someone who is hurting. It helps to have a friend who really knows how you feel.

The simple fact that these blind men followed Jesus reveals their desire for his help. I wonder, did the Lord slow down just enough to where they could keep up?

These men call Jesus, "Son of David". This is the first time the bible records Jesus being called by this title. This was another way of calling him the Messiah. Matthew recorded Jesus' genealogy and calls him the "Son of David" (Mat.1:1).

One requirement for the one who would be the Messiah was that he be the offspring of David (2 Sam.7:13). Of course, Jesus met that requirement.

Their one request was for mercy. They knew enough to know they did not deserve what they were asking for. Mercy is for those who are needy, mercy is for those who can't help themselves, but mercy is for those who don't deserve it.

Do you realize your need for God's mercy? If you feel you deserve God's blessings, I feel sorry for you. The blessings of God are for those who realize they do not deserve them.

Our God is a God of mercy and comfort (2 Co 1:3; Eph 2:4).

I can't imagine how these men must have felt. How awful it would be to be blind. What excitement must have filled their hearts when they heard that Jesus was passing their way.

Mt 9:28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

Jesus goes into a house but that does not stop these blind men. They follow him in. They don't give up.

Jesus asks a searching question, "*Believe ye that I am able to do this*". Do you believe I can? Their response was "Yea Lord".

If he asked you that question, what would be your answer? Do we believe he can? I am sure we believe he *could*. We certainly believe that God *did* great things, but I'm not so sure we believe he *will* do great things. Our God has not changed. He's looking for someone who will not just believe he can, but will believe that he will.

Mt 9:29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

They received according to their faith. And so do we. We receive from the Lord according to our faith. Perhaps that is why we receive so little. Little faith brings little results. Great faith brings great things. We have a great God, but we have little faith. So, we receive little things even though we have a great God.

- Our lack of faith dishonors God

Lack of faith is us telling God we cannot believe him.

- Our lack of faith displeases God

God wants us to believe him. When we refuse to trust him, he is displeased. That isn't too much to ask. Trust is a vital part of any relationship. We can't please God without faith (Mk.4:40; 1 Cor.10:5; Heb.11:6).

- Our lack of faith hinders God

Since our faith moves God, our lack of faith hinders him (Ps.78:41; Mat.13:58). As Jesus said in these verses, as our faith is, so we receive from God.

- Our lack of faith hurts us

It robs us of the peace that comes when we are trusting the Lord (Jn.20:29).

There is no greater peace than that which comes to the person who completely trusts the Lord. We worry needlessly.

- Our lack of faith hurts others

Someone is watching us. There's a generation coming after us. They need to know they can trust God. They need to see faith in our lives. They need to see a people who believe their God is trustworthy.

The condition of this world will only worsen. Those coming after us will need faith more than any other generation since the beginning of time. We need to instill in them a faith that will not waver. We won't be able to do that unless we have that type of faith ourselves.

Mt 9:30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

Jesus did what they asked. He did what they needed. Nothing is impossible to him.

He told them to not tell anyone what he had done. The words, "*straitly charged*" have a sternness connected to them. Jesus did not want to be known merely as a miracle worker. The more his fame spread, the more difficult it would be to move about and do his father's will.

Mt 9:31 But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

I believe this would be one of the most difficult commandments to obey. To not tell anyone what the Lord had done, how difficult would that be? How could you keep quiet about such a wonderful miracle?

Some thoughts about these blind men.

- They realized they had a need

How ridiculous would it have been for these blind men to act like they had no problem? Unfortunately, there are many today who refuse to admit they have a need.

- They were helpless

These men asked for mercy because they knew they could not help themselves.

May the Lord show us how helpless we are. He is our only hope.

- They believed

They had faith that Jesus would meet their need and grant their request.

- They didn't give up

Jesus tested their faith by ignoring them, by continuing down the road, and by going into a house. How often do we just give up when the Lord doesn't answer the first time we call?

The fact that he did not respond to them the first time they called did not stop them. We should keep asking until he answers, or until he tells us to quit asking.

- Their faith was rewarded

They received what they needed. If we asked them if it was worth it, what do you think they would say?

- Their faith was increased

Surely this experience caused the faith of these men to grow. Seeing the power of God at work in them helped them to trust him even more. What need could they have that was too big for a God who could give them sight?

JESUS HEALS A DUMB MAN WHO WAS POSSESSED WITH A DEMON 9:32-34

Mt 9:32 As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

As these two men were leaving, another man is brought to Jesus. This man was unable to speak because he was possessed by a demon. Once again we find someone who is suffering a physical affliction because of demon possession.

We are reminded once more how Jesus does not just have power of sickness, he also has power over Satan.

Mt 9:33 And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

We are not told the details about this man's healing. All we're told is "when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake". We do know Jesus dealt with the source of the problem, not the symptom.

The crowds marvelled because they had never seen anything like this before. The Jews has a heritage of miracles. God had worked through Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and others.

But, none of them were able to do what Jesus did. Within the course of one afternoon, Jesus had healed the woman with the issue of blood, raised Jairus' daughter, given sight to two blind men, and cast out a demon.

Mt 9:34 But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

The multitudes marvelled when they heard this man speak, but the Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus.

The Pharisees could not deny the miracle, so they denied the source of the miracle. The Pharisee's hatred for Jesus surfaces here. Why did they despise him so? There is more involved here than men hating Jesus. The kingdom of darkness is opposing the kingdom of light.

How could they come to such a conclusion? The answer is simple, since they could not deny the miracle, they had to explain it. There were only two options that would explain it. It was either God, or the devil. They certainly would not admit it to be God, so they turned to only alternative available.

The attitude of these two groups is amazing. They both see the same miracle but they see it from two totally different viewpoints. Things have not changed. The so-called experts of science tell us we evolved from monkeys because the only other alternative is one they cannot accept, that is, God made all things, including mankind.

Mt 9:35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Jesus didn't fire back at the Pharisees for their attack. Instead, he simply continues to preach the truth and do what is right. Our best defense against error is truth. It will do us well to realize, we never win an argument.

What good would it have done Jesus to try to argue with these Pharisees? Instead, he continues to do what he can to reach those who will listen.

Jesus broadens his ministry and goes to the neighboring cities and villages. He went where the people were. We would do well to follow His example. I'm afraid we sit in our churches waiting for the lost to come to us. We are to go to them with the truth (Mt.28:19).

Jesus continued to preach the message of the kingdom. At this time, He was still offering the kingdom to the Jews. His message was for them to make sure they were ready for the coming of the king. God had promised the Jews a king and a kingdom (Isa.2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-9; 32:1; Ezk.34:24; 37:24; Jer.30:9; Amos 9:11; Mic.4:1-13; Zech.2:10-12).

The one requirement connected to this kingdom was repentance. Jesus came preaching "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt.4:17). As we know, the Jews did not repent. As a whole, they rejected their Messiah and his kingdom.

Mt 9:36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Once again we see the compassion of the Lord. He saw the multitudes. There are billions of people on earth; I wonder how many of them we really see.

The multitudes "fainted". The word "fainted" means to be weary or heavily burdened. There were multitudes of people searching for peace, but finding none. They had laid upon themselves the burden of keeping the law, and it wasn't working. Like anyone today who tries to do good enough to please God and go to heaven, they found themselves in bondage. There is no greater burden than the burden of trying to please God by our own merit.

Jesus was moved because he saw the people as sheep without a shepherd. There is nothing more sad than sheep that have no shepherd. Sheep are helpless without their shepherd. They depend totally on the shepherd for food, protection, and guidance.

The multitudes needed someone to guide them. Jesus was the one who could have led them into peace, but they would not accept him. So, they wandered on in their blindness.

Like sheep without a shepherd are hopeless, so is man without God.

Mt 9:37-38 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Jesus saw the multitudes as a field that was ready to be harvested.

When I think of Jesus' words in these verses, I think of the following words....

- ALERT

We should be alert. It's easy to overlook the multitudes around us who are heading to hell.

In John 4:35, Jesus said "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest".

We should be alert at all times. The next person we pass may be the one we need to witness to. If someone doesn't tell them, they will go to hell.

- ABUNDANCE

Jesus said the "harvest truly is plenteous".

When you think of a field of wheat, you don't think of one or two stalks, you think of thousands. So it is in the world around us. There are multitudes in need of a Savior.

At this time there are 7.3 billion people on earth. The vast majority do not know the Lord. The harvest truly is plenteous.

Your field is your family, friends, neighbors, those you pass in the stores, parks, or gyms, those you meet in elevators, funerals, and even at church.

- AVAILABLE

The idea is the field is ready right now for harvest. Certainly, there are many who do not want to hear the gospel. But, there are many who do want to hear. They are ready. They are longing for someone to tell them how they can find forgiveness. Who knows, the next one you witness to, may be one of the ones who is ready. So, tell them, tell them all.

- ANTICIPATION

A farmer plants his field in anticipation of a harvest. He labors hard and long, but he knows it will be worth it in the end. We should sow the seed of the gospel in faith. We should anticipate the harvest.

Don't give up if they refuse to listen the first time. Keep sowing, keep expecting. God can touch their heart. Very few get saved the first time they hear the gospel.

- ACCOUNTABILITY

We are accountable for the ones we are supposed to witness to. The Lord said they blood would be on our hands if we do not warn them (Ezk.3:17-21).

- ASK

Jesus didn't just say the harvest was plenteous, he also said the laborers are few. This was true in his day and it certainly is true in our day. How many Christians do you know who witness regularly? Do you?

Jesus tells us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send more laborers into his harvest (v.38). This is an amazing statement. Jesus is telling us to ask him to send laborers into the harvest. He wants us to ask him. He wants to send laborers, but he waits for us to ask.

- AWARDS

To those who are faithful to witness, he will give rewards.

Paul was excited about going to heaven because he knew he would see people he had led to the Lord there.

1 Th 2:19-20 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

THE KING'S MISSION JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE 10:1-42

Mt 10:1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Luke describes this event in more detail than Matthew (Lk. 6:12-16). Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. The next day, He calls all his disciples to Him and chooses twelve. He will name these twelve apostles.

The word “*disciple*” means student. Jesus calls them to do as he has done. They are to learn from him and do what he does.

There being twelve apostles probably has a relation with there being twelve tribes of Israel.

Notice, he calls them “*unto him*” and then he sends them out for him. If we expect to go out for him, we must first come to him. Unless they came to him, they would lack the power needed to do his will. So it is with us.

He sends them to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nation of Israel (v.6). God has always used people to reach people. He gave them power to cast out demons, and to heal all manner of disease. This power was to be the proof that they came from God, and was doing his work.

The first thing that catches my attention when reading through the list of disciples is the fact of how different these men are. They are from different backgrounds, different occupations, and different life experiences, yet he uses them.

This should remind us of how God can use all types of people. You may not be from the who’s who of society but the God of heaven can use you. You may not feel that you are as talented as others but God has a place for you in his work.

It isn’t our talent, our background, or our intellect that God is looking for. He is looking for someone who is available. He gives the power needed to the one who says, “here am I”.

Mt 10:2-4 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

This is the first time the names of the twelve are given. The apostles are listed in three places in the gospels (Mt.10:2-4; Mk.3:16-19; Lu.6:14-16). They not always listed in the same order but that makes no difference. Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last.

These twelve disciples were also called apostles. The word “*disciple*” means student, but the word “*apostle*” means a “delegate” or “sent out one”. Jesus is sending them in his name to act as his representatives.

They have been learning from him, now they are about to do what they have been taught.

They were much like the ambassadors our country sends out to represent America. They went in the name of the one who sent them. They spoke with the authority of the one who sent them. They were to say only what the one who sent them told them to say.

There were some specific qualifications for a true apostle. Peter explains these qualifications after Judas hung himself (Acts 1:15-26).

- An apostle had have a special calling from the Lord (Acts 1:17; Acts 9:15; Rom.1:5; Gal.1:1; Eph.4:11)
- An apostle had to be associated with the ministry of Christ (Acts 1:21-22)
- An apostle must have seen the Lord after his resurrection (Acts 1:22; Acts 22:14; 1 Cor.9:1)
- An apostle had to have a God given power to do the miraculous (Mk.3:15; Acts 2:43; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:12,15)

Other men were called apostles who were not of the twelve. Barnabas (Acts 14:4), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Andronicus and Junia (Ro.16:7), James the Lord’s brother (Gal.1:19), and Paul was an apostle “out of due time” (1 Cor.15:8-10).

The apostles were the ones God chose to establish His church (Eph.4:11). They laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).

The office of apostleship ended when these men died. There is no evidence that shows these apostles were replaced when they died.

The apostles were called for a reason, and for a certain period of time. Once that purpose had been accomplished there was no reason for any more apostles.

Mt 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

They were not to go to the Gentiles, or the Samaritans. The Gentiles were any people who were not Jews. The Samaritans were a mixed race. They were hated by Jew and Gentile.

The kingdom message for was the Jews. Jesus did not forbid his disciples from preaching to individual Gentiles or Samaritans if they encountered them along their way, but the message was primarily for Israel.

Mt 10:6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus sent them to the people of Israel. He saw the people of Israel as sheep that were lost. Israel was God's chosen people but they had wandered from his will. Jesus is sending these men in an attempt to draw Israel back to God.

I have to be honest. I think God is being better to the Jews than they deserve. He had done so much for them. He brought them out of Egyptian bondage. He provided for them in the wilderness even though they complained most of the time. He gave them the tabernacle and the temple to worship in. He sent them godly leaders to direct them. He was merciful to them during the years when they had ungodly leaders. He protected them from ungodly nations who wanted to destroy them.

But, even though God treated them in such a manner, they rejected Him, they disobeyed Him, and they worshipped false gods. And yet again, we find the Lord reaching out to Israel. Once again, we see Him being merciful.

But then, I think of me. I remember how God has been as merciful to me as He has to Israel. I, like Israel have devoured the good things of God, and lived selfishly. I also, have abused the grace and mercy of God more times than I can count.

And so, I say, thank the Lord for His mercy on undeserving people.

The apostles were sent to the lost sheep of Israel. Today our commission is to go to the world and tell everyone the gospel message (Acts 1:8).

Mark tells us Jesus sent them out two by two (Mk.6:7). This strategy still works today.

Going two by two...

- They could reach more people than if the entire group stayed together
- Having a companion helped them to serve

It has always been difficult to go out in the name of the Lord. Having a fellow Christian makes it a little easier.

- Each of them would have a witness in case of trouble

The devil will attempt to ruin the testimony of God's people. He doesn't mind lying if it will accomplish his desire. Many Christian's testimony has been ruined when accused of some inappropriate action they were not guilty of. Having another Christian with us will provide a witness to our actions.

Mt 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

They were to preach as they went. They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven was as hand. This was the same message Jesus had preached (Mt.4:17).

Jesus had come to offer the kingdom to Israel. Their king was present, if they would simply believe it and accept him.

Mt 10:8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

The apostles were given the ability to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Surely the kingdom of heaven was stronger than the kingdom of Satan.

As miraculous as it was, the apostles did raise the dead on at least two occasions (Acts 9:40-42 and Acts 20:8-12).

They had received freely, so they were to give freely. Their service and their power were to be used at no charge.

How different from so many of the preachers of today who expect and demand large sums of money.

Mt 10:9-10 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

Anyone taking a trip would take the provisions necessary for their journey. But, Jesus told the apostles to take nothing extra. They weren't even to take any money to pay for food, or a place to lodge.

A scrip was a bag used by shepherds to carry their lunch. It could be used to carry food or supplies.

It's strange that so many claim verse 8 but ignore verses 9 and 10. There are a lot of people who claim to have supernatural power with God, but they want nothing to do with the part about having nothing.

The reason Jesus gives for taking nothing extra is interesting. He says, "the workman is worthy of his meat". Those who receive from the apostles should be willing to provide their necessities.

God has always used His people to provide the need of the ministry. We can see this principle when the tabernacle was built (Ex.25:1-9).

We find this principle in the New Testament also. Paul says, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor.9:14). He means those who preach should be compensated for preaching by those who hear them.

Paul refers to an Old Testament scripture to teach this principle (1 Tim.5:17). He said the ox should not be muzzled. When an ox was used to grind grain, they allowed it to eat some of the grain as he worked.

Paul said it would be inhumane to muzzle the ox to where he couldn't eat a little while he worked. So, as the labor of the ox was that which supplied his necessary food, the labor of the servants of Christ should provide their needs.

God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor.9:7). He will reward those who trust Him and give as He leads.

Since God was sending the apostles, He would use His people to provide what they needed. They were not to depend on any of their own resources. They went out depending on God. He was sending them, and He would provide for them. If need be, He would perform a miracle in order that His servants be provided for.

Mt 10:11 And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.

There were very few hotels in Jesus' day. The custom of the day was that homeowners provide a place of lodging and food to those traveling.

The apostles were instructed to accept this hospitality from those who were godly, but to decline it from those who were ungodly.

Mt 10:12 And when ye come into an house, salute it.

It was customary to greet people as you entered their house. The common greeting was "peace be to you".

Mt 10:13 And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

The apostles were to go in peace to all. Some would receive them, but some would reject them. How they were received would determine their reaction.

The usual way to greet people was to say, "peace be to you". It was, in effect, asking God to bless the people of the home. If those in the house extended a godly response, it was evidence they were godly, and deserving of God's blessings.

On the other hand, if the people in the house did not respond in a godly manner, it proved they were not godly. In such cases, the apostles were to withdraw themselves, and their peace. God will not give his peace to those who refuse his message.

I would love to see such a spirit upon the people of God today. Just them being there, made a difference. Is this not the way it should be? Should not our presence make a difference wherever we go?

Mt 10:14 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

The fate of the people depended upon themselves. If they received the apostles and their message, they received peace.

If however, they refused the men and the message, the peace they could have enjoyed would be withdrawn.

This is true today. We forfeit His peace when we walk our way. I am convinced, it is not worth it.

The apostles were to literally shake the dust off their feet. This was a common custom which was a symbol of contempt. It was a visible sign that they regarded the place, and people cursed by God.

God is a merciful God, but His mercy does run out on those who reject Him. The Psalmist said "his mercy endureth for ever", but it doesn't endure forever for those who reject Him.

Mt 10:15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

What a terrifying verse. Jesus speaks of the severity of judgment. The severity of God's judgment is determined, at least in part, by the amount of light given. Rejecting the light of God's word is serious.

We know how Sodom and Gomorrhah was judged by God (Gen.19:1-29). He judged them quickly and severely.

But, the judgment Jesus is referring to in this verse is when those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrhah stand before God. No doubt, those who lived in those cities will be judged severely when they stand before the Lord.

And yet, Jesus said the judgment of the cities that reject the apostles will be more severe than that on Sodom and Gomorrhah. The obvious reason, these cities had rejected the great light of the apostles. Some of them had seen, and heard the very Son of God himself, and they had rejected him.

I have said often, the worse place to go to hell from, is the pew of a church that preaches the gospel. Those who hear the word and reject it will not go unpunished.

Mt 10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Jesus warns the apostles that they are being sent into unfriendly territory. This warning certainly applies to us today. Our task is to go into a world that doesn't want us, with a message they don't want to hear, and do it in a way that will cause them to accept it.

The world and the devil are not our friends. We are in the middle of a battlefield. Jesus described it like sheep going into the middle of a pack of wolves.

Jesus gives them instructions about how to handle the situation they are in. He told them to be "*wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*".

But, what does that mean?

To begin with, we need to understand, Jesus is not teaching his disciples how they can get ahead in life. He isn't trying to teach them to be good business men and outdo their competitors.

Jesus' primary thought was how his disciples could reach lost Israel with the word of God. We need to adapt the same principles today as we try to reach our world with the gospel.

Jesus said his disciples must "*be wise as serpents*". The word "wise" means to be clever or perceptive.

Serpents in Jesus' day were considered the perfect example of wisdom and perception. The snake is one of the most perceptive of God's creatures. It is very much aware of its environment. Most snakes are not aggressive and will do everything they can to avoid conflict with their predators.

So, the wisdom of the serpent speaks of its ability to avoid its enemies, and to catch its prey.

Is that not what we need to win our world? We need God's wisdom in order to avoid those who would harm us, and, at the same time, reach those who need to Lord.

Like the serpent, we need to be perceptive to those we speak to. If we confront the lost with a harsh and cruel attitude, it is unlikely we will reach them. If we have a holier-than-thou attitude we will turn people away from the gospel.

Wise as serpents means we should use spiritual discernment when dealing with the lost. Since every person we encounter is different, we need wisdom. What works with one person will not work with another.

Our message doesn't change, but our methods will. The only message we have is the gospel of Jesus Christ. How we get that message across takes God given wisdom.

Jesus also said his apostles must "*harmless as doves*".

The word "*harmless*" speaks of purity and being innocent.

Doves in Jesus' day were considered to be a perfect example of meekness and innocence.

I believe that is what Jesus was saying. He knew his disciples would need both.

- They would need meekness

They were going to be mistreated in horrible ways, but they could not fight back. The moment a Christian fights back, they have lost the opportunity to win the lost.

Stephen didn't fight back even while he was being stoned (Acts 7:60). Jesus didn't fight back. He forgave his attackers (Lk. 23:34).

Harmless as doves means to be not fight back. Even though we may be mistreated, the godly Christian does not retaliate. We will never win them if we react in an ungodly manner. It's more important to be a good witness than to defend ourselves.

- They would need innocence

How vitally important it was for his disciples (and us) to be pure and above reproach. Our lives must be beyond reproach if we are to win the lost. The world around us is evil and corrupt. We dare not live as they do.

Jesus could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin". His life was pure enough to where no one could rightly accuse him of doing wrong. Pilate said, "I find no fault in him at all". The world hated Jesus, but they were not able to bring one true accusation against him.

If we are to reach the lost world, we need to be wise like the serpent, but we also need to be pure and godly like the dove.

JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT

Mt 10:17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

Jesus tells his disciples to expect trouble. The word “*beware*” means to pay attention, or to be cautious. They were not to do anything that would put them in unnecessary danger.

He meant what he said when he said they would be like sheep among wolves. Not everyone will love them, or their message.

Jesus wanted them to realize their godly lives would not keep them from being persecuted. In fact, a godly life can be the reason for persecution. Ungodly people don't like godly people.

The “*councils*” Jesus speaks about is the judicial system that was set up in most cities. These councils would settle disagreements between parties.

They would be “*scourged*”. Scourging (whipping) was a part of the Old Testament method of punishment. This whipping was to be done in the presence of the judge and was limited to forty stripes (Dt. 25:2-3).

A note of interest. The Jews wanted to make sure they did not break the law when they scourged. To make sure they did not exceed forty stripes, they would apply only 39 stripes, just in case they had miscounted. Paul talks about receiving forty stripes, save one (2 Cor.11:24).

Notice this scourging will be done in the synagogues. The synagogue was supposed to be a place of worship. In many ways they were like our churches of today. In each of the synagogues they had an area where they would carry out scourging on those who had broken God's law.

Paul talks about beating Christians in the synagogues (Acts 22:19; 26:11).

These wonderful places of worship had been turned into places of sin. A place built that eyes might be opened to truth had become places of spiritual blindness.

A building built for love had become a place of hatred. The sacred sermon had been replaced with the crack of a whip.

Jesus is warning the apostles about the men who will attack them. The worse thing about this, those who will abuse the apostles will think they are doing God's will by doing so.

Mt 10:18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

The apostles would eventually be brought before the civil authorities like common criminals. The governors and kings were the Gentile authorities of that day. This means, the Jews would bring some of the apostles before the world's judicial system.

Who would have ever expected this? These unknown and unimportant men would cause such a stir as to cause the civil authorities to become involved.

It's amazing how much the devil hates the Lord and his people. He hates the disciple's message so much that he gets governors and kings involved in his attempt to keep them quiet.

Jesus said this mistreatment would be “*for my sake*”. The apostles weren't hated because of some wrong they had done. They were hated because they stood for the Lord. They weren't persecuted because the world hated them; they were persecuted because the world hated the one they spoke of.

The same is true today. I certainly hope our persecution isn't because of our attitude, or the way we act. If it is, we get what we deserve. So many Christians have sour attitudes and live in a way that dishonors God. If they are mistreated, it's because of how they act and certainly isn't because of a godly lifestyle.

The kind of persecution Jesus spoke of came because the disciples lived godly lives and spoke the truth. This is what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 5:11, where he said, “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake*”. Just as they lied about Jesus (Mt.26:60), what was being said about his disciples was false.

The devil and the world has always hated God's message. They did in Jesus' day and still do. We should not be surprised if we are persecuted for our walk with the Lord.

Jesus said these actions would be “*a testimony against them and the Gentiles*”. He is saying the Jews (“*them*”) and the Gentiles will be held accountable for their actions against these men of God.

The mention of Gentiles shows God's plan after the resurrection of Christ and how the gospel will be opened to Gentiles. God was not surprised when the Jews rejected His son (Jn.1:11).

Mt 10:19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

What seems to be a horrible experience will be a great opportunity for them to testify about the goodness of God. It is amazing how God can take what seems to be bad, and make something good out of it. The trials we face may be difficult, but God has a purpose with each of them. Let God turn them into a blessing!

Paul learned this. He would testify of his imprisonment and say, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; (Phil. 1:12). God had taken what seemed to be a hindrance, and made it a blessing.

Jesus tells his men to not be afraid when they are brought up to be interrogated. How can he say this? He can say it because they will not be there alone. The God of heaven will be with them. He will give them what they should say.

They are to not even give it a thought until it happens. At the proper time, God will fill their minds with the words that should be spoken.

I personally believe the concern the disciples had was not about saying something that would get them in more trouble with the officials. I believe their concern was that they not say anything that would dishonor their Lord, or anything that would not be biblical.

They realized they were spokesmen for the Lord's message. They understood the importance of their task. They realized the opportunity to speak to the civil officers of their day wasn't something that happened often, and it was nothing to take lightly. The Lord had opened a door and they wanted to do what they could to take full advantage of it.

Some have tried to use this verse to say a preacher should not prepare for the messages he preaches. Nothing could be further from the truth. Certainly the Holy Spirit will speak through the preacher as he delivers his message, but he should seek the Lord and study to prepare for the message he is to preach.

Paul would say, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Ti 2:15).

Every preacher should apply his heart to study and be prepared to preach (Pro.23:12).

Jesus' prediction was fulfilled on more than one occasion (Acts 5:26-28; 12:1-4; 23:33-35; 26:1)

Mt 10:20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

How could these simple men be prepared to speak to governors and kings? What could they possibly say in such a predicament?

The fact is, they would not have to say anything, the Lord would speak through them. The Holy Spirit would give them the words they needed to say. After all, who else would know what needed to be said?

This would not be the first time the Holy Spirit spoke through people. God told Moses He would be with him and "*will be thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say*" (Ex. 4:12).

We can rely on Him to do the same for us. We also, can be His spokesmen. But, we must be sensitive to the voice of the Spirit within us.

Will you please notice with me what we don't find in these verses? We don't find a way for them to escape their dilemma. The Holy Spirit isn't going to give them a way to talk themselves out of their problem. There are times when the Lord does not want to deliver us out of the problem, but He will always help us through the problem. In such cases, it is vitally important that we listen to Him.

Jesus wanted the apostles to be prepared for the trouble ahead. What they would endure would be difficult but it would be a lot worse had they not known it was coming. He tells them what to do when it happens. They can truly face what was coming without fear or anxiety.

Mt 10:21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

The apostles certainly endured horrible persecution. Most of them died a martyr's death. However, verses 21 to 23 seem to go beyond the experience of the apostles and speak of the events during the Tribulation Period. After all, Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples. The Jewish believers that live during the Tribulation Period will face persecution like no one else.

The message of Christ has always caused division. The division may be in one's own family. Many Christians suffer because of a family member who wants nothing to do with their beliefs. Many wives are treated badly by their husbands, husbands are ridiculed by their wives, and even children are mistreated by their parents because they are believers.

The persecution Jesus warns about will worsen. It will come to the place to where Christians will be put to death. The time will come when this division is so severe that one brother will betray another. One family member will turn another family member into the officials of that day.

This animosity will be so great that a brother will betray his brother, a father will betray his child, and a child will betray their parents. How can this happen? How can there be such a hatred for the things of God? How can a hatred for the things of God be stronger than the love of family? I can't explain it, but it is so.

Jesus will say later, "the love of many shall wax cold". He certainly knew what he was talking about. The natural love for family will fade away in many people.

Maybe we see now why Jesus told his disciples to shake the dust of these people off their feet (v.14). They reject the truth in such a severe manner as to make them unworthy of God's mercy.

Mt 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

This verse has been misused by many in an effort to teach a person can lose their salvation. The word "saved" here has nothing to do with salvation in the spiritual sense.

Jesus is explaining how difficult things will become for the child of God during the Tribulation Period. The Anti-Christ and all his followers will be in an all-out effort to put to death every believer on earth.

It will be so severe that the Jewish believers are told to flee to the mountains in order to escape the Anti-Christ. They are told to run to the mountains and not even take time to go home to get any supplies (Mk.13:14-18). Many will be put to death during this time (Mk. 13:24).

The word "saved" in verse 22 is talking about being saved from death, not being saved from sin.

Jesus is saying anyone who is able to avoid the Anti-Christ's attack and endure to the end of the Tribulation Period will be saved from death because the Lord will return to rescue them.

And how true this is, for Jesus himself will come to rescue his own. In the nick of time, Jesus will return and deal with the Anti-Christ and all those who have followed him (Rev.19:11-15; 19-21).

He will deliver his people from certain death.

Mt 10:23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

Jesus continues his instructions to those who will be persecuted. He tells them to keep on the move. They are not to give in to the persecution. They are to avoid it the best they can. He gives them the hope that will keep them going; the Son of man will come.

God will prepare a place of refuge for the people of Israel. Israel will flee to this place during the second half of the Tribulation Period (Rev.12:6). They will dwell in this place for 1260 days. Many believe this place will be the city of Petra. This city is presently deserted and lies south of the Dead Sea.

We certainly see the tenacity of the devil in verse 23. He doesn't give up. If the believers escape in one city, he'll pursue them to the next.

We also see the spirit of these believers. They would rather die than deny their Lord. The grace of God is amazing. So many of God's people have endured horrible torture, but did not deny their Lord.

Where did this strength come from? Are we to assume they were merely strong willed people? Of course not. It is the good grace of our God who gives them strength in times when they have no strength of their own. He gives them courage to face pain and death with a song in their heart and a testimony on their lips. Stephen enjoyed this amazing grace (Acts 7:59-60). This same grace is available for us today. I wonder how many of us experience this grace on a regular basis.

Mt 10:24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

The servant need not expect to be treated better than his master. If they mistreated Jesus, they certainly would his disciples.

Mt 10:25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

Jesus talks about the disciple being "as his master". The word "master" is a word used for a teacher. Any student would be pleased if they became as their teacher. It would be wonderful if the student in the math class would learn everything his teacher knows. If the person learning to play the piano becomes as great a musician as their teacher, it would be a wonderful accomplishment.

Would it not be a blessing to become like our heavenly teacher?

Wouldn't it be wonderful....

- If we could love like he did

Jesus' entire life was a display of love. John 3:16 tells it all. May the Lord touch our hearts with the same love he had. He tells us to love as he did (Jn.15:12).

- If we could show mercy like he did

Jesus showed mercy everywhere he went. He helped, healed, and forgave people who certainly did not deserve it.

May that same mercy be demonstrated in our lives. If he had not had mercy on me, I believe I would be in hell right now. If he can give me mercy, certainly I should do the same for someone else.

- If we could do the Father's will like he did

Jesus came to this world because it was the Father's will. He lived every second in submission to that which would please God. He said, "*My meat is to the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*" (Jn.4:34). How many of us can say we desire the Father's will as much as we desire our daily food?

Jesus could say, "I do always those things that please him" (Jn.8:29). I know we will never be perfect, but we come so far from being like our Lord in this regard.

If we could endure the difficulties like he did

I know Jesus was God but it still amazes me how he did not let how he was treated effect his actions.

It takes so little to stop us from doing the Lord's will. A little rain keeps a lot of Christians from going to church. If something is said that offends us, we quit serving the Lord. The slightest trial is all it takes for many Christians to give up, and quit.

May the Lord place in our hearts a desire to do His will that is so strong that nothing can keep us from doing the perfect will of God.

It is an honor to become like our Lord, even if that means we will be persecuted as he was. If we are truly walking with the Lord, it should not matter what they say about us. If they said Jesus was doing his work by the power of Beelzebub, can his servants expect any better treatment?

Mt 10:26 Fear them not therefore; for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

This speaks of how all people, saved or lost, will eventually stand before Jesus and give account of their lives. Those who are saved, at the Bema Seat (2 Cor.5:10). Those who are lost, at the Great White Throne Judgment, Rev.20: 11-15).

This verse is full of truth. It tells us the following.

- Jesus is the winner in the end

The Lord is the one who wins. He is the one who brings all things to light. It may appear that the enemy is winning for the moment, but the story isn't finished yet.

- Jesus knows all things

The only way he can know the truth in the end is to be able to see all things now. God sees all (Job 31:4; 34:21; Heb.4:13).

- The truth will be revealed

There will be nothing hidden then. All things will be revealed.

This thought can be comforting because the world lies about us so often. The persecuted saint can be encouraged by knowing the time is coming when the truth will be revealed.

This thought can also be very disturbing. It can be distressing to realize, one day all the truth about us will be revealed.

No doubt, there are things that we do not want revealed. There are some things about us that we do not even recognize ourselves at this point. To see to whole ugly truth about ourselves will be probably the worse experience we have ever had to face.

- What the world thinks about us should not matter

Jesus said the truth will be revealed in the end. The disciples were to not worry about what was said about them. The day is coming when the truth will be revealed. In that day, all will see who was right and who was wrong.

- Our motives will be revealed

The Lord is concerned with what we do. He is also with *why* we do what we do. Our motives do matter. A Sunday School teacher may teach a wonderful lesson. All we know is what he teaches, we cannot see why he teaches. If he teaches in order to get attention and to be recognized, this will be revealed, and he will lose a reward he could have received.

- All are accountable

No one escapes the Lord. All will stand before him sooner or later.

Those who are saved will stand before him at the Bema Seat. They will receive or loose rewards according to how they lived their Christian life on earth (1 Cor.3:11-15; 2 Cor.5:10).

Those who are lost will stand before him at the Great White Throne Judgment. They will be cast into the Lake Of Fire (Rev.20:11-15).

Mt 10:27 What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

The apostle's message was to come from the Lord himself. They were not to preach their personal beliefs, opinions, or experiences. They may have been wrong. Our opinion does not matter. Only what the Lord says that can always be trusted.

They were to hold nothing back. They were to repeat exactly what they heard. What the Lord said to his disciples was needed by those who heard them speak.

We desperately need to hear from God. What hope do we have if God is not speaking?

What he said to them "*in darkness*" (in private) they were to "*speak in light*" (to everyone).

There is no greater privilege than to be a spokesman for the Lord. This certainly is true of preachers but it's also true of the Christian who witnesses for the Lord.

They were to speak the message from the housetops. I think this can have two meanings.

First, Jesus has in mind that his disciples share his messages to individuals. Since the roofs were flat they provided a place where the home owner could sit and relax. In such a hot climate this was a place they used often. Family and friends would meet together on their rooftops.

This provided an excellent place for the disciples to meet with individuals and share the Word of God one on one.

Secondly, Jesus has in mind that his disciples literally shout his message from the rooftops. A rooftop provided an excellent place to preach the word of God to whoever was within hearing distance. This method of delivering the word was much like the street preaching of our day. They preached to whoever would listen.

Either way, they were not to keep the message to themselves. The same is true of us today. We have a message that will save any sinner. How can we keep quiet? If you had a cure for cancer certainly you could not keep it to yourself.

We have a message more valuable than a cure for cancer. And yet, we let lost people pass us every day and refuse to give them the message that would deliver them. How can we do such a thing? How can our hearts be so hard?

Mt 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell..

This is the second of three times in this chapter that Jesus tells his disciples to not fear (vv.26,28,31). Even though Jesus knew his disciples would suffer he tells them to not fear. Their enemies may take their physical life (body), but they could not take their spiritual life (soul).

When we fear God, we do not have to fear any man.

The child of God need not fear any man because their heavenly Father watches over them at all times. Paul reminds us of this fact when he wrote, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro 8:31).

Even though Jesus tells them (and us) to not fear, he goes on to say we should fear the one who has the power to send someone to hell. He is not suggesting that a true disciple can lose their salvation and go to hell as a result. He is merely pointing out the fact of how physical (temporary) things are not as important as spiritual (eternal) things.

The people who will persecute the apostles may be able to take their lives but they can no touch their souls. They cannot do any permanent damage.

We know the earthly bodies of the unbelievers will be raised in order to be punished forever (Rev.20:13-14). But, Jesus' words in verse 28 indicate those who go to hell with have some type of body. The rich man felt the pain of hell (Lk.16:23-24). He was able to speak; he had eyes and a tongue (v.23).

The torment of hell will be physical and spiritual. The pain of fire for the body and the pain of the emotions for the soul. Perhaps the worse torment will be the torment in the mind of the forever condemned person.

The word "destroy" does not mean annihilation. It is the same Greek word translated "perish" in John 3:16. The soul will last forever, either on the streets of heaven, or in the pits of hell.

The word "hell" in this verse is the Greek word Gehenna. This speaks of the lake of fire (Mt.9:47; Rev.20:10).

A note of interest:

Some have actually said "him" in verse 28 is speaking of the devil. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only God has the power over life and death, heaven and hell.

Mt 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

Jesus continues his advice to his disciples about going out to deliver his message. He reminds them of how important they are to him. He uses an example of sparrows to make his point. A sparrow was one of the smallest, and least valuable, of all birds.

In Jesus' day sparrows were sold at the market two for a farthing. A farthing was one tenth of the Roman penny.

Jesus said in Luke 12:6 that five sparrows were sold for two farthings. These birds were so small, if the buyer bought four, they were given the fifth at the same price.

To say the least, the sparrow was a bird that everyone thought was unimportant and insignificant. Yet, God is very much involved in the life of every sparrow. There are millions of sparrows that live where no man will ever see them. But, our God knows every one of them.

The words "without your Father" mean much more than just that He knows when a sparrow dies. It actually means He controls its fall. God has to give His permission for it to die.

These words remind us of how God controls even the smallest matters of this earth. If He is in control of these matters, how is it that we worry? If He cares for the sparrows, certainly He can be trusted to take care of His children. The care of our heavenly Father is so great, we ought never fear.

Mt 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

How many hairs do you have on your head? To tell the truth, other than the fact that mine are getting fewer by the day, I couldn't care less. But God does. This is a simple way to say, there isn't anything He doesn't know about us.

Mt 10:31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

This is the third time Jesus tells his disciple to fear not in this chapter (vv.26,28,31).

It's important to remember, Jesus said these things while talking about his disciples going out to tell his message. They could expect to be persecuted. But, even if you may be going through the worse experience of your life, you can remember, He knows what you are going through. Like the sparrows, He will not allow anything to happen to you that isn't His will. And, like the sparrows, He is very much aware of your situation. You are not alone.

Mt 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

The word "confess" in this verse is the same word translated "profess" in 1 Timothy 6:12. There, Paul says, "hast professed a good profession before many witnesses". This word is translated "confession" in Romans 10:10, where it is referring to a person who acknowledges the fact that they have been saved.

This helps us to understand what Jesus is talking about here. To "confess" him is to acknowledge publicly our dependence on him for our salvation. Peter made this type of confession (Mt.16:16), so did the eunuch (Acts 8:37). My question to you dear friend, have you? Are you certain about your salvation? Do you remember the time when you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

Those who confess him in this life will be confessed by him in heaven (Mt.25:21). Jesus will claim the believers. He will say, "this one is one of mine".

Jesus made it very clear; our eternal destiny depends on how we respond to him.

Mt 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Many claim to be going to heaven, but only those who have been saved by the blood of Christ are really going. Those who do not call on him now, will be denied by him when they stand before him.

They will hear the saddest words ever spoken, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt 7:23).

Mt 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

Even though Jesus' message was a message of peace it caused division.

He truly was the Prince of peace (Isa.9:6), but the effects of his coming caused much turmoil. There can't be total peace when there is disagreement about the most important thing on earth, how to get to heaven.

A sword speaks of disagreement and discord.

No doubt, this statement caused confusion for the disciples. They were expecting a Messiah to come. They expected him to deliver them from Roman oppression, and set up the kingdom that had been promised in the Old Testament (2 Sam.7:12-16; 2 Chr.6:15; Isa.2:2-4; Isa.9:7; Isa.11:6-9; Isa.65:20-25; Ps.89:3-4).

We can be assured; God has not forgotten His promise to Israel. Jesus will return at the end of the Tribulation Period and set up this kingdom, just as he promised (Mt.19:28; Mt.25:31; Rev.20:1-5).

Mt 10:35-36 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

There are times when this division is within a family. Those who are not believers are opposed to those who believe. It is the unbelievers that cause this division, not the believer. The sinful heart of the unbeliever refuses to accept even the tender love that comes from the Christian.

Mt 10:37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

This statement is simple. We should love Jesus more than anyone, including those of our own family.

How do we determine how much we love someone? We want to please the one we love, we put the one we love before ourselves, and the one we love comes first. If our families (or anyone) have more control over us than Jesus, we do not love him more.

Jesus certainly isn't saying it is alright to mistreat our family. Family is vitally important. Neglecting or abusing our families is unspiritual and displeasing to God (Dt.27:16; Lev.19:3; Pro.15:5; Pro.25:22).

Mt 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

In that day when a criminal was found guilty of a crime that was worthy of death, the method of execution would often be crucifixion. Part of the sentence was the criminal was compelled to carry their cross to the place of execution. Jesus carried his cross until he fell under the load (Mt.27:32).

Bearing a cross became a phrase that implied pain, suffering, disgrace, and death.

A cross certainly implies pain, suffering, and disgrace, but its primary function was to kill. I'm convinced that is what Jesus has in mind when he talked about his disciples taking up his cross.

Following Jesus will be a path that involves hardship, it is a path that involves difficulty, but it is a path that involves death. We must die out to self. We cannot do our will and the Father's will at the same time. Paul talked about dying daily (1 Cor.15:31). We need to die out to our flesh every day.

The path that led Jesus was the path of obedience to his Father's will. The same is true for us. Bearing our cross means we walk the path God has designated for us.

Jesus is making it crystal clear; those who follow him will suffer. However, his path is still the best path. The rewards are worth the pain. Here and now, we will enjoy the reward of knowing we are pleasing our Lord. Later, we will enjoy the rewards of heaven.

Refusing to take Jesus' cross can be summarized simply; a person does what they want to do instead of what God wants them to do.

Mt 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Those who seek to live their lives for themselves will lose real life in the process. Many people think they are living by indulging in the things of this world. Little do they know that in the process of seeking to find something to make them happy, they are missing the one thing that can give them real happiness.

On the other hand, when a person gives up their life for the Lord and his will, they will discover what true living is all about. I can honestly say, I had no idea what life was until I met the Lord. I tried many things, but none of them satisfied. But, then I met the Lord. And, by doing so, I found real life.

The person who does not have Christ has no idea what real life is. Is your life empty? Is there something missing? Perhaps, the reason is because you have not yet really met Jesus. Make sure today.

Mt 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

The word "receiveth" has the idea of the custom of homeowners receiving travelers in their homes for the night. This custom was more than just good manners. Being received by a home owner would be a great blessing to a weary traveler. They had a place to rest, eat, and sleep. The harshness of desert travel would have made it inhuman to refuse a weary traveler. The bible is filled with examples of such hospitality (Gen.18:3-5; Gen.24:28-32; Ex.2:20; Judges 13:15; 2 Kgs.4:8-11).

A person received a disciple of Christ by believing their message and by assisting them in their ministry in some manner. Believing the message came first. No one would assist a disciple if they did not believe the message they preached.

Those who receive Jesus' disciples are receiving Jesus; those who receive Jesus are receiving the heavenly Father ("*him that sent me*"). The disciples were merely messengers of the Lord. Naturally, those who received the messenger were receiving the one the message was about.

Mt 10:41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Jesus had spoken about those who would mistreat his disciples, now he speaks about those who would assist them. He promises a reward to those who will aid his disciples.

Those who receive a prophet because he was a prophet will receive the type of reward a prophet will receive. Receiving a prophet shows the host has a great respect for the man of God. He recognizes the importance of the prophet's ministry and he wants to assist him in any way he can. This person receives the reward because they did something to aid Jesus' disciples.

By assisting the prophet the host becomes a part of the prophet's ministry. Their assistance helped enable the prophet continue to serve the Lord. They have a little bit to do with every message the prophet preached, every soul that was saved, and every person who was helped.

Those who receive a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a reward. This implies the person who receives the righteous man does so because they love righteousness. They want to be a help to anyone who lives a righteous life. The person who loves godliness shall receive the reward of the godly.

These verses remind us of the connection Christians have. We do not labor alone. Those who assist the prophet are partially responsible for the results of the prophet's ministry. Had they not assisted him, he would not have been able to accomplish as much for the Lord.

These verses also remind us of how we can do something for the glory of God. Assisting the preachers, missionaries, and other servants of the Lord is a vital part of the cause of Christ. You may not preach, but you can help those who do. You may not go to the mission field, but you can help send those who go.

Mt 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Jesus called his disciples, "little ones".

A deed as insignificant as giving a disciple a cup of cold water will not be forgotten. It isn't just the size of the act; it is the motive of the heart that matters. Their love makes the difference. The simple act of giving a cup of water reveals a genuine love for the Lord and his disciples.

Jesus said he would not forget the smallest of services from his disciples.

THE REJECTION OF THE KING BEGINS

In chapters 11-27 we see the evidence of Jesus being rejected as the Messiah. Jesus will warn the unbelievers.

He will begin to speak in parables that they might not understand his message. God won't force mankind to hear His message.

JOHN THE BAPTIST SENDS MESSENGERS 11:1-15

Mt 11:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

Jesus ends his instructions to his disciples. This refers to him sending the disciples out to preach the Word of God (Mt.11:5-6). Later, the disciples would meet with Jesus and tell him what had happened (Mk.6:30).

Jesus is alone now. But, he does not sit idle, he goes to teach and preach in the cities of the disciples

Notice, Jesus preached but he also taught the Word of God. There seems to be a group today who resist the idea of teaching.

No doubt, preaching is necessary and has no substitute. However, the same is true of teaching. I think we need a better understanding of both, teaching and preaching. Both are vitally needed.

Mt 11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

John the baptist has been put in prison by Herod because he spoke against Herod's sin with his sister-in-law. Herod would eventually have John put to death (Mk.6:17-19).

While in prison John sends two of his followers to ask Jesus a question.

Mt 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Some believe John sent these men because they were the ones who were doubting. Even though I understand why they believe that, I disagree. If it was their faith that was lacking, Jesus would have merely spoken directly to them and not given them a message to take back to John (v.4).

In one way John's doubt is shocking. After all, he was the one who baptized Jesus, he heard the voice of the Father from heaven, and he saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus (Mt.3:13-17). How could anyone who had that type of experience ever doubt?

On the other hand, John's doubt is totally understandable. Like all the Jews, John had expected the Messiah to come with might, overthrow Rome, and set up a kingdom.

He probably expected Jesus to have already started his attack on Rome by now. Instead of John being a part of a mighty revolution, he is in prison. Instead of fighting, Jesus is healing the sick and helping the needy. To make matter worse, Jesus has been rejected by many (Mt. 8:34).

We should remember there had been many false prophets. Could Jesus be another one? No doubt John thought through every Old Testament promise he could think of. He tried to determine if Jesus lined up with what the Word said. Yet, he could not get settled on the issue. The doubt lingered. If Jesus was the Promised One why was he in prison?

We must not think this is a lapse of John's overall faith. Jesus' response will make that clear (v.11). He still believes a Messiah will come. However, John is wondering if Jesus is the one they have been looking for. Is Jesus the Messiah, or should they look for another?

Doubt can be such a frightening thing. It's interesting to note that when the New Testament deals with doubt it is mostly speaking about believers. Seldom does the bible talk about doubt in unbelievers.

That makes sense when you think about it. I mean, you have to believe something before you can doubt it.

John's doubt should warn us. If the mighty John the baptist could doubt, certainly we can. This shows us no matter what experience we have had, we can still doubt. The devil whispers his lies in the ear of God's greatest believers.

We can be assured that John's faith was strong when he was first put in prison. After all, he could expect opposition if there was going to be a revolution. But time has gone by. He has had been in prison long enough to start wondering. Our faith is tried when trials go long. It's easy to believe when we first enter a trial, but when it runs long, it's easy to doubt.

John's response to his doubt should be a lesson to us. When he doubted he went to the right source to get the answer. He knew Jesus would tell him to truth. We defeat doubt with truth and with the facts. Only Jesus can tell us what is the real truth.

When you doubt, go to the truth and believe it. We can be sure about what the Word of God says. No matter how convincing the devil can be, he cannot undo the truth of Scripture.

We must remember how important it is to know the truth. If we are ignorant to the Word we have no defense to the lies of the devil.

JESUS DEFENDED JOHN THE BAPTIST 11:4-15

Mt 11:4-5 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Jesus did not rebuke John. What he did was send John evidence that would help him conquer his doubt.

I am thankful to hear Jesus' response to John. He did not attack John. Instead, he was tender.

Jesus sends John's disciples back to John with a message that is based on the Word of God. The ministry of Jesus had been exactly as Isaiah had written. Isaiah talked about the Messiah preaching good tidings unto the meek, binding up the brokenhearted, and setting captives free (Is 61:1).

The Messiah was to be a person of power but he was also to be a man who did many wonderful works for those in need. That's exactly what Jesus had been doing. Jesus would judge when the time was right but that time had not yet come.

Luke wrote about this occasion and includes something that Matthew does not mention. Jesus actually performed some miracles in the presence of John's disciples (Lk.7:19-22). In other words, he proves he is the Messiah. Jesus could have simply told John's disciples about the wonderful miracles he had been doing. But, he didn't want them to just hear about it, he wanted them to see it for themselves.

Hearing about the amazing things God has done is wonderful. But, seeing it with your own eyes is so much better. That's one of the problems of our day. So many Christians have only heard about what God has done in the past. However, there are a vast number who have not seen it for themselves.

He told John's disciples to tell John "again". The message was the same. Jesus didn't show John something new. The old message was that which would give him assurance. We need not look for a new message today. The old message worked for John and it will work for us.

Why did Jesus not rebuke John for his doubt? He certainly rebuked others for doubting (Mt.6:30; 8:26; 12:31; 14:31; 16:8-11; 17:20). I believe it was because of John's overall faith. He believed a Messiah was coming. He did not doubt that in the least. He simply wasn't sure if Jesus was the Messiah.

Mt 11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

The word “*offended*” means to stumble. To many, Jesus was a stumbling block (1 Pet.2:8). Jesus is saying happy is the one who believes I am the Promised One. Jesus’ ministry was offensive to those who longed for political deliverance from Rome. But, it was a blessing to those who were not offended.

Mt 11:7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

The multitude must have been close enough to where they heard the conversation between Jesus and John’s disciples. Many of them had heard John preach and now they know he is having some doubts.

As John’s disciples are leaving, Jesus speaks to the multitudes about John. He asks them a simple question, “what went ye out into the wilderness to see”. They had gone to hear John. Now they are thinking, if John was doubting, maybe they shouldn’t believe what he said.

Jesus describes John. He was a man who lived in the wilderness. He was a man’s man. He was not like a reed that would shake at the slightest breeze (Mt.3:1).

John was bold enough to preach the truth to all. He was the one who looked the Pharisees and Sadducees in the eye and called them a bunch of snakes (Mt.3:7). John was humble enough to know his own flaws. When Jesus came to be baptized, John said, “I have need to be baptized of thee” (Mt.3:14). John was a man who hated sin. When he stood before king Herod he told him in no uncertain terms that it was a sin for him to live with his sister-in-law (Mk.6:18).

John was not the type of preacher who bowed to the opinion of man. He would never be controlled by anyone. If they were wanting a wishy-washy preacher they could have found one under every rock. There was many of that sort at the Temple. But John would never be that type of man.

We are warned to not waver. James warns us about being double minded (Jam.1:8). Paul tells us to not be carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph.4:14).

The bible tells us that a time will come when people will not accept sound doctrine. Instead of a preacher who tells the truth as it is, they’ll want someone to tickle their ears (2 Tim.4:3). We are there!

Mt 11:8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

John wasn’t a man who had to have the luxuries of life. He dressed in camel’s hair and lived on locusts and wild honey (Mt.3:4).

John truly was an example of a person who refused the things of the world. He didn’t live the way he did in an attempt to appease God. He wasn’t try to earn forgiveness by giving up things.

We must recognize the connection between John’s separated life and his power with God. Jesus himself said there was never a man greater than John the baptist. He preached the message of God with a power that few, if any ever had.

I’m certainly not trying to imply that if we give up the luxuries of this world we will automatically have power with God. It wasn’t just John’s sacrifice of things that gave him power. It was his dedicated life.

His lifestyle may have not been easy, but I’m sure if we asked him, he would say it was worth it.

Mt 11:9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

John certainly was a prophet. Like all true prophets, John had strong moral convictions (Mt.3:7-8), he led a clean life, he had a zeal for the things of God, he was fearless, and he preached the Word without fear or apology (Mt.3:2-3). John’s life was one that put Jesus Christ first and himself last (Jn.3:30).

John lived such a spiritual life that people wondered if he was the Messiah (Lk.3:15). He was indeed a unique individual. John had taken the Nazarite vow. This was a vow whereby a Jew would dedicate themselves to the Lord and His will (Num.6:1-21).

The Nazarite vow consisted of three things.

ONE...they were to abstain from grapes, wine, any produce of the vine, and all strong drink. (Nu 6:3–4).

Abstaining from wine and all products of the vine shows of a life that is not controlled by temporary pleasures.

This part of the Nazarite vow deals with a person who is resisting a life of ease and is dedicating themselves to the spiritual matters of life.

TWO... they were forbidden to cut their hair. Nu 6:5

The long hair would be a visible sign of the Nazarites dedication to the Lord.

THREE... they were to not touch or come close to any dead body even if a parent or sibling dies. Nu 6:6–7

The separation from dead things speaks of desire to avoid any thing that is corruptible. Touching a dead body made a person ceremonially unclean.

The bible records three men who were Nazarites for life, Samson (Judges 13:4), Samuel (Sam. 1:11) and John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15).

Usually, this vow was taken for a limited period of time (Num.6:8,13a). However, John had made this vow for life.

Jesus said John was a prophet, but more than a prophet. What did he mean? John was a prophet in that he told what was going to happen. But, he was more than a prophet because his life was a display of prophecy.

Mt 11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

John was one of the ones the Old Testament prophets prophesied about. He not only preached the Scripture, he was a fulfillment of Scripture.

He was the forerunner the Old Testament spoke about (Isa.40:3; Mal.3:1; Mt.3:3).

Mt 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Jesus said there is no one greater than John the baptist. What a statement. This is not the opinion of a man. This isn't what one of John's best friends would say about him. This is God speaking. Jesus didn't say this just to make John feel better; he said it because it was the truth.

Who do you think is the greatest of all believers? Would you say it was Abraham, or Moses, or David, or maybe Elijah? Jesus said the greatest was John the baptist.

John was greater than all the Old Testament prophets because he actually lived what they only talked about. He was the fulfillment of what they wrote about. They wrote about the forerunner, John was the forerunner. John had the privilege of introducing the Messiah to the world.

John was the greatest because he was the end of the Old Testament prophets and the beginning of the New Testament believers.

Jesus' response not only helps to assure John, but it also defends John's reputation against those who would use this attack his character. As with us, there were many in that day that would love to defame one of Jesus' disciples. If his disciples can be defamed the message they preach will be rejected.

Jesus continues by saying, "*notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*". He has just said John the baptist was the greatest of all. Now, he says the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

The least in the kingdom is greater than John because he would not live to see the fulfillment of the gospel message. He would not see crucifixion (Mt.27:31-54), or resurrection of Christ (Mt.28:1-6). He would know nothing about the pouring out of the Spirit as Pentecost (Acts 2). He had not known what it was like to have the fullness of the Spirit dwelling in him continually (Jn.14:16).

We who are believers have so much to be thankful for. God has blessed us in so many ways. He has equipped us for whatever battle we face. He has given us the Holy Spirit who enables us to do a work for Him. We have a completed, inerrant bible we can trust. We have a unity with each other that no other dispensation of believers has known.

Mt 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

To say the least, this is a difficult verse to explain. Jesus said "*from the days of John the Baptist until now*". So, we know he is talking about something that has happened since John started preaching.

He said, "*the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence*". There are two ways to translate this phrase.

One, it can be taken in a negative sense. In other words, Jesus is saying the kingdom of heaven is suffering violence from violent men. The devil is doing all he can to defeat the kingdom. We certainly see this happening. The Pharisees and Scribes have done everything they can to stop the kingdom. They will not quit until they have the Son of God crucified.

Two, it can be taken in a positive sense. In other words, Jesus is saying the kingdom is suffering violence by those who are flocking to John and the message he preached. These people are so eager to hear the message they rush to John, and later to Jesus.

The publicans, harlots, and sinners flocked to John and Jesus. They did not have the pride the Pharisees had. They recognized their need of forgiveness. With earnest (violently) they sought the forgiveness offered them.

Jesus uses the word "violence" because of the battle a lost person goes through when under conviction. If you are truly saved, you will remember this fight. No doubt, it was violent.

- There's the battle with the devil

The devil fights for the soul of the lost person. He does all he can to stop the person from getting saved.

- There's the battle with the flesh

There is a battle with the flesh of the lost person. The flesh does not want to give up the sin. The flesh resists the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and does all it can to keep the lost person from getting saved.

- In John's day, there was the battle because of persecution

Those who trusted Christ in John's day knew they would be persecuted for their faith. I doubt if there were many false professions when John or Jesus preached. The sinners realized the cost before they believed on Christ. If anyone made a profession, they meant business.

There is still a cost for being a disciple of Christ. The disciple's cross has not been taken away. I am grieved by the so-called evangelism of our day that makes the sinner think there is no cost in getting saved. Many sinners are led to believe getting saved is the way to get rid of all your problems and be guaranteed a life of health and wealth.

Jesus talked about a violence with those who are thinking about getting saved. We need this type of "violence" among believers. How different would the cause of Christ be if all believers sought the Lord's will violently?

What is every Christian was violent in serving God? John certainly was. What if every preacher prepared and preached his messages with a violence? What if every Sunday School teacher was violent in their preparation of their lessons? What if every Christian sought to win the lost with a violence? What a difference we would see in our churches.

Mt 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The "law" is speaking of the first five books of the Old Testament. The "prophets" is speaking of the rest of the Old Testament.

All the prophets of the Old Testament were leading to the time of John the baptist. Every message preached in the Old Testament was pointing towards the one who would point to Jesus. The prophets announced, "the Messiah is coming", only John could announce, "the Messiah is here". In John the old was fulfilled and the new began.

Mt 11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

Elias is the Greek mode of the Hebrew word Elijah.

Jesus explains how John is the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Mal.4:5-6). He will say later that Elias had come but they would not accept him (Mt 17:11). He did not mean John was Elijah come back from the grave. John himself said he was not Elijah (Jn.1:21). Jesus is saying John was a man much like Elijah. When describing John the baptist the angel Gabriel said he would go "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk.1:17).

John was *like* Elijah. He was rugged, nonconforming, and had the Spirit of God upon him.

A note of interest: Elijah did not die. He went to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs.2:11). Elijah may come again before the Second Coming of Christ. More than likely, he will be one of the two witnesses that will preach during the Tribulation Period (Rev.11:3-12).

Mt 11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This statement reminds us the importance of the Spirit in revealing truth. Unless the Lord opens our ears, we will not hear. The things of God are spiritually discerned (1 Cor.2:14).

Jesus spoke because he wanted people to accept his message. He didn't talk just to hear himself speak. His message had the power to change lives. His message was able to bring forgiveness, peace, joy, and contentment.

But, his message was one that cut deep. It revealed the truth about a person. It showed them their sin and their need of forgiveness. Those who would hear him, he would help. Those who refused his message, he could do nothing for.

As in Jesus' day, it is vitally important that we be open to what the Spirit says. Those who are open to the truth will find the knowledge they need in Jesus' words. Spiritual truth is received by the Spirit of God.

OPPOSITION TO THE KING 11:16-24

Mt 11:16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

Jesus draws a word picture to describe the people of his day. He likens them to little children that couldn't be satisfied. He says they are like the little children who play in the market.

The market was an open area in the middle of town that was set up all types of goods. Vendors would bring their items to sale, so it was full of people and activity. These families would bring their children when they came to the market. These children would join their friends whose parents had also there, and they would play games while their parents shopped.

Mt 11:17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

Jesus said, "*we have piped unto you*". He's talking about the games the children played while at the market. One of the games they played was wedding. They would pretend to be at a wedding. They would laugh and sing as though they were actually at a wedding.

Jesus also said "*we have mourned unto you*". Another game the children played at the market, was funeral. They would pretend to be at a funeral.

They would pretend someone had died and they would cry and moan as though they were really at a funeral.

But, notice what else Jesus said. He said, we piped, "*and ye have not danced*". He said, we mourned, "*and ye have not lamented*".

He's talking about children at the market who refuse to play no matter what the game is. The children say "let's play wedding", but they don't want to play wedding. So the children say "if you don't want to play wedding, let's play funeral". But, they don't want to play funeral either.

So, what does Jesus mean? He is pointing out the fact that those who he is speaking to are never satisfied. He continues this thought in the next verse.

Mt 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

John came with a somber attitude. He didn't drink wine, he fasted often, and he avoided all types of worldly amusements. And how did they treat him? They said he had a demon.

Just like the little children in the market. They didn't want anyone so serious. They weren't interested in a lifestyle so extreme.

Mt 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Jesus continues his explanation of the people by reminding them about himself (*Son of man*). Jesus went to weddings (Jn.2:3), he went to funerals (Lk.7:11-16), he was a friend to those in sin, yet they rejected him just like they did John.

John lived in the wilderness and they said he was out of his mind and had a demon. Jesus lived among the people and they said he was a drunk and a partier. This was a proof of their hard hearts. The bottom line is, if someone doesn't want to hear the message, they will think of some excuse not to.

A note: Jesus didn't partake of their sin but he did all he could to reach them. One of the worse mistakes of the modern church is our idea of separation. We should be separate from the world (2 Cor.6:17; 2 Cor.7:1; Nu.16:21, 26; Isa.52:11). However, if we are to reach the world for Christ we must associate with the sinner. Certainly, we should not be their best friend, and partake of their sin, but we should reach out to them in Christian love.

Jesus is making the point that even though his and John's their style of ministry was different, their message was the same. It shouldn't be the style of preacher but the content of the preacher's message we are interested in.

I am grieved about how we are so controlled by personality and style in our day. If the preacher isn't our style of preacher, we don't even want to hear him. Style and personality shouldn't be the most important factor, the content of what they preach should be most important.

The wonderful thing about the work of God is the fact that He will use totally different people. Whether it's the leather lunged country preacher, or the polished up-town orator, God will use anyone who is willing.

Jesus said "*wisdom is justified of her children*". He's saying wisdom is proven by its results.

The wisdom in John's and Jesus' message was proven to be true by the changed lives. They may doubt the methods of John and Jesus, but they could not deny the results. Lives had been changed by the power of their message.

The wisdom of John's message which spoke of the need to repent, and the wisdom of Jesus' message that spoke of the way to salvation was proven to be true by the lives that had been changed. The proof was in the results.

I can testify to this fact. I believed the message of the gospel and it changed me. I am not the person I used to be.

Mt 11:20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

In this verse Jesus lets us know the primary reason he did the miracles he did. He did it that they might repent. All he did was in an effort to get them to see their need of forgiveness.

Jesus begins to talk about the price of ignoring the voice of God. He rebukes the cities that had ignored his message.

They rejected him in spite of the fact that he did many unexplainable works in these cities. They had refused to repent, and they would pay.

Mt 11:21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

This verse tells us that God knows all things. He even knows what would happen if things had been different. He knows what would have happened if you had been born in another country, or at a different time, or a different sex. He knows what would have happened if you had gotten that job you wanted so much. I'm glad we have such a God.

He mentions two cities by name. Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities near Capernaum where Jesus had his headquarters for a while. They were witnesses to so many mighty works; they certainly should have believed and accepted Jesus.

John said if everything Jesus did was written, the world could not contain the books that would need to be written (Jn.21:25). There is no telling what all these people saw and heard. Yet, with all his miracles, they rejected him and his message.

Jesus also speaks about Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were cities on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. They were seaport cities so they were filled with sin of every sort. They had all the riches, the luxury, and the debauchery their wicked hearts could desire. Both of these cities were deep into Baal worship. The Old Testament speaks of the wickedness of these cities (Isa. 23:1-17; Amos 1:9; Joel 3:6)

Had the works Jesus did in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in "sackcloth and ashes". Sackcloth was a coarse material, like canvas. The extremely poor dressed in sackcloth but it was also worn as a sign of intense grief. The Jews would throw ashes on their heads to express extreme grief (Job 1:20; Jer.6:26). Jesus is saying they would have repented in a deep and genuine sorrow.

Mt 11:22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

In the eyes of a Jew, there was no place more wicked and more deserving of punishment than the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Yet, Jesus said their punishment will be less than that of Chorazin and Bethsaida.

More "tolerable" indicates there are degrees of punishment in hell. The bible makes it clear, there will be different degrees of punishment in hell (Ps.62:12; Pro.24:12; Jer.17:10; Ezk.18:20, 30; Rom.2:6; Rev.20:12).

We should not assume from this that there will be some in hell who will not suffer. All who end up in hell will suffer indescribable agony. Those who suffer the least in hell will be in indiscernible pain (Lk.16:23-24).

One of the greatest factors that determine the degree of punishment is the light the person had. Those who have more light are more accountable. Jesus talked about a servant (Lk. 12:47). The servant knew his lord's will but did not do it. Therefore, he was beaten with many stripes. In other words, he suffers a greater punishment.

Those who sit in church, hear the Word, see God move, and still reject Him, are the ones who will suffer the worse punishment in hell. It isn't just the amount of sin they committed, it's the amount of light they had.

Mt 11:23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Capernaum was a city on the north-west corner of the sea of Tiberius. Jesus spent a good bit of time in and around this city. He did many mighty works there. He healed the centurion's servant (Mt.8:13), he raised Peter's mother in law (Mt.8:15), he healed the demoniac of Gadara (Mt.8:28-32), and he healed the paralyzed man (Mt.2-8).

Jesus also mentions Sodom in this verse. We all know about the ungodliness of Sodom (Gen.19). He says if the works that were done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, they would have repented, and God would not have been destroyed it.

Jesus speaks in figurative language in this verse. Capernaum had, as it were, been "exalted unto heaven" by the blessing of having the God in flesh walk in their midst and do so many great works. But, it would be "brought down to hell" because they had rejected the Lord. As Jesus predicted, in less than forty years Capernaum was destroyed by the Romans.

If Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are bound for judgment, how much more is America? Our country was founded on godly principles. We have been blessed with so much light. We have so many modern marvels to aid us to know the Word of God. I fear what might be ahead if we don't repent quickly.

Mt 11:24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

The cities that didn't accept Jesus were judged in this life but the individuals in those cities will be judged in the next life. Every lost person will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

If someone asked me which was the most wicked city in the bible, I would probably say Sodom. But, Jesus says the most wicked is the city of Capernaum. It wasn't because of their horrible sins. As far as we know they were not guilty of such deeds. It wasn't because of homosexuality, or drunkenness, or harlotry. We have no record that indicates they were involved with the things.

Jesus implied that Capernaum was the most wicked city simply because they ignored his message. They didn't mistreat him horribly, they didn't arrest him, and they didn't whip him, all they did was ignore him.

This lets me know that the worse sinners are not those who are into the most vile deeds we could think of, the worse sinners are those who think they good enough to where they don't need forgiveness. Even God can't help the person who will not admit they need help.

Mt 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Before I make any comment about the meaning of this verse I'd like to address the title Jesus gives his Father. He called Him "*Lord of heaven and earth*". I am so glad that is true. He is indeed the Lord of everything. He is Lord of what you're going through right now, hear Him, trust Him, and obey Him.

When Jesus talked about the wise and the prudent (learned) he was talking about those who *thought* they were wise and prudent. Man's philosophy has always been contrary to the gospel message. Jesus probably has the Pharisees and scribes. Their pride refused to allow them to admit their need.

The time came when God "*hid these things*". If a lost person refuses to believe long enough, God will fix it where they can't believe. He will blind them to the truth.

The Lord "*revealed them unto babes*". He is looking for those who will become like a little child. Someone who is sincere, humble and willing. A child accepts what they are told without hesitation. That's the kind of faith God looks for. God goes after the foolish, weak, base, and the despised (1 Cor.1:27-28).

This certainly doesn't mean God never deals with an educated or learned person. Certainly He does. There many examples of learned men and women in the bible and in life. But, for the most part, those who of this sort find it too difficult to admit their sin and their need of forgiveness. Unfortunately, more times than not, the more a person learns, the more they believe they can depend on themselves.

Mt 11:26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

He did it because He wanted to. He did it because it was the right thing to do.

Mt 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

This verse is rich. It says exactly what is meant to be said. Jesus has all authority over all things (Mt.28:18; Jn.13:3). He had already shown his authority over disease, sickness, demons, and even death. He also has authority to judge the guilty, forgive the repentant, and help the needy. He has the authority to offer salvation to those who will accept him.

We are reminded of two things in this verse. First, how limited we are. Second, how limitless God is.

Jesus said, "*no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son*". No one can understand God, but God. Man does not have the ability to comprehend God. How could a feeble human really know the God who spoke the universe into existence?

He continues by saying, "*and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*". We may never know God completely but we can know Him. We can know Him only when the Son reveals Him to us.

Paul tells us the natural man cannot receive the things of God because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). He also tells us that even though spiritual things are not understand with natural means, the Spirit reveals these things to us (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

Only the Son can open the eyes of man and reveal God. I wonder how those who heard these words felt. They had rejected Jesus and his message, and now he tells them he is the only way they can know God.

Mt 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Jesus gives the first invitation found in the New Testament. The bible contains many invitations from God (Isa.45:22; Isa, 55:1-3; Jn.6:35; Jn.7:37; Rev.22:17).

THE WHO OF THIS INVITATION

Who was Jesus inviting?

Primarily, this invitation was directed to Israel. However, this invitation is still offered today for anyone who will listen. This invitation is for anyone who labors and is heavy laden.

THE WHY OF THIS INVITATION

Why did Jesus offer this invitation?

Jesus gave this invitation because there were some Jews who were doing the best they could to keep the Old Testament law. Jesus referred to these people as those that "labor". They were working hard trying to keep the law.

However, the load these people were trying to carry was not just keeping the Old Testament law. They also had the burden of trying to keep the man-made traditions that had been added to the law. Traditions were man-made rules that were added to the law and passed from one generation to another. There were hundreds and hundreds of these traditions. They eventually added so many of these man-made rules that they elevated their rules above the Old Testament scripture. They came to the point to where they believed it was worse to break the traditions, than to break the scripture. Jesus would say later the Pharisees were actually shutting up the kingdom of heaven by their traditions (Mt.23:13). He would go so far as to call their traditions a transgression of the commandments of God (Mt.15:3).

That's why Jesus used the word "labor". The word "*labour*" gives the idea of working to the point of exhaustion. Jesus was talking to those who have been laboring in an attempt to find favor with God by keeping all the rules. The Jews were loaded down by their rituals, holy days, ceremonies, and man-made requirements.

Jesus gave this invitation because there were some who were "*heavy laden*". He was talking to the person who to whom the rules had become more than they could bear. The load had become overwhelming. All day, every day, there was nothing but rules, and it had become more than they could handle.

They had been taught the way to find favor with God was to keep all the rules. So, they worked, they tried, they did the best they could, but it didn't work. They didn't have peace, they weren't at rest, and the more they worked, the worse they felt. They didn't feel any better because keeping the rules cannot produce favor with God.

Things have not changed. There are many who still teach the way to find favor with God is to keep all the rules. Earning salvation by doing good is one of the many rules that has been added by man.

When we leave the Word of God for our traditions we are headed for trouble. On one occasion the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why his disciples did not live according to the tradition of the elders (Mk.7:5).

Jesus' response was sharp, to the point, and truly revealing. He called them hypocrites and pointed them to the Word of God. He said they were teaching the doctrine and commandment of men (Mk.7:6-11).

We need to stay with what the bible says and not what has been added by man.

What made it worse was the fact that as hard as they tried to keep the law, they kept failing. The Jews were laboring to keep all the rules, but they kept failing. In spite of their best effort they still sinned.

That shouldn't surprise us. That's true of us all. At our very best, we are still horrible sinners. The bible says we all are unclean and all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isa.64:6). We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom.3:23). None of us are righteous (Rom.3:10).

So, Jesus speaks to these people who have tried their best to follow all the rules, yet they know they have failed. They were overwhelmed with the guilt of their failure. All their work at keeping the rules was doing nothing with their guilt. The weight of their sin was overwhelming.

That is certainly understandable. They felt guilty because they were sinners and they had sinned. They may have kept much of the law, they did not keep all the law. No one can keep it all. And, the bible says to break one law is to break it all. If we break one law, we have broken it all. James 2:10 says, For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

The law is like a pane of glass. You don't have to shatter the entire pane in order to break it. If you break one little spot you have broken the entire pane. So it is with the law.

So, Jesus likens the lost person to someone who is laboring, but at the same time, carrying a heavy load. Imagine working all day on a strenuous job and the entire time you're carrying a two hundred pound weight on your back.

So, Jesus gave this invitation because there were some people who were tired of trying.

THE WHAT OF THE INVITATION

What does Jesus offer? He offers rest. Jesus' invitation was to those who needed rest. He says if you want rest you will get it only from me.

But, what does Jesus mean when he says he will give rest. What is rest?

First, rest means to cease from labor or work. God "rested" on the seventh day (Gen.2:2). That doesn't mean God was tired and needed a rest from working to create all things. It simply means God had finished His work, so He stopped working.

When God finished His creative work, it was complete. Nothing else needed to be done, nothing else could be done. In like fashion, the work of salvation was completed by Christ. Nothing else needs to be done, nothing else can be done, for it is finished (Jn.19:30).

Jesus is saying to those who have tried to gain salvation by doing good works, you're efforts are futile. We don't have to do any work in order to be saved. Salvation has never been by works. In fact, the opposite is true. Salvation is a work God does in the heart of a person, it isn't a work that person must do. Salvation has always been by grace (which means it is of God) and not of works (Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8-9; Ti. 3:5).

Jesus said to the Jews, and to us, you can quit working, it isn't helping anyway.

Secondly, rest means to cease from war. A lost person is fighting against God, they are at war with God, they are actually the enemy of God (Rom.5:10).

Accepting Jesus' invitation means they give up, they quit fighting against God. It's like the gun fighter who gives up to the sheriff in the old cowboy movies. It means they surrender their all to Jesus. The fight is over.

Thirdly, rest means to lie on. When we lie on a bed we don't lay there trying to hold ourselves up. We are completely dependent on the ability of the bed to hold us up. True salvation comes to those who put their trust totally in the Lord. The rest Jesus offered comes to those who put their total dependence on the Lord. They quit trying to earn God's favor, they stop trusting themselves at all and start trusting God only.

Salvation isn't me trusting him and me; it's me trusting only him. That's what a lost person must do if they are to receive his rest. They stop trying on their own. To receive his rest we must stop all self-effort, and we stop trying to earn favor with God by doing good.

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Jesus continued his call to the weary soul.

A yoke was a piece of wood that had been carved to place across the back of an ox. Many times they would actually carve the yoke to fit a particular ox precisely. This would keep the yoke from rubbing the ox and causing injury.

Jesus isn't telling the Jews they had to add another yoke to their already overladen lives. He is asking them to exchange their yoke, for his.

Their yoke was the yoke the Pharisees had laid upon them. It was the yoke of keeping the law, the yoke of self-effort, the yoke of following all the man-made traditions, it was a heavy yoke. In fact, it so heavy, it was impossible to bear.

But, Jesus' yoke was an easy yoke. His yoke was the yoke of repentance and faith. His yoke includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who enables us to do his will.

His yoke does involve service, but it is a service that is delightful. It is an honor to serve the Lord. There's no greater thrill than to be used of the Lord.

Jesus' yoke is easy because he is "*meek and lowly in heart*". He was the opposite of the Pharisees. He doesn't add burdens, he wants to relieve us of burdens.

Jesus said "*learn of me*". Accepting Jesus' invitation and embracing his plan of salvation enabled a person to learn from Jesus. There is no better teacher than the one who knows everything about everything. The more they learned, the more they would love him.

Mt 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The yoke of the law, of self-effort, of works, or of doing our best is a heavy yoke. But, Jesus' yoke is easy. Man-made yokes are heavy, but Jesus' yoke is light. Jesus' yoke is not grievous, it is a blessing to serve the Lord. He enables us by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to do his will.

Jesus promised rest to the souls of those who came to him. God said the same type of thing in the Old Testament. He said, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer.6:16).

Unfortunately, they weren't any more interested in Jeremiah's day than they were in Jesus' day. Their response is given in that same verse, they said, "We will not walk therein".

The sad thing about all this was the fact that many heard Jesus' invitation and rejected it. Many had labored for years to keep the rules, had failed miserably, and yet they refused to admit their failure and turn to Jesus.

Many are doing the same thing today. He still calls to those in need. His invitation still stands.

I cannot leave these verses without mentioning how urgent Jesus' invitation was, and is. This invitation demands a response. This was not a just a few trivial words that Jesus spoke frivolously. This is an invitation. This was supposed to bring people to a decision. In fact, everyone who has ever heard these words made a decision. They decided to heed Jesus words and accept his invitation, or they decided to reject his invitation.

Do you hear his voice? He says "come unto me". He did not say, stop sinning and come, he didn't say, improve yourself and come, he simply said, "come". You can come as you are. It doesn't matter what you've done, just come just as you are.

You may be the most religious person on earth, but you still need Christ, so come to him. You may be the most wretched sinner on earth, you still need Christ, so come to him. To you he says "come". Will you accept or reject his invitation? There is no middle ground.

ANOTHER APPLICATION OF THESE VERSES...

Even though Jesus is speaking to those who are lost, I can't help but believe the principles in these verses can be applied to those who are saved.

Many who are saved find themselves troubled, burdened, worried, or weary. Unfortunately, when we get saved we don't always rest in Christ.

Jesus' invitation can be applied to the Christian.

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to Lordship

Jesus just stated that his Father had delivered all things unto him (v.27). He is the LORD, he is over all things. If we expect his rest, we must allow him to truly be LORD of our lives.

When we come to him we can rest assured we are coming to someone who can assist us with our need

The fact that Jesus said "come unto me" proves that he is the source of rest. Our help comes from him and from nowhere else. He is the ONLY source of rest. All real help will come from him.

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to listening

He says "*come*". If we expect to enjoy the rest Jesus offers, we must listen to him. The Christian walk is a day by day affair. We follow where he leads.

For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to labor

As we have already seen, the word "*rest*" has the idea of ceasing from work.

A yoke was an instrument of service. Jesus makes it clear that accepting him will result in a life of service. He doesn't want us to just goof off until we go to heaven. We aren't saved by our good works but if we really get saved, we will do good works.

The Jews labored every day to try to live good enough to please God. Jesus told them to quit trying on their own. All their effort would not get them one step closer to God.

In like fashion, all of our self-effort will not give us rest. Trying in our own power to do God's will doesn't work. Until we learn that our ability is useless, we will never enjoy rest.

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to load

Jesus talks about those who are "heavy laden". The best thing that could happen to any Christian is for them to get tired of the load. When we finally get sick and tired of the load, then, and only then will we really turn to the Lord for help.

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to love

Jesus offered this invitation to the very ones who hated him. He did it for one reason, he loved them. For God so *loved* the world explains it all. He loved us while we were sinners (Rom. 5:8). I believe Jesus' heart was broken as he spoke these words.

If he loved us when we were his enemies, certainly he loves us after we get saved. Remember, he really does love you.

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to leaving

You can't "come" unless you're willing to "leave" where you're at. The idea is, quit doing what you've been doing, stop trying to earn God's favor by your good deeds, lay all that down, and come to Jesus.

For the Christian, leaving means to leave behind those things that keep us from having the rest we so desperately need. We cannot have God's rest and the things of the world at same time. We have to decide which is more important to us. One question, what in this world is worth forfeiting God's rest?

- For the Christian Jesus' invitation pertains to leaning

To rest means we put our trust in that which we are resting on. We rest on a bed. It means we are trusting the ability of the bed to hold us up. We don't help the bed, we simply trust the bed.

So it is with Jesus' invitation. Those who get rest are those who lean heavily on him and trust him completely. When Jesus said, "come unto me" he was saying we must depend on him.

Salvation is simply a sinner depending on the Lord to forgive them of their sin. Rest for the Christian is simply a Christian depending on the Lord to give them the rest they need. It sounds too simple, but those are the facts.

- Jesus' invitation involves liberty

He said he gives rest. We can be set free from our sin. There is liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ.

With all our modern conveniences, all our super intelligence, all our self-help know how, we still have no rest. Jesus tells us to quit trying, admit our need, come to him, and accept his free gift of forgiveness. Then, and only then will we find true rest.

And so we see, that the answer to the problems of the world can be found in a simple invitation, "come unto me". He offers this same invitation today. He offers it to anyone who will hear his voice, believe, confess, and repent.

The more we learn about him, The more we learn about him, the more we'll learn that there's no reason for stress.

THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONTINUE TO REJECT THE KING chapter 12

The anger of the Pharisees and religious leaders is even made more evident as we move into this chapter. Their evil hearts of unbelief are proven by their treatment of their Messiah. This is truly a pivotal chapter. Matthew has shown us how Jesus has endured a life of rejection. In chapter 2, Herod tried to have him put to death. In chapter 9, they accused him of blasphemy, of being a friend of sinners, and said he had a demon. By verse 14 of this chapter, they are devising a way to put him to death.

THE PHARISEE'S ARGUMENT ABOUT THE SABBATH 12:1-13

Mt 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

As Jesus and his disciples are traveling they go through a field of grain. The roads were little more than paths in that day and they passed through the fields. The word "corn" refers to wheat or barley. They knew nothing of the corn, or maize, we are familiar with. The disciples were hungry so as they walked through the fields they grabbed some of the wheat, rubbed it in their hands to loosen the husks, and ate the kernels.

There was nothing wrong with them doing this even though they did not own the property. In fact, God had made provision for those who were hungry or poor. He allowed the poor or hungry to pluck enough grain to satisfy their hunger (Dt.23:25). Farmers were instructed to not harvest the corners of their fields in order that the poor might get what was left behind (Lev.19:9-10). If the harvesters overlooked a sheaf, they were not to go back for it, they were to leave it for the poor (Dt.24:19). So, the disciples were not stealing.

The Pharisees weren't upset because Jesus' disciples plucked some wheat. They were upset because they did it on the Sabbath day.

The word "Sabbath" actually means 'to cease'. It has the idea of a ceasing from labor. The seventh day rest goes back to when God "rested" on the seventh day. This certainly doesn't mean God was tired or needed to rest. It simply means God was finished, so he stopped his work.

It's important to remember, the Sabbath day was not instituted until God gave Moses the law (Ex. 20:8-11). God told Israel to work six days, but they were to rest on the seventh. The Saturday rest was the fourth of the Ten Commandments. It was a law that was for Israel only (Ex.31:12-13).

The Sabbath rest was the only non-moral law of the Ten Commandments. The other nine dealt with morals but this one dealt only with ceremony. It was simply a ceremonial rule that was given only to the people of Israel. It was much like the sign of circumcision that God gave to his chosen people.

The fourth commandment is the only commandment that was not repeated in the New Testament. Jesus honored the Sabbath day as he walked the earth because the New Testament economy did not begin until after his resurrection.

Jesus said he did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it (Mt.5:17). Notice the scripture below that demonstrates how the New Testament carries on the spirit of the Ten Commandments.

	COMMAND	NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCE
1 st	No other god before me	Mt. 4:10; Rev.14:7
2 nd	No graven image	Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-20; Eph. 5:5
3 rd	Take the Lord's name in vain	Mt. 5:33-37; Jam. 2:7
5 th	Honor father and mother	Mt. 15:4-9; 19:19; Mk. 10:19; Rom. 1:30
6 th	Shall not kill	Mt. 5:21-22; Rom. 1:29-30; 13:9
7 th	Shall not commit adultery	Mt. 5:27-28; Lk. 16:18; 18:20; Rom. 7:3; 13:9
8 th	Shall not steal	Mt. 19:18; Rom. 13:9; Eph. 4:28; 1 Pet. 4:15;
9 th	Shall not bear false witness	Mt. 19:18; Lk. 18:20; Acts 5:3; Rom.13:9; Eph. 4:25
10 th	Shalt not covet	Lk. 12:15; Rom. 1:29; 7:7; 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21

I am not suggesting we are required to keep the Ten Commandments in our day. I am simply saying the message of the Ten Commandments continues.

Mt 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

The Pharisees were upset, not because the disciples had broken the Old Testament law, but because they had broken their tradition. Traditions were man-made rules that they added to the law. There were hundreds and hundreds of these traditions.

They eventually added so many of these man-made rules that they elevated their rules above the Old Testament scripture. They came to the point to where they believed it was worse to break the traditions, than to break the scripture.

To their credit, the Jews wanted to protect the law. This is commendable but a problem arose. In an attempt to make certain the law was not broken they added restrictions that God never intended.

Let's take a look the Jewish laws and traditions. The Jews believe that God has spoken through the following sources of information.

THE WRITTEN LAW

The Jews believed God gave His message to them through Moses (Ex.20). God had Moses write down what He said. What God had Moses write became the first five books of the Old Testament.

THE ORAL LAW

The Jews believed God gave His message to them through what God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

What God spoke to Moses became what is referred to as the Oral Law. As the name suggests, the Oral Law was not written down at first, it was passed from father to son, and from teacher to student. The Jews believed the Oral Law was needed in order to explain the written law. They believed the Oral Law gave details that were not included in the written law. It was considered much like a commentary of the written law. It explained how the commandments in the written law were to be carried out.

THE MISHNAH

The Oral Law remained oral until the second century. Around the year 200 AD, this oral law was written down in a document that is called the Mishnah. The Mishnah is supposed to explain the Oral Law.

THE GEMARA

The Gemara (pronounced Guh-mar-uh) is like a commentary on the Mishnah. The Mishnah was given to help explain the law, and the Gemara was given to explain the Mishnah.

THE TALMUD

Some rabbis decided to put it all together. The Gemara and the Mishnah together are called the Talmud. To further complicate matters, there are two versions of the Talmud, the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud. The entire Talmud consists of 63 tractates (dissertations). In standard print, it is over 6,200 pages long. So, to say the least it is quite exhaustive and can cause confusion.

Christians do not consider the Talmud to be inspired. However, the Jews believed it is to be honored as much, if not more, than the Old Testament scriptures.

There are 24 chapters in the Talmud dealing with the rules relating to the Sabbath alone. These rules can be confusing to say the least. For example, it was forbidden that you travel more than 3,000 feet from your house on the Sabbath. However, if you planted food on Friday that was 3,000 feet away from your home, you could go where the food was. Since there was food there, you could consider that to be your "home" and you could travel 3,000 more feet.

The Talmud has many rules concerning the Sabbath. You could not carry an item that weighed more than a dried fig, or you could carry something that weighed half the weight of a dried fig twice. You could not eat anything larger than one olive. If the olive you put in your mouth was rotten, you couldn't put another olive in, because your mouth had already tasted the olive.

If you threw an object in the air, you must catch it with the same hand you threw it with. If you catch it with your other hand, it would be considered labor and a violation of the Sabbath. If you reached out your hand for your food at the exact moment the Sabbath began, you had to drop your food before you brought your hand back.

A tailor wasn't allowed to carry a needle lest he be tempted to sew something. A scribe wasn't allowed to carry a pen because he might write something. You couldn't examine anyone's clothing because you might find an insect and kill it.

Nothing could be bought or sold. Nothing could be washed. You couldn't take a bath because the water might spill on the floor and wash it. No fire could be lit. Cold water could be poured on warm water, but warm water could not be poured on cold. A woman couldn't look in a glass because she might see a gray hair and pull it out. You couldn't carry more grain in your hand than would fit into a lamb's mouth.

The Talmud described what could be saved if a person's house caught fire on the Sabbath. Only the clothes that were absolutely necessary could be saved. One could not put on a robe, and then go back for another one. You could not ask a Gentile to extinguish the fire. If a Gentile put the fire out voluntarily, he was not to be stopped.

The only way a man could eat something bigger than an olive on the Sabbath was if he was about to starve to death. But, how do you determine if a person is truly about to die? How could you say with any certainty that he would not live until the next day? If a man was sick, you could stop him from dying, but you couldn't do anything to make him well. You could put a bandage on him but you couldn't put any medicine on his injury because that would aid his improvement.

These regulations go on and on. The sad thing about it all was the Pharisees and other religious leaders had elevated these man-made rules above the Word of God. There's no wonder they were so mixed up by the time Jesus came on the scene.

Even though at the time of Jesus the Pharisees did not have all these traditions in writing, they did have it in their belief system.

And so we see the reason why the Pharisees were so upset at Jesus' disciples. They thought the disciples were breaking the Sabbath. And, according to their distorted view of the law, they were. But, according to God's law, they were not.

Verse two says the Pharisees "saw" the disciples pluck the wheat. It's obvious they following Jesus and his disciples. They looking for a chance to attack them.

We learn a great deal about the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament Law in the following verses. I'm afraid we see the Ten Commandments just a bunch of rules. There is much more to these commands that merely rules to follow.

The first part of the Ten Commandments deal with loving God by being faithful to Him. The second part of the Ten Commandments deal with loving our fellow man. Jesus said the summary of the Ten Commandments is loving the Lord your God, and loving your neighbor as yourself (Mk.12:30-31).

Jesus' response to the Pharisees in these verses reveal at least four things about the Sabbath laws. First, the Sabbath law was never meant to ignore human need (vv.3-4). Second, it wasn't meant to restrict anyone from serving God (vv.5-6). Third, that God desires mercy more than sacrifices (v.7). Fourth, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (v.8).

JESUS EXPLAINS HOW THE SABBATH LAW WAS NOT MEANT TO IGNORE HUMAN NEED 12:3-4

Mt 12:3-4 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Jesus responds by asking them "Have ye not read". They believed themselves to be masters of the Law, not Jesus is asking them if they had not even read a portion of it. This had to strike a sour chord with the Pharisees.

Jesus points to the Word. That's where we find all our answers. That's where we find the truth.

The instance Jesus refers to is in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. David and his men were running from Saul and were tired and hungry. David asked Ahimelech the priest to give him some bread for himself and his men. The only bread available was the shewbread in the Tabernacle. The law said that twelve loaves of unleavened bread were to be laid on the table in the holy place in the tabernacle. These loaves were to be replaced with fresh loaves every Sabbath. The loaves that were removed were to be eaten by the priests only (Ex. 29:32-33; Lev.24:5-9).

God allowed David to eat the shewbread because of their great need. God never intended the law to overrule human need.

It's very important to understand, Jesus is not implying that since David did wrong and got away with it, it is ok if he and his disciples did wrong.

JESUS EXPLAINS HOW THE SABBATH WAS NOT MEANT TO RESTRICT SOMEONE FROM SERVING GOD 12:5-6

Mt 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

The Pharisees were accusing Jesus and his disciples of violating the Old Testament law by plunking the wheat and rubbing it in their hands. They said they were working on the Sabbath. Jesus counteracts their attack by referring to the priests who serve in the temple on the Sabbath.

Every Sabbath the priests would labor by starting fires (cf. Ex.35:3), killing animals, and preparing them for the sacrifice. Their labor was actually doubled on the Sabbath (Num.28:9-10). In spite of their intense work, the priests were not in violation of the Law because they were doing the Lord's work.

The Sabbath laws were not meant to keep someone from serving God. Jesus is implying that he and his disciples were about his Father's business and were not violating the Old Testament.

Mt 12:6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees to see that his disciples were not just serving in the temple, they were serving the God of the temple. He is saying clearly that he is greater than the temple. The Pharisees could not deal with this statement. The temple was the central place of their worship.

We cannot comprehend what the temple meant to them. The temple was the center of their religious lives. There was no place on earth more sacred than the temple. It was God's house, it was the place God visited. To speak against the temple was in essence speaking against God Himself. In the mind of the Jews the only thing greater than the temple, was God Himself. By Jesus saying he is greater than the temple, he is saying that he was God.

The Pharisees were right to respect the temple, but there stands before them one that is greater than the temple. If they honored the building of God, should they not honor the God of the building?

Jesus is unmistakably claiming to be God by this statement. The temple was the holiest place on earth and the Sabbath was their holiest day. Yet, Jesus was more holy than them both.

As marvelous as the temple was, it was still just a building. It was the place that God had seen fit to meet with His people. It was the place that He had blessed with His presence. Yet, it was just a building. Jesus was more than a building, he was God.

When Jesus said he was better than the temple, it was like the last straw that broke the camel's back. As far as they were concerned, Jesus had blasphemed.

JESUS EXPLAINS HOW GOD DESIRES MERCY ABOVE SACRIFICE 12:7

Mt 12:7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Jesus pretty much tells the Pharisees they don't know near as much as they think they do.

Jesus said he would choose mercy before sacrifice. His words come from Hosea 6:6 where God says, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings". No doubt, God did require the sacrifices of the Old Testament, but He was more interested in the heart of those who came to Him.

The word "sacrifice" is referring to the entire ceremonial system of the Jews. He's simply saying he desires his people to show mercy instead of following a bunch of their man-made rules.

The Pharisees saw the law as a bunch of mechanical rules. Jesus is trying to get them to understand that God is more interested in the heart of man than a bunch of regulations. Micah 6:8 gives us more insight into this. Mic 6:8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

God wants a people who love Him, and love others, not a bunch of robots who follow all the rules.

Jesus is trying to get them to understand the compassion of the law. God is a God of love and mercy. The Pharisees did not care about those who were suffering. They only cared about their traditions.

In Mark's account of this event, he adds, "*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*". He's trying to get them, and us, to realize the law wasn't meant to put God's people in bondage.

The Sabbath laws were supposed to give the people of Israel a day to rest, a day to focus on their God, and a day to appreciate who He is. The Pharisees and the religious bunch were the ones who made the law a thing of bondage.

Jesus said, "*ye would not have condemned the guiltless*". Had the Pharisees had any genuine love, they would never have accused Jesus' disciples of doing wrong.

JESUS EXPLAINS HOW HE IS THE LORD OF THE SABBATH 12:8

Mt 12:8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

If he is Lord, he is Lord over all. The Pharisees were so fixated on their rules and restrictions that they had forgotten the God who loved them.

It would do us well to examine our hearts at this point. Why do you do what you do? We say we serve the Lord, but do we serve Him because we love Him? God wants His children to love Him. If we truly love Him, our service will be from the heart. We won't be trying to keep a bunch of rules. Our service for Him will be natural and genuine because it is merely the result of our love for Him.

JESUS GOES TO THE SYNAGOGUE 12:9-13

Mt 12:9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

Jesus goes to the synagogue. Luke tells us this happened a week later (Lk.6:6).

It's vitally important to note that Matthew didn't say "our" synagogue, he said "their" synagogue. It had been God's house, He had moved there, He had done great things for His people there, but they had resisted the Spirit of God to the point to where God wouldn't even call it His house.

Jesus will say later, "*your house is left unto you desolate*" (Mt.23:38). We dare not think the same thing cannot happen to us. How awful would it be to go to church and God not be there?

Jesus knows the Pharisees are upset at him, and yet, he goes straight to the place where most certainly he will be found.

Mt 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

A man was in the synagogue who had a withered hand. Luke tells us it was his right hand (Lk.6:6). There were some there who asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Luke tells us the scribes and Pharisees were the ones who asked this question (Lk.6:7).

It's interesting to note that these hardhearted people are found in church. Things haven't changed much through the years. Unfortunately, the biggest hypocrites can still be found at church. We should notice that not only were the hypocrites at church, but so were the genuine disciples, and so was the Lord. The house of God is still the right place to go. There may be a few who are hypocrites, but that does not give us an excuse to neglect God's house. In fact, we should be even more dedicated to the church. Your church needs someone who is real.

They asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Their traditions prohibited any type of medicine being used on the Sabbath unless the person was at the point of death. As previously stated, anything that aided healing was forbidden on the Sabbath. In their minds healing the man's hand would be a violation of their laws.

They weren't interested in an answer to their question. They asked Jesus this question in order that they might "*accuse him*". The word "*accuse*" means to bring a charge against.

They wanted to find some way to charge Jesus with breaking the law. They weren't just trying to win an argument. They were wanting to find just reason to have Jesus taken before the judicial system of their day.

There's a good chance the Pharisees actually brought this man to the synagogue in an attempt to trap Jesus.

By their question they were admitting to the fact that Jesus had the power to heal. How could anyone see his miracles and still refuse to believe in him?

Mt 12:11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

They tried to trap Jesus, but Jesus actually trapped them. None of them would have refused to pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath. And yet, they were accusing Jesus of doing wrong by healing the man with a withered hand.

Mt 12:12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Jesus asked if it was lawful to do well on the Sabbath. Is it right to help someone who needs help? Jesus' argument about the sheep in the pit proved it was right to do good on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees thought nothing of helping a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, yet they refused to help their fellow man. Man has reached a sad state when he cares more for a dumb animal than he does for his fellow man. Unfortunately, there are many who have reached that point in our day.

Mt 12:13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Mark tells us the Pharisees were silent (Mk.3:4). What could they say? Jesus was right, and they knew it.

Mark also tells us Jesus was angry and grieved (Mk.3:5). Jesus' anger was justified. His anger was controlled. Most of our anger is selfish and out of control. It should anger us when we see the results of sin. It's right to be angry when we see a little baby suffering because of parents who stay drunk, or a wife going without because her husband gambled their money away. It's also right to be angry when we see people bound in religion as the Pharisees were. They are just as lost as the drunk, or the gambler.

Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand. He did as Jesus said without hesitation. This would seem to indicate that this man had heard about Jesus. He could have explained to Jesus how his condition made it impossible for him to stretch out his hand, but he didn't. He simply did what Jesus told him to do.

When he obeyed his hand was made whole. Getting help from God is always connected to our obedience. I'm not sure why we expect God to give us what we want when we do not obey Him. Those who get God's best are those who obey.

Before we leave these verses I'd like to take one more look at the fact that Jesus went to church.

Will you notice with me....

- Jesus went to church even though it was inconvenient

I promise you, Jesus was busier than any of us, but he made time to go to church. Jesus would never use the excuse, "I'm too busy".

- Jesus went to church even though there were people there who didn't like him

How often do we hear of people who refuse to go to church because there is someone there who they can't get along with? Jesus did not use that excuse.

- Jesus went to church even though he knew someone was there who wanted something from him

Jesus knew the man with the withered hand would be there. So many stay away from church because they don't want to get involved. When will we learn that serving God and helping others is a delight?

- Jesus went to church even though it wasn't safe

Jesus knew the Pharisees wanted to put him to death. All around the world there are Christians who are having to hide in order to worship. They worship in secret because they would be killed if caught. And yet, they are faithful to gather in spite of the danger. I certainly hope we don't stand near these dear saints when we stand before the Lord. I'm afraid there will many who will be truly ashamed of their lack of dedication to God's house.

THE KING BEGINS TO TURN TO THE GENTILES 12:14-21

Mt 12:14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

The Pharisees were not touched by the man's need. They were not moved by the power Jesus displayed that proved he was God. They were set to destroy him.

The Pharisees met together. They met for one purpose, to devise a way whereby they could see Jesus put to death. They were not meeting to decide *if* they should have him put to death, they were meeting to determine *how* they would put him to death. How can anyone be so hardhearted? How could they see the wonderful miracles of Jesus and still turn from him?

Mark tells us the Herodians were included in this attempt to do away with Jesus (Mk.3:6). During the time of Christ there were three Jewish groups who held positions of authority. There was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and there were the Herodians.

The Herodians were a Jewish political group who were committed to Herod and to Rome. They believed Herod would bring about peace for the Jews. They saw Jesus as a threat. They would oppose Jesus again (Mt.22:16).

The Pharisees and the Herodians did not get along. However, these enemies joined forces in an attempt to do away with Jesus. It's amazing how opposing parties can work together when they have a common enemy.

Mt 12:15 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

Being rejected by the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus begins his turn towards the Gentiles. God was not surprised by the Jews rejection of His Son. He knew it would happen.

The religious bunch may have rejected him but the common people flocked to Jesus. Great multitudes followed him.

Many of those who followed Jesus were sick. This verse says he healed them “*all*”.

I must confess. This verse has changed my view about Jesus’ ministry. Before I read this verse I would have guessed that Jesus healed a couple hundred people, at most, while he was on earth. But, this verse says he healed multitudes on this one occasion. There is no telling how many were healed by Jesus. He must have healed literally thousands during his lifetime.

Mt 12:16 And charged them that they should not make him known:

I’m convinced this is one of the most difficult commands Jesus ever uttered. How in the world could you be quiet after the Son of God healed you of an awful disease? I’m certain, many of these blessed people failed to obey this command. The news spread like wildfire.

Why would Jesus tell these people to not tell about what he did for them? It would seem that he would want everyone to know. There were times when Jesus did tell those he healed to tell others (Mk.5:19-20).

Why did Jesus tell them to say nothing....

- Because he didn't want second hand information to be given

Jesus realized the danger of second hand information. By the time the news about his healing was told several times, the fact would be distorted. Therefore, he wanted people to see for themselves. Then they would know the truth.

- Because his primary mission was to preach the truth

Jesus healed in order to prove he was God (Act 2:22). He healed also because he truly cared about those who were hurting. But, healing was not the main reason for his ministry. He came to preach the truth and point people to his Father. He wanted them to come for the truth and not his miracles. It is the truth that sets you free, not miracles.

- Because the large crowds actually hindered him

The crowds got so large that he wasn’t able to go to large cities, he had to stay in the countryside (Mk.1:45). There were so many thronging him for a miracle that he wasn’t able to preach. Many who needed the truth were not able to get close enough to hear.

- Because the increase of his popularity angered the scribes and Pharisees

The more popular Jesus became, the greater the Pharisees' hatred grew. God would not allow his arrest, or death, to come before the time was right (Jn.8:20). When the time was right, when Jesus finished the work he came to do, he allowed himself to be arrested (Jn.12:23; Jn.13:1).

- Because it wasn't time for him to become king

The more popular he became, the more the Jews tried to force him to take over Rome, and become their king. The Jews obviously had the kingdom on their minds (Mt.18:1; Mt.20:21; Lk.17:20; Acts 1:6). Jesus would not be forced into setting up his kingdom (Jn.7:6).

- Because he did not seek self-glory

Jesus came to glorify the Father. He did not want any glory to himself. Doing miracles had the potential for a misplaced attention on him. Jesus became a servant (Phil.2:7). He did always that which would please his Father (Jn.4:34; Jn.10:18; Jn.12:27-28).

Since the Jews rejected Jesus, this kingdom has been postponed until after the Great Tribulation Period.

Why did Jesus heal even though he knew it would cause him problems? Because he cared. The Pharisees didn't care for the blind, lame, and infirmed, but Jesus did.

Mt 12:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

Nothing Jesus did was by accident. It was done to fulfill Old Testament scripture.

Mt 12:18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

Verses 18-21 are quoted from Isaiah 42:1-4. Had the Pharisees simply read these verses, they would have know the Messiah was not going to come with political and military agendas. The Messiah was coming with a gentle and meek spirit.

Jesus came a servant to his Father. His Father was well pleased with him (Mt.3:17; 17:5).

It's always been God's design to change the world through the preaching of the truth. Efforts to change to the politics of our nation may improve our circumstance but it does nothing to change the spiritual corruption of an ungodly nation.

The words, "*shall shew judgment to the Gentiles*" means he will open the way of truth to the Gentiles. He would teach the Gentiles how to please God. Had the Jews simply read these verses, they would have known this.

God wanted to use Israel as a light around the world. But, they rejected His message, and His messenger. So, God turned to the Gentiles. Unfortunately, the Gentiles haven't done much better than the Jews in being that light.

Mt 12:19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

They expected a mighty conqueror but Jesus came proclaiming the need for repentance. He did not cry for retaliation against the Roman government. He didn't march up and down the streets shouting for revolution. Instead, in humility, he proclaimed the way to have true peace.

Mt 12:20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

This verse tells us a great deal about Jesus' attitude. Isaiah said the Messiah would come with tenderness. The day will come when he comes with might and will deliver the nation of Israel (Zech.12:10; 14:4; Mt.24:30; Rev.1:7).

These verses paint a picture of the Messiah's tenderness. He would not even break a bruised reed. A reed was a plant that grew in abundance. A bruised reed was one that had been hit somehow. Maybe someone walked by and brushed against it, bruising it. Of course, the spot where it was bruised would become weak. Those would later walk by this bruised reed would think nothing of just brushing it aside, and breaking it the rest of the way.

But, Jesus would tenderly care for the reed. He cares for those who are weak. He understands the nature of man.

Mt 12:21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

As previously stated, God was not surprised that the Jews rejected His Son. He knew He would turn to the Gentiles. The Jews had rejected him, (Jn.1:11) but the Gentiles would be more ready to accept him.

The message of the gospel today is, "Whosoever will" (Rev.22:17).

Mt 12:22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb; and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

A man is brought to Jesus who is demon possessed. He was blind and dumb because of the demon that lived in him. This shows the evil nature of the devil and all the demons. They hate, they hurt, and they destroy. It also shows the power of the devil and the demons. This man's affliction was produced by the devil. How many of the afflictions of today are demonic? We can't be sure, but the devil certainly has not abandoned this method of attack.

The touch of Jesus dealt with all the issues this man had. I'm glad we have a God who can take care of us no matter what the need. When the devil is dethroned, deliverance comes.

Mt 12:23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

The question assumes a positive response. His works proved he was the Messiah. The term "son of David" was a phrase used in referring to the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13).

This conclusion was reached by the common people, and not by the Pharisees.

THE SIN OF BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 12:24-37

The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is dealt with in these verses.

Much ink has been spilled in an effort to explain Jesus' comments in these verses.

Some believe this sin is something as simple as telling the Holy Spirit to leave you alone. Entire sermons have been preached in an attempt to demonstrate this belief.

Some believe this sin was simply rejecting Christ and refusing to get saved.

Some believe this sin could only be committed while Jesus was on earth. They base this belief on the fact that it was the Son of God who did the miracle. They believe, since Jesus is no longer on earth, this sin cannot be committed.

The sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is attributing to Satan a work done by the Holy Spirit. Mark tells us this was the case (Mk.3:30). I personally believe this is a sin that could only be committed while Jesus was on earth. Since he is no longer dwelling in a body, the circumstances of this sin cannot be repeated.

The word blasphemy is defined as "defiant irreverence". It can apply to sins such as slandering, defaming, and cursing God, or degrading things related to God. However, the blasphemy in these verses is a specific sin of attributing to Satan a work that God had done. The Pharisees witnessed a miracle that was clearly done by the power of the Holy Spirit, but they said it was done by the power of Satan (Mk. 3:30).

THE PHARISEES ACCUSE JESUS OF CASTING OUT A DEMON BY THE POWER OF SATAN

Mt 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

The word "Beelzebub" is just another word for the devil.

The Pharisees heard the comments mentioned in verse 23. They knew this miracle had to have been accomplished by a supernatural power. They did not deny the miracle, they just denied Jesus did it by the power of God. Realizing the miracle was real, they had only two options as to its origin. Either Jesus did this miracle by the power of God, or he did it by the power of Satan. There was no other option. They determined that Jesus cast out the demon by the power of Satan.

There is little doubt about why they came to this conclusion, they simply hated Jesus. If God performed the miracles through Jesus, it proved he was who he claimed to be. They knew Jesus' miracles validated his ministry and proved he was the Messiah. They could not accept that.

The words "this fellow" is a way of saying a nobody. They saw Jesus as nothing. How could they view Jesus in such a manner?

JESUS RESPONDS TO THE ACCUSATION OF THE PHARISEES

Mt 12:25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

The Pharisees didn't speak to Jesus, they spoke to the crowd, but Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus responded to the Pharisees by saying their accusation is unreasonable. Any kingdom that fights against itself can not survive.

Mt 12:26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

The man's sickness was obviously a work of Satan. A demon had caused it. So, if Jesus cast the demon out by the power of Satan, it would have been Satan fighting against Satan.

Jesus is asking the Pharisees if they think Satan is so dumb that he would cast out his own demons. Jesus spent a good bit of his time casting out demons, and healing sickness caused by Satan. If he did it by the power of Satan, the devil had done a lot to destroy his own kingdom.

Mt 12:27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

Jesus responds to the accusation of the Pharisees with another comment. He talks about the "children" of the Pharisees, and how they "cast them out". The Pharisees had disciples who learned their beliefs and practices. These students were called the "children" of the Pharisees. This group of students claimed to be able to cast out demons.

The Pharisees had put their stamp of approval on their disciples. They claimed their disciples did their works through the power of God. Jesus' point is, if you say your disciples are casting out demons by the power of God, how is it that you say I am casting them out by the power of Satan.

A note of interest. It is questionable as to whether these disciples of the Pharisees actually cast out demons. Many false teachers claim to cast out demons. I am convinced there are times when the devil will come as an angel of light and make it appear there are demons cast out. The devil will do whatever it takes to deceive.

Mt 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Jesus gives another response to the Pharisee's accusation.

The Pharisees entire argument dealt with whether Jesus cast the demon out by the power of God, or the power of Satan. If he cast it out by the power of God, that proved God was working through him. It also proved he was who he claimed to be. The kingdom was before them, in other words, he was the Messiah.

Mt 12:29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Jesus is saying, if you want to rob a house, you must first bind the owner. The owner will do everything within his power to stop a thief from robbing his house. If the thief is able to bind the owner, he will have free access to all that is in the house. The stronger the owner, the more difficult it is to rob his house.

Jesus had proven many times that he was stronger than the devil. He had proven it by healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and forgiving sin. He had just proven his power to bind the strong man by casting out the demon. He had the power to bind the strong man and spoil his house. The devil is strong. he is able to do more than we can imagine. But, he is not more powerful than our Lord.

Mt 12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

There is no middle ground. Those who aren't for the Lord, are against him. When we don't do right, we are doing wrong. Those who know to do good, and do not do it, are in sin (Jam.4:17).

Mt 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

The words "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit" both refer to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This verse tells us that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is speaking "against the Holy Ghost".

Sin is any attitude, or action, that is against God, and His will. Blasphemy is the specific sin of speaking against God. It is saying things about God that are not true. It is speaking about God in a derogatory manner. The word blasphemy is defined as "defiant irreverence".

Jesus said "All manner of sin and blasphemy" can be forgiven. Of course, he is implying the sinner confesses, and repents. Thank the Lord, God is a forgiving God. He loves to forgive.

To say that all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven is an amazing statement. Jesus said those who drove the nails in his hands can be forgiven. He said, the drunkard, the murderer, the adulterer, the thief, and even the child molester, can be forgiven. But, the person who blasphemes the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven.

Mt 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Jesus said, if someone speaks against the "Son of man", he can be forgiven. The term "Son of man" is speaking of Jesus. The Son could be easily misunderstood. Jesus was a man. He looked like any other man. Even though he was sinless, he was still human. He was born in the lowly town of Nazareth, he worked as a carpenter, he was meek and lowly.

Though wrong, it would be easy to see him merely as a man. It is possible to be forgiven for speaking derogatory things about the Son.

However, Jesus goes on to say, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven. Why is this so? The Holy Spirit was the means whereby the miracles were accomplished.

To see the Holy Spirit do something that was impossible was to see the power of God on display.

When someone saw a miracle that was obviously a work of the Holy Spirit, and say Satan did it, was the epitome of rejection. There was no forgiveness for this type of sin.

What else could God do? He had sent His Son, He had worked through His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish a miracle that only God could do. And now, they did not just refuse to believe it was God who did it, they went so far as to say the Son did it by the power of Satan. Could I say it again, what else could God do? There was no more light to show.

There is no forgiveness for this type of person because they had rejected the only means of forgiveness.

Mt 12:33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

A tree is known by its fruit. It has either good fruit, or bad fruit. In like fashion, a person's true nature is revealed by what they do, and what they say. If their deeds and words are evil, it reveals their heart is evil. If their deeds and words are good, it reveals their heart is good.

I believe Jesus is trying to accomplish two things in this verse.

First, he is speaking about himself. He is saying, if his works are good, that proves that he is good. Anyone who was willing to take an honest look at Jesus had to come to the conclusion that he was good. He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). The Pharisees should have recognized this.

Second, he is speaking about the Pharisees. The reason they blasphemed was because their hearts were evil. Their actions, and their words, merely revealed their sinful hearts.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees to make up their minds. If his works and words are good, that must mean he is good. If his works and words, are evil, then he must be evil. They should allow his fruit to speak for itself. They could not deny the fact that his works were good, therefore, he must be good.

Mt 12:34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

I've heard many people talk about wishing they could have heard Jesus preach. I'm convinced the average Christian wouldn't be able to handle the type of preaching Jesus did.

Jesus didn't play games with the Pharisees. He calls them a bunch of snakes. The viper Jesus referred to is a poisonous snake. Most of them are small. They are colored in a way that makes it easy for them to hide. The viper waits for someone to get close, and strikes suddenly. They clamp their teeth into the flesh and pump their poison into their victim. Paul was bitten by such a viper (Acts 28:3).

No doubt, Jesus used the viper as an example of the Pharisees because they were dangerous and deadly. Their false doctrine condemned people to an eternal hell.

He called them "evil". What a telling word. We see the depravity of man in this word. Mankind is evil. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). We have all received the sin nature of Adam.

And so, Jesus has set the Pharisees up for the kill. He has made it clear that the words we speak are from our heart. The Psalmist makes the connection between our hearts and our words (Ps. 19:14).

The words of the Pharisees had proven what they were. The word "abundance" has the idea of being so full it runs over. In other words, their hearts are so full of evil, it naturally ran over through their words. What's in the well, comes up in the bucket.

Elihu felt like he had to speak, or burst.

Job 32:18–19 For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles.

If we wonder where our questionable words we utter occasionally come from, this verse tells us. They come from our heart. If you want to know what type of person you are, look at what you talk about.

Pr 10:11 The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

Pr 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.

Mt 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Jesus' words had proven what he was. The word "treasure" has the idea of a store house, or where we would keep our valuables.

Mt 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

The word "idle" means a thoughtless, or useless word. This speaks of any word that is spoken that does not have a positive aim. Jesus certainly has in mind the words the Pharisees just uttered. If every idle word will be judged, how much more will the words of the Pharisees?

The word idle also means anything we say that accomplishes no good. Certainly, that would include injurious words like those of the Pharisees.

When we stand before the Lord, we will give an answer to our words, and not just our deeds. We may consider what we say to be unimportant, but our Lord doesn't.

David understood the importance of watching our speech.

Ps 34:13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

OUR WORDS CAN BE PROOF

Mt 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

The Pharisees, like the vipers carried death in their mouths. As with the vipers, their bite proved their evil nature.

Our words prove what we really are. Jesus said, by our words we are justified or condemned. Our words so prove what's in our hearts that they will show if we're saved or not. What a thought. But, it makes sense when we think about it. Jesus said our words are the outlet of our heart. What's inside will come out.

James said the person who doesn't bridle their tongue is deceived, and their religion is useless (Jas 1:26).

If you want to know what you really are, listen to how you talk when things don't go your way. Listen to what comes out of your mouth when the heat is on, when someone jumps in front of you at the grocery store, when the boss complains again, when the waitress is slow, then you'll know how spiritual you are.

It's a shame that waitresses across the country say the rudest people they deal with are the church people on Sunday.

What is in the heart, comes out the mouth. So, we need to be careful about what we take in. We're like a computer, garbage in, garbage out.

OUR WORDS CAN BE POINTLESS

The word "idle" in verse 36 means useless. How many of the words do we speak that have no real spiritual value. It has been estimated that, on average, men speak 25,000 words a day, and women speak 30,000 a day. That's an awful lot of words. How many of these words aid in the advancement of God's family?

I'm convinced many of our words are hypocritical. We add our "Christian jargon" when we're around other Christians. I met a preacher one time. I was aware he was a preacher, but he did not know me. We in the home of a mutual friend for several minutes, so I was able to hear him talking. Then, the mutual friend introduced me to him, and let him know I was a preacher. From that moment on, he started saying things like, "praise the Lord", and "thank God" to every other sentence. I wondered where all that Christian talk was before he discovered I was a preacher. I don't doubt this preacher's love for the Lord, I know he was a godly man and served the Lord faithfully, but I think I found out that day what "idle" words are.

When we use words in an attempt to impress others, they are pointless.

OUR WORDS CAN BE PROFITABLE

What we say can encourage the discouraged, inform the ignorant, or warn the wicked. We can help others by what we say to them. Don't ever think you can't make a difference. God may use your words to change someone's life.

Paul tells us that our speech ought to always be with grace (Col. 4:6).

Our lips should bring glory to God. We are to teach and admonish one another (Col.3:16). We are to sing forth praises to our God (Col. 3:16).

We defeat the devil by keeping the Word of God in our hearts (Dt.6:6).

OUR WORDS CAN BE POWERFUL

James uses the illustration of a bit in the horse's mouth, and the rudder on a ship to show the power of the tongue (Jam. 3:3-4). Both are small, but have the power to control the horse, and the ship.

What you say, may be exactly what the hurting person needs to hear.

Pr 16:24 Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

What you say, may be used by God to convict the wayward saint.

OUR WORDS CAN BE POISON

What we say has the power to destroy. James says the tongue is like fire, it can be destructive (Jam.3:6).

Pr 26:22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Ps 34:13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Ps 141:3 Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

A godly testimony that takes a lifetime to build, we can destroy in a few seconds. The wisest saint on earth is the one who knows how to control their tongue.

Pr 11:9 An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

God despises lying lips.

Pr 12:22 Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

Pr 17:27 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.

We should guard ourselves from speaking in the heat of the moment. We should allow the Holy Spirit to control our words. We may say something we will regret. We may apologize, but the damage is done.

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Col 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Jas 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

Our words can be one of the most helpful, or harmful parts of our lives.

OUR WORDS CAN BE PUNISHED

Jesus said in verse 36, *"every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"*. Those who are saved will lose rewards because of some of the things they said.

The word "account" carries with it the idea of "intent". We'll not only give account of what we said, but why we said what we said.

Mt 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

The Pharisees change the subject. That is the tactic of those who are losing an argument. Little did they know, their tactic would fail for Jesus would strike again.

They asked Jesus to show them a sign. If he is the Messiah as he claims, certainly he should be able to perform one miracle.

How could they ask for a sign after all the miracles Jesus had done in their presence? He had healed the sick, raised the dead, and transformed lives. They weren't asking for Jesus to heal someone, or even to raise someone from the dead. They were asking him to do something astronomical. They were wanting him to wave his hand and write his name in fire across the heavens, or to speak the word and the sea part.

They called him "Master", which means "teacher". They certainly didn't learn anything from him because they refused to believe him.

The sad thing about it is, had he done such a miracle, they still would not have believed. If he did all he did, and they refused to believe, neither would they have believed if he had done what they demanded.

Is it not amazing what man expects from God? After all He has done for man, it's never enough.

We who know Him are pretty much the same. After all the good things He sends our way, we still complain when something happens we don't like. Oh, how many spoiled brats are in the family of God.

Mt 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

Jesus could have done what they asked, and more. But, he would not allow himself to be used as a pawn. There are many today who demand God give them some proof that He exists. In the process, they prove their ignorance. God is not intimidated by any mortal.

Those who demand a sign reveal their evil and adulterous hearts. Those who know the Lord do not require such a sign. They believe by faith, and are rewarded for it. The bible process has always been, believe and then you will see. The world wants to see, and then believe. The sad thing is, like the Pharisees, after seeing so much, they still refuse to believe.

Notice Jesus calls them "*evil and adulterous*". The word "*evil*" means wicked. The word "*adulterous*" is exactly what we would think, to be unfaithful to a spouse. The relationship of the Jews to God is often referred to as a marriage. They were guilty of spiritual adultery.

God calls Israel adulterous because they have been unfaithful to His covenant with them. The Jews forsook the Lord many times in the Old Testament. They kept slipping back into idolatry (Dt.7:25-26; 12:31; 1 Kgs.11:4-8; 2 Kgs.23:13; Jer. 4:1-2; 7:30; 16:18; Ezk. 5:9, 7:20; 20:30; Hos.9:10). God remains faithful, but man doesn't.

God broke Israel of their idolatry when He sent them into the Babylonian captivity. They never worshipped idols again. This is not to say Israel remained faithful to their God. Even though they did not worship idols, they had still walked away from the will of God and had been as an unfaithful spouse. They didn't worship false gods, but they worshipped their man-made traditions. The Pharisees are a perfect example of this.

Mt 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

He had already given enough signs to convince the entire world. Jesus told them there would be only one sign. It would be the sign of the prophet Jonah.

As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so would the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Jonah was in the depths of the sea, Jesus was in the depths of the earth. Jonah came out of the fish after three days, Jesus came out of the grave after three days. What an amazing thought. God used the escapades of a backslidden preacher as a prophecy of His coming Son.

These words tell us Jesus believed in Jonah. He believed Jonah got swallowed by a fish, and came out alive three days later.

So, if the Pharisees, or anyone else for that matter, wanted a sign, the one sign Jesus was pointing to was his death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus was true to his word. The bible does not record Jesus doing any more miracles. He went to Calvary without performing any other supernatural work.

However, three days after he died, he came forth, alive. He walked the earth for forty days and ascended back to heaven (Acts 1:10). If these scribes and Pharisees wanted a sign, Jesus would give them one they could not deny. What greater sign could he give than to come back to life?

And so it is today. If you are looking for a sign from God, look to the empty tomb. There is no greater sign.

Mt 12:41 The men of Ninveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

The people of Nineveh will be a condemnation to the unbelieving Jews because they believed the message of Jonah, and repented (Jonah 3:5-9). They were some of the most ungodly people who ever lived. The preacher who spoke to them was half backslidden, but they listened, they believed, and they got right.

Not only did they repent when they heard God's warning, but God forgave them (Jonah 3:10). If God was willing to forgive the ungodly Ninevites, surely He was willing to forgive Israel. I am so glad we have a God who will forgive. We can trust Him.

Jesus was greater than Jonah in many ways. Jesus was God, Jonah was man. Jesus was perfect. He was God, and without flaw or sin. Jonah was half backslidden even while he preached to Nineveh. Jesus was powerful. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and transformed lives. Jonah performed no miracles. Though these things be true, Nineveh repented (Jonah 3:5), and the scribes and Pharisees refused.

Mt 12:42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus gives another illustration to make his point. The queen of the south is speaking of the queen of Sheba (1 Kg. 10:1).

The words "*the uttermost parts of the earth*" speak for the most distance parts of the hospitable world at that time. She had heard of the wisdom of Solomon and wondered if what she heard was true. There was one way to find out. In her days there were no books to speak of, so she had to go to talk to Solomon herself.

She was willing to travel this great distance in order to learn more about this man. The trek was difficult. Traveling through the dessert was no easy task. We can find the account of her travels in 1 Kings 10:1-7. It is astounding to read about what all she brought with her.

So, here's this Gentile, pagan, idol worshiping woman, traveling miles upon miles to see if what she heard about Solomon is true. We should realize, she is coming without an invitation. She has no idea how she will be received. She has no guarantee that Solomon won't throw her out on her ear. Yet, she comes.

And Jesus said, "a greater than Solomon is here". If Solomon's wisdom was great enough to cause the queen of Sheba to make such a strenuous journey, was not Jesus great enough to believe? The Pharisees should have, at the very least, taken an honest look at Jesus and examined his message.

REFORMATION IS USELESS 12:43-45

Jesus tells a story to describe the futility of reformation.

Jesus tells us who this story is about in verse 45. He was talking about "*this wicked generation*". He was painting a picture of the horrible consequences of the Jews continuing to reject the message of Jesus. The Pharisees believed living a ceremonially clean life was how a person pleased God. How wrong they were. By depending on their morals, they were at the same time, rejecting God Himself.

The Pharisees were experts at reforming. They were also a perfect example of how reformation does not work. They depended on their morals to such an extent they saw no need for Jesus, confession, repentance, or forgiveness. After all, what did they have to repent of?

It was the religious bunch who betrayed Jesus. They are the one who demanded his arrest, conviction, and execution. It wasn't the drunks, harlots, thieves, and ungodly, it was the religious bunch.

Therein lies the danger of trusting in our own morality. Morality gives a false sense of security. We see no need for God. The religious person does not see how Satan is working in their lives.

There are some unanswered questions connected to this story. But, there is one thing we can be certain about. The Holy Spirit is not seen anywhere in this story. There is no real conviction, and there is no genuine conversion.

Mt 12:43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

The "*unclean spirit*" is a demon. This word "*unclean*" speaks of it's evil nature.

We must remember, Jesus is giving this parable to show the condition of the Pharisees. No doubt, demons are very much involved with the horrible sin throughout our world. However, they are also very much involved with religion. Satan's desire it to keep people from accepting Christ. He could care less if he has to use vile sin, or empty religion to accomplish this goal.

It is scary to realize just how much power, and scope the devil has. He is not omnipotent, but he is powerful. He is not omnipresent, but he moves fast and he has a myriad of demons around the world that are ready to spring to action at his call.

The demon is "*gone out of a man*". The demon leaves the man. We can't be certain whether he left on his own accord, or if he was driven out. Since it seems like he was able to reenter at his will (v. 44), it would seem to me that he left on his own accord.

Considering Jesus' point to this story, the man must have tried to make some changes in his life. We don't know why it happened, all we know is it did happen. Perhaps he realized his lifestyle was not a good example to his children. Maybe he got tired of the hangovers after his late night parties. It's possible he wanted to save the money he had been wasting on his wicked habits.

For whatever reason, this man decided to clean up his life.

He "*walketh through dry places*". The demon goes to the barren land of the desert. This seems to verify the opinion of the Jews, that evil spirits live in the desolate areas of this world (Isa.13:21; Rev.18:2). When the devil tempted Jesus, he did it in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1). We cannot be certain why this demon went to these dry places.

The demon is "*seeking rest*". This evil spirit is restless. This certainly seems to suggest that demons desire a body to dwell in. He is seeking a place where he feels at home. It's disheartening to realize that which gives him rest is a place where he can do his vile work of evil. The corrupt nature of the demon desires the pollution of an evil heart. He is not content to wander, he finds no rest outside of a body. He does his best work for Satan when he has a person to work in, and through.

The devil and his demons are not satisfied unless they are causing havoc. They are constantly seeking a place where they can do harm. Satan told God he had been "*going to a fro in the earth*" (Job 1:7). Peter tells us our adversary "*walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Mt 12:44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

The evil spirit said, "*I will return into my house*". The demon did not leave the body because the person got saved, for he could still say it is "my" house. It did not belong to the Lord. The demons feel at home in the body of an unbeliever.

When he returns, he finds it "*empty*". That also tells us the person did not get saved. If he had gotten saved, his body would not be empty, the Holy Spirit would abide there. All true believers have the Holy Spirit abiding in them (Rom.8:9). No matter how rich, successful, beautiful, or popular, the unsaved are empty.

He found it "*swept*". This person has made an attempt to clean up his life. It doesn't matter what we get rid of, cleaning up our lives will not save us.

He found it "*garnished*". The word "*garnished*" means "decorated". This person not only stopped doing wrong things, he started doing right things. His life truly "looked" better. But, the change was self effort.

Mt 12:45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

The demon got mad when he found his house cleaned. He gets seven demons more wicked than himself, and they enter the man.

This certainly seems to suggest there is a hierarchy in the demon world. The devil is call the Prince of demons. If there is a prince, it would be natural to assume there are subjects under him. I would expect nothing less from the devil. He is a master mind when it comes to organization.

The state of this man was worse at the end than in the beginning. This speaks of his wickedness, but I believe it also speaks of the hardness of his heart. None are so hard, as those who try to reform in an attempt to please God. They refuse to acknowledge the vanity of their good deeds.

These demons enter in and "*dwell*" there. The word "*dwell*" means to live in. It is the same word found in Ephesians 3:17, where Paul says Christ may dwell in your hearts. In other words, these demons are at home, and they plan to stay.

Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, "*even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation*". What he said about reformation applies to individuals. The person who reforms will eventually go back to their old habits, and will be worse. What else should they expect. They have rejected the way of peace. The person who looks for happiness and contentment by reforming their lives will be miserable.

He was speaking to the nation of Israel as a whole. There is no doubt, the situation of Israel continued to worsen. In 70 AD, Titus besieged Jerusalem. They destroyed the temple completely. This caused a drastic change in how they worshipped. The sacrificial system ended. Though they worshipped in their homes, and in the synagogues, their lives were never the same.

Before we move on, I feel compelled to address the push for morality we see across our country. I believe the immorality of America is a cancer that will devour us eventually. However, the answer to our dilemma is not morality, the answer is the gospel. We need regeneration, not reformation. The preacher who preaches the truth will preach about living right and will proclaim the horror of a sinful lifestyle. But, he will not suggest this be done apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Self-reformation without the life changing work of God, will only make them two-fold the child of hell. We need preachers who know the Spirit of God, we need families that know the Lord and live godly lives, we need politicians who are born again and filled with the Spirit.

The answer to the plague of our, once great, country is in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

RELATIONSHIP INSTEAD OF REFORMATION 12:46-50

Mt 12:46 While he get talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

Jesus had just dealt with the futility of self-reformation. As God would have it, as he was speaking, his family comes, wanting to talk to him. He uses this opportunity to show the difference between reformation and relationship. Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus' brothers are mentioned here. Joseph and Mary had children after Jesus. Some claim Jesus did not have earthly brothers, but the bible mentions Jesus' half brothers in all four gospel accounts (Mt. 13:55; Mk.3:31; Lk.8:18-21; Jn.7:3-5). Mark tells us Jesus had sisters also (Mk.6:3).

Joseph was most likely dead since he is not mentioned here. The last time we hear anything about Joseph was when Jesus was 12 years old (Lk.2:41-50). He probably died before Jesus began his earthly ministry. He was not at the cross (Jn.19:26-27). Surely he would have been there had he been alive.

Mt 12:47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

Someone tells Jesus his mother and brethren are asking to speak to him.

Mt 12:48-49 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

Jesus continued to focus on the need at hand. He was speaking truth to those who desperately needed it. He did not take his family lightly, but ministering to those he was speaking to was more important at the time.

Jesus is not rejecting his earthly family. He proved his love for his mother many times (Lk.2:51; Jn.19:25-27). In fact, he is revealing the superiority of a spiritual family. He had said earlier that we should love him more than our family (Mt. 10:37).

As sad as it is, Jesus' brothers did not believe on him until after he was raised from the dead (Jn.7:5). Thank the Lord, they did eventually believe.

The comments of Jesus tell us the strongest relationship on earth is the relationship between Jesus and a believer. We truly are family. I have heard so many say they are closer to their Christian family than they biological family. There is a special bond between believers.

Mt 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

The one's who do what God says are the true children. If obedience was the only criteria that would determine whether you are saved, would you pass the test? It's easy to say we are saved, but obedience is the litmus test that reveals if we are genuine. We don't obey to get saved, but if we are saved, we will obey.

Jesus was interrupted as he was attempting to do his Father's will. Anytime you try to do something for the Lord, you should expect interruptions. The devil is a master at timing. He knows just when to attack. The phone rang just as you began to pray, the baby cries just as the invitation is given, the friend walks up just as you are witnessing to that lost person.

We must learn how to deal with interruptions. We should determine what is most important. If we don't, the devil will absolutely control our lives. We will have to leave undone some important things, because there is something more important. We must set our priorities, and stick to them.

We are admonished to put the Lord first. Jesus said, "*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*" (Mt.6:33). I'm afraid our priorities are way out of line. The average Christian is more interested in recreation, than righteousness. We may not be able to control every circumstance of our lives. Interruptions will happen. But, we should make sure our circumstances don't control us.

THE KING'S MYSTERY 13:1-58

When we come to chapter 13, Jesus has been rejected as King by most of the Jews. And so, they forfeit the kingdom they could have had. They had waited all their lives for the Messiah and his kingdom. They had longed for the times of refreshing that was promised. And, when he comes, they reject him, and lose the kingdom in the process. You can't have a kingdom if you reject the king.

We are introduced in this chapter to the "mystery" of the kingdom (cf. Mk. 4:11). A biblical "mystery" is something that had once been hidden, but now has been revealed. It does not mean the thing was undiscernable, or even difficult to understand, it simply means God had not yet revealed it. A mystery is simply God revealing His will when the time is right.

The "mystery" of the kingdom is the fact that God knew Israel would reject His Son, that His Son would be crucified, that He would set Israel aside, and He would have the gospel preached to the Gentiles. Paul reveals this in Romans 11:25 and Ephesians 3:4-6.

As we have already mentioned, the kingdom of heaven is a term Matthew used when he spoke to the Jews. Actually, the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God, is the same thing.

One of the reasons we know this is because in Luke's record of this same event, he used the term "kingdom of God" (Lk. 8:10).

There is one fact we must recognize about the kingdom. We must not forget, the kingdom consists of those who *profess* to be believers. All who profess are not genuine. The parable of the wheat and the tares is a perfect example of this. If we don't keep this in mind, we will be confused.

Mt 13:1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.

Jesus left the house, went to the sea shore, and sat down. Jesus seldom rested. He knew his enemy never took a break. The devil is constantly "walking to and fro" (Job 1:7). He is walking about, "*seeking who he may devour*" (1 Pet.5:8). And so, Jesus didn't rest long. A multitude came, and his rest ended.

Notice Jesus moved out of the synagogue, (12:9) and was preaching outside. If they didn't want him, he wasn't going to force himself on them.

Mt 13:2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

So many followed him that he was being pushed towards the seashore. No doubt there were small boats beached on the shore, so he boarded one, sat down, and spoke so they all could hear.

Mt 13:3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

JESUS SPEAKS IN PARABLES Chapter 13

Chapter 13 marks a drastic division of this book. Jesus has preached, healed, and helped multitudes, but the Jews have, for the most part, rejected him. So, he turns toward the Gentiles like never before. This chapter contains parables Jesus spoke. Of all Jesus' recorded words, one third are parables. This tells us these stories are important.

SOME FACTS ABOUT PARABLES

- A parable is a allegorical story designed to teach a truth, spiritual principle, or moral lesson

A parable is, "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning". A parable uses a picture we do understand to reveal a truth we do not understand. A parable carries with it the idea of "comparing". It has the idea of laying something along side so you can compare. A spiritual truth is compared to a natural truth.

- A parable never uses a common name

A parable may speak of "a certain man" as in Mark 12:1, but a common name is never given in a parable. That's why we know the story about the rich man and Lazarus is not a parable.

- A parable emphasizes one primary truth

There may be many truths in a parable, but there is always one primary truth the parable centers on. Therefore, we need to be careful to not try to squeeze truth from every word, or detail of the story.

- There are no two parables that teach the exact same truth

God never wastes words.

- The context of a parable is vitally important

We must keep in mind the context of a parable. Who is the parable intended for? What is being taught? What is the primary purpose of the parable?.

A parable makes facts interesting

The facts, even those found in the Scripture, may seem cold, or uninteresting, at times.

But, when you explain those facts with a parable, they come to life. It makes it real.

WHY DID JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES ?

His disciples asked him why he spoke in parables. Mark records his response. He said, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (Mk.4:11).

- He spoke in parables in order to CONCEAL truth

Many had heard and rejected what Jesus said (vv. 11b,13,15). Since they had refused to listen, Jesus spoke in a way where they could not understand. We need to understand the importance of listening when God speaks. He does not waste words. When He speaks, He has something to say.

- He spoke in parables in order to REVEAL truth

Those who had heard Jesus' words and believed could understand the parables (v.11a). The truths of the parables can be understood by believers because they have the Holy Spirit to give them discernment. They see what the unbeliever doesn't.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER 13:3-9

Jesus gives the parable in verses 3-9, and interprets it in verses 18-23.

THE SOWER

Mt 13:3Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

Everyone understood what a sower was. The sower would carry a bag of seed, walk in a straight line across the field, broadcasting the seed as he went.

THE SEED AND THE SOIL

Mt 13:4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

The fields of that day were scattered throughout the land. Through these fields were paths that they used to travel. These paths were narrow, perhaps only 3 or 4 feet wide.

The ground on these paths would become hard as a rock because of the traffic.

Of course, as the sower sows his seed, some of them would fall on these paths. Since the soil is so hard, the seed just lays there, it cannot penetrate the soil.

The birds find this easy meal and consume the seeds that have fallen on these paths. Birds are the enemy of the farmer. They can ruin a crop quickly.

We'll look into the spiritual significance of this in verse 19.

Mt 13:5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

Some of the sower's seed fell on stony ground. This isn't talking about a bunch of rocks in the field. The farmer would go through his field and remove all those rocks. This is speaking of a sheet of bedrock that is common in that area. These sheets of bedrock would run parallel with the surface of the ground. The wind would blow a thin layer of soil on top of this bedrock. There would be very little soil there, but it was enough to where some of the seed would stick when it fell.

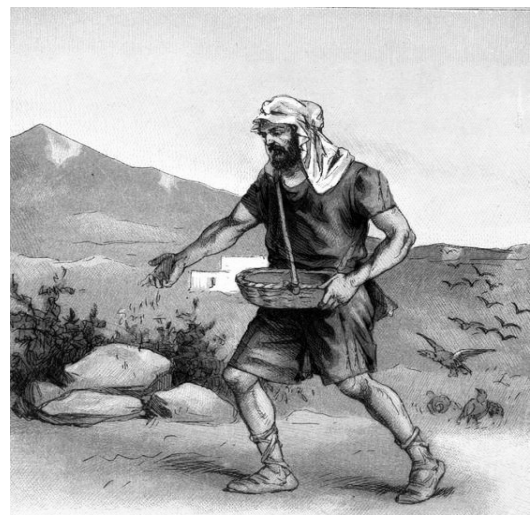
Mt 13:6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

There was enough soil for the seed to germinate and shot upwards, but there was not enough for roots to form. When the sun came up, the plant was scorched and withered away because it had no roots to sink down and get moisture.

We'll look into the spiritual significance of this in verses 20 & 21.

Mt 13:7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

The field had been cleared. However, there were spots where there were unseen roots and seeds of thorny bushes and weeds left behind. Some of the sower's seed fell in these areas. Of course, weeds and thorns grow quickly, so they outgrew the sprouts from the good seed. The sprouts from the good seed could not grow because the weeds blocked the sunlight. Also, they were choked out because the weeds consumed the nutrients the good sprouts needed.



We'll look into the spiritual significance of this in verse 22.

Mt 13:8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Some of the seed fell on good ground. The soil is called "good" because it has been prepared to receive seed. This soil was no different than the other soil. The only difference, it had been cultivated, it was open, it was receptive to the seed. It was deep, it was soft, it was open to the seed.

This seed brings about fruit. Notice, this soil is the only one that brings forth fruit.

We'll look into the spiritual significance of this in verse 23.

Mt 13:9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Only believers could hear Jesus' message. The Holy Spirit opens the Word to believers. An unbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit, so they cannot understand. What Jesus said was not to entertain or amuse, it was meant to change their lives. Jesus was dealing eternal affairs, life and death, heaven and hell.

This answers the question about how so many can hear the Word, and be untouched. There is no effect unless the Holy Spirit touches the heart of the hearer.

Mt 13:10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

His disciples did not understand the reason for his parables. He had used illustrations and word pictures before, but he had never given a parable.

Mt 13:11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

Jesus didn't explain the parable to the multitudes. Many of the unbelievers had rejected Jesus' words. If they wouldn't hear, Jesus would speak in a way where they couldn't hear. He explained this to his disciples in verse 15. He said, "*their eyes have they closed*". The reason he stopped speaking to the multitudes was because they refused to listen. They had closed their eyes and ears. They had rejected his word, so they would suffer the consequences.

Mt 13:12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

Those who had received the Word would be given more light. Those who had rejected the Word would have what little they heard taken away. How many have heard the Spirit speak, began to be convicted, but resisted the Spirit's urging? In time, the conviction, and the concern they had felt disappeared.

Mt 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

They saw and heard, but did not understand.

Mt 13:14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

None of this surprised Jesus. It had been prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 6:9-10). What could be worse than seeing the Son of God, yet not discerning who he was? What could be worse than hearing the Son of God preach the Word of God, and miss it entirely?

Mt 13:15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Their heart is "waxed gross" means, to be thick, or calloused. It actually means, to be stupid. They had become hard of hearing. They had closed their eyes. This is the key. It was their fault.

They had closed their eyes because they did not want to see. Anytime, anyone rejects the Word of God they will suffer greatly. No one turns away from God and gets away with it.

Why would they do such a thing? Jesus tells us in this verse. They did not want to be converted. Getting converted meant they could no longer live as they pleased. Getting converted meant they had to admit their sinful condition. They refused to do that.

The Lord had spoken to these people. But, as the light began to shine on their sin, they quickly rejected it. They would not accept the fact that they were sinners, or that they deserved judgment. So many do the same today. As soon as the Holy Spirit begins to speak to them, they resist His work, and turn back to their sin.

The saddest part of this verse is the fact that the Lord was willing to "heal them", had they only listened. The answer to all our problems, is always the Word of God.

Mt 13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

As Jesus would tell Peter, "*blessed art thou*". Peter had not received his information through "*flesh and blood*", but from the "*Father which is in heaven*" (Mt. 16:17).

We who see and hear have truly been blessed. What could be worse than to not know what the Word of God is saying? The Word has the answer to every question we have. It is the solution to every problem. It is our comfort when we are hurting, our strength when we are weary, our courage when we are afraid, and our lamp when we need direction. How awful it would be to have the bible, and not be able to get from it the help it provides.

Mt 13:17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Many Old Testament saints desired to see, and hear the things these disciples did. They did not see the mysteries of the kingdom.

JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER 13:18-23

HE EXPLAINS THE SOWER v. 18

Mt 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Jesus gave the spiritual meaning of this parable. Who was the sower? Most likely, it was referring to Jesus. In another parable later in this chapter, Jesus said the sower is the "*Son of man*" (v. 37). We would be safe to assume the sower is the same in both parables.

No matter what, the sower certainly refers to someone who is sowing the seed of the Word of God. That could refer to Jesus himself, and it can refer to the believers who follow him. When we share the Word, we are sowing.

The sower has a desire for a harvest. He labors hard that he might see his desire become a reality. That's the only reason he went to his field. That was his intent when he left his house. We should realize, witnessing will not happen accidentally. We must do it on purpose. We must determine to be a sower.

HE EXPLAINS THE SEED v. 19

The sower sows seed. The life is in the seed. Jesus said, when someone "*heareth the word of the kingdom*", so we know the seed is the Word of God. Also, Luke tells us the seed is the Word of God (Lk.8:11). Peter tells us we are born again by the "*incorruptible*" Word of God (1 Pet.1:23). The Lord invites people to leave the world of darkness and enter the kingdom of light.

The "*word of the kingdom*" is the message that tells someone how they can get into the kingdom. The Word is like seed, it has life within itself. When the seed finds good ground, life bursts forth. So, it is with the Word of God.

The seed is the only means of life in the agriculture world. Without seed, we would have no harvest. So it is in the spiritual world. Without the Word of God, there is no life.

HE EXPLAINS THE SOIL vv. 19-23

Jesus mentioned four different types of soil. Actually, there was only one type of soil. After all, dirt is dirt. The difference between the four soils was how each had been prepared. It's the condition of the soil that makes the difference.

We will talk to people with all types of backgrounds. Some have been raised in church, some have never gone to church, some have been abused, some have had a life of ease, and some have been taught to sin since their birth.

All the soils could have received the seed, had it simply allowed itself to be prepared. I am glad the gospel is open to whosoever will (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17).

If there is no fruit, it is not the fault of the sower, or the seed. The problem lies with the soil. As long as the sower sows the true seed, he has done all that can be done. This certainly does not mean we can live as we please and still expect God to use us. It does mean He can use us in spite of our limitations.

THE FIRST SOIL, THE PERSON WITH THE STUBBORN HEART v. 19 (cf. v.4)

Mt 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

This is the person who's heart is hard. They stubbornly reject the Word.

As described in verse 4, some of the seed fell on the hard paths. The soil was so hard the seed could not penetrate it. This speaks of the person who will not listen to the Word. You talk to some people and it's like talking to a brick wall. You can tell, it isn't sinking in.

This is the hardhearted person who has no interest in the things of God. Like the hard ground, they have never allowed their hearts to be softened by the Spirit of God.

Then cometh "the wicked one". We know this is the devil. He swoops in like a bird and devours the seed. Jesus said in verse 4, the birds come and devour the seed. If any of the Word touches their heart, the devil is quick to spring to action. He reminds them of all the "fun" they are having in the world. He whispers in their ear and tells them the Christian life is for losers. He may simply tell them to wait, and get saved later.

THE SECOND SOIL, THE PERSON WITH THE SHALLOW HEART v. 20-21 (cf. vv.5-6)

Mt 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

This is the person who makes a false profession.

The large bedrock that ran near the surface of the ground made the soil shallow. The seed had enough soil to germinate, but not enough to send down roots.

This person hears the Word, gets excited, and without much thought, "makes a decision". They are the kind who looks at Christianity as the thing that will make them happy. Maybe they have been facing some real problems, and they see salvation as a way to get some relief. They don't give their decision any real thought. They never counted the cost. They didn't realize, there is a price to pay by being a real Christian.

This speaks of the person who hears the word and quickly makes a profession of faith. But, the profession is false. This is the person hears about the joy that is found in Jesus, and quickly grabs this "fix all" religion. But, there was no conviction, there was no repentance, and there was no real conversion.

If this type of person lives today, how many more would have lived in Jesus' day? Many saw him heal the sick, raise the dead, and feed the multitude. As wonderful as his miracles were, they caused many people to want what they could get out of him. To them, he was a free meal ticket. Jesus addressed these people in the book of John (Jn.6:26).

Mt 13:21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Since all the nutrients from the soil was devoted to springing upward, so it grew upward quickly. However, since it could not sink down deeply to obtain moisture and nutrients, it died quickly.

This type of person may look genuine to begin with. Remember, the sprout shots up quickly. This is the person who shows a great deal of emotion when they make their profession of faith.

But, once this person faces some of the difficulties of the Christian life, they show their true colors. When someone makes fun of them for going to church, when they are mistreated by their old friends, or they face a problem they weren't expecting, they quit.

Persecution will do two things, it will strengthen the true believer, but it will also reveal the false believer.

This parable lets us know all professions are not genuine. At times, the ones who seem to be so real, are the ones that are false.

THE THIRD SOIL, THE PERSON WITH THE SATURATED HEART v. 22 (cf. v.7)

Mt 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

This person is the one who has a heart saturated with a love for the world. They are not interested in the Word. The thorns and weeds of worldliness consumes them. This may be the person who loves to party, or the business man who strives for success, or the teenager that longs to be popular. They have so much in their lives, they don't have time for God.

The weeds and thorn bushes consume the nutrients in the soil. The soil, any soil, has a limited amount of nutrients. There is not enough for the thorn bushes, and the good seed. In like fashion, the human heart is limited. There is only so much time, and so much room in any life. We cannot live for the Lord and the world at the same time. Jesus said we cannot serve God and mammon (Mt. 6:24).

We must not forget, weeds grow naturally in any soil. Weeds will grow in places you would never dream possible. The lost person feels at home in the world. Sin and worldliness comes naturally to them.

The sad thing is, weeds of the world can also grow in the heart of a believer. Our flesh will always desire the things of the world. However, if you are a believer, there will also be a fervent desire to please the Lord.

THE FOURTH SOIL, THE PERSON WITH THE SOFT HEART v. 23 (cf. v.7)

Mt 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Some of the seed fell into good ground that was ready to receive it. This speaks of the person who listens to the Word, accepts its message, and turns to the Lord for salvation.

This is the only soil that brought forth fruit. Fruit is the proof of real salvation. It isn't leaves, or vines, it is fruit.

Some have used this parable in an attempt to teach that we can lose our salvation. This is totally unbiblical. Those who did not bear fruit were never saved. Again, fruit, and only fruit, is the proof.

The harvest was a good harvest. The least amount of fruit was thirty-fold. Some produced thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred.

One out of four who heard the Word, accepted it. This certainly does not mean that one out of every four people we witness to will get saved. It is simply saying, many who hear, will reject it. But, thank the Lord, there are some who will hear.

We should not be discouraged if people don't accept the Lord every time we witness. The soil of their heart simply was not ready to receive it. God can still soften their heart. Very few people accept the Lord the first time they hear the Word.

So, what are we to do? We are to keep sowing. Keep praying, keep witnessing, keep handing out tracts, and keep trusting God to touch their hearts.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

- It isn't the sower

It isn't the talent or ability of the sower that brings fruit. The seed brings fruit. Anyone can throw out seed. An experienced farmer, or a five year old boy, can sow seed. I am not implying we can live a half-hearted Christian life and still be used of the Lord. Certainly, the dedicated Christian will be used greater than the worldly Christian.

If you feel like you aren't equipped to witness, simply tell others what has happened to you. Sow your seed. But, be sure to study the Word and learn how to witness in a more productive manner.

- We should witness a lot

Anyone knows, the more seed you sow, the greater the harvest. Go tell everyone.

- Most will not listen

Only one out of four received the Word. We must not let that get us discouraged. We were not told to win the world. We were told to sow and let the Lord take care of the harvest.

We should not force people to pray

We should trust the seed. We can depend on the Lord to touch the hearts of those we speak to. I have seen so many, well meaning Christians, almost force people to pray the sinner's prayer. The terrible fact is, many of them believe they really got saved, when they are still heading towards hell.

- Some will hear and believe

There will be some who really get saved. What a joy it is to be able to lead someone into the family.

- Don't be discouraged

One of the primary reasons Jesus gave this parable was to encourage his disciples. He told us there will be times they won't listen when we witness.

- We should keep on sowing

No matter what the result, we must keep on sowing. Who knows, the next one you speak to may be the one who God has made ready. Their hearts may be made tender even while you are talking to them.

The Jews actually had a method of farming where they would sow the seed first, and then they would plow the soil. This made certain the seed would go into the soil. So, keep sowing and trust God soften their hearts later if they are hard now.

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES 13:24-30

Jesus gives the second parable in this chapter. He stated the parable in verses 24-30, and explained it in verses 37-43.

In this parable, the sower is the Son of man. The field is the world. The good seed is the children of the kingdom, the enemy is the devil, the tares are the children of the devil, the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels.

Mt 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.

Once again, Jesus gives a parable about farming to describe the condition of the kingdom of heaven. Remember, the kingdom of heaven deals with how God rules over the earth at our present time. As we have mentioned before, the kingdom of heaven represents "professing" believers. This means, some are genuine, but some are false. Some are really saved, and some are lost.

Jesus talked about a man who sowed good seed in his field. He will explain this in verse 37.

Mt 13:25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

Jesus will explain this in verse 37-39.

While the laborers slept, an enemy came and "sowed tares among the wheat". This was not uncommon during Jesus' day. One of the best ways to get to your enemy would be to ruin his crop. His crop was his livelihood. If he had no harvest, he and his family would go hungry. The Roman government actually established a law to deal with those who would do such a thing.

This "tare" most most likely was a "darnel". A darnel was a weed that was common in ancient Israel. It looked just like wheat until the head, or fruit, of the wheat came forth.

Mt 13:26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

When the wheat grew, so did the tares. Once the head of the wheat came forth, the difference between the wheat and the tares became obvious.

Mt 13:27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

The servants were shocked to find the tares among the wheat. They knew their boss, they knew his desire for a good harvest. They knew he would sow only the best of seed so they were shocked to see the tares. God does not work contrary to His nature, or His Word.

Mt 13:28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

The servants suggested removing the tares from the field. The first response was to get rid of the tares so the wheat could grow without hindrance.

Jesus explains this in verse 39.

Mt 13:29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

If they tried to pull up the tares, they would pull up some wheat also. The two looked so much alike, no one could tell the difference. We cannot determine who is real, and who is false. We do not know the hearts of people.

Mt 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

The wheat would be easy to recognize when it reached full maturity. Then, the workers could go in and separate the tares from the wheat.

We can see the mercy of God in this parable. The only reason judgment is withheld on the tares, is because of the wheat. The children of the wicked one ought to be thankful for the children of the kingdom. If it were not for the godly, the ungodly would be judged quickly. The people of God are the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13). Salt preserves. Sodom was destroyed because of it's sin, but it was also destroyed because there were not enough godly people (Gen. 18:16-33).

Jesus will explain this in verses 39-42.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED 13:31-32

Mt 13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

Jesus used another parable about a farmer. But, notice the difference. This farmer was not in his field sowing seeds by the handful. This farmer sowed one seed.

This seed was not your ordinary seed, there was something special about this seed. It only takes one seed to accomplish what the farmer desires. This seed grew into something gigantic.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed sown in a field. Mustard had many purposes. It was a valuable crop. The kingdom of believers are to effect this world for the good. Are you doing your part to make this world a better place? We are not here to change the entire world, but the Lord can use us to change our part of the world.

Mt 13:32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

This parable reveals how even though the kingdom will have a small beginning, it will grow to something gigantic.

Great things can come from small beginnings. Every piece of music ever written, from chopsticks to Bach, comes from eight simple notes. Every piece of literature, from Jack and Jill to Shakespeare, comes from twenty six letters, every mathematical equation comes from ten numbers.

Jesus said the mustard seed was the "*least*", or smallest, of all seeds. Some have tried to discredit Jesus' words in this verse. They say there are seeds that are smaller than the mustard seed. For instance, the wild orchid seed is much smaller than the mustard seed.

This is a vitally important matter. If Jesus was mistaken about the mustard seed, that means, he was wrong. If he was wrong, that means, he was not God.

However, Jesus was not talking about *wild* seeds or plants. The word "*seed*" that Jesus used in this parable is the type of seed that is used in a garden. It is the type of seed that is planted on purpose, with a harvest in mind. The mustard seed *is* the smallest of any seed that is used for a harvest. So, Jesus was correct in saying the mustard seed is the smallest.

Jesus said the mustard seed starts small, but when it is grown, it becomes a tree. Certainly he did not mean the mustard plant would be as large as an oak tree. However, in Palestine, the mustard plant has been known to grow as high as 25 feet high. Imagine, from a seed so small it is difficult to pick up, comes a tree 25 feet high.

So, Jesus was telling the truth about his kingdom. It did start small. In fact, his kingdom started in a manger. This king was raised in a carpenter's home. He led a lowly life.

His ministry started with eleven men. When Jesus ascended, there were only 120 in the upper room. The disciples were all afraid, confused, and fleshly.

Yet, from that small beginning, billions have come. By the time Paul died, only about forty years after Jesus gave this parable, the gospel message had spread to the ends of the known world. What a thought!

This seed was so small had little chance to live. It was truly a speck against the world. There was every reason in the world for it to not survive.

So it is with the kingdom of God, and the gospel message. The devil has fought this kingdom from it's beginning. Yet, like the mustard seed, his kingdom thrives. Peter preached one message and 3,000 souls were saved (Acts 2:41). Later, 5,000 were saved (Acts 4:4). Even though the entire world has not yet heard, the gospel has spread across this world like a wildfire.

How can anything so small, with so much opposition, have any hope of survival? The odds against it are unbelievable. It has survived because the God of heaven has protected it. When speaking of his church, Jesus said, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Mat.16:18).

The mustard seed became a tree that branched out. This reminds us how God is the ruler of the entire earth. All people do not acknowledge Him, but He is Lord none the less.

Jesus said the mustard seed produces a plant so large, the birds come and make their nests in it. The word "lodge" means to remain, or to live. So, the birds actually build their nests in this plant. This speaks of the influence the kingdom will have on this world. The effects of the kingdom will branch out across the world, and influence everyone under it's branches.

Look across this world and you will see the effects of God's kingdom. Christianity has had a tremendous effect on the world. Our calendar is based on the birth of Christ. The bible is still the number one seller. A great deal of the world has at least a portion of the bible in their language.

I dare say America would not even exist if it were not for Christianity. Compare America to the nations who never heard about Jesus and you will notice a vast difference. The nations that have embraced Christianity have better morals, and are more advanced in every aspect of life.

The birds are not a part of the tree, but they benefit from it. The birds live in the tree because it provides safety, shelter, and seed. The mustard tree produces seed that the birds can eat. They don't even have to leave the tree. In like fashion, lost people around the world are enjoying the benefits of living in the branches of God's blessings.

Christianity has had a positive effect on any land that embraces it. America is what she is, because of the effects of Christianity. Until this country began to ignore the principles of scripture, she was the greatest nation ever to exist, other than Israel.

The moral principles of Christianity, dignity of life, judicial system, education, free enterprise, and the dignity for women, all are benefits that have been instilled by Christianity.

The birds lodging in the plant reminds us how there are many false professors in the kingdom. Remember, this kingdom includes those who profess to be saved, which includes those who are genuine, and those who are false. The more the kingdom grows, the easier it is for those who are not real to slip in. Church growth is wonderful. But, it can also provide a place for those who are not genuine. As the birds devour the seeds on the mustard plant, these false professors have the potential of harming the kingdom.

Jesus' words about the small beginning meant more to the disciples than we can ever imagine. They would eventually see their leader mistreated, abused, and crucified. They would see multitudes turn their backs on Jesus. This parable taught them how the kingdom was supposed to start small.

Even though this parable deals with the kingdom, I cannot help but apply it's truth to individuals. God uses small things. He works through people who see how small they are. God chose the weak things of this world to work through (1 Cor. 1:27). God uses ordinary people. He uses men who have a speak impediment, like Moses, to bring millions of people out of captivity. He uses little shepherd boys, like David, to defeat giants. He uses men like Job to give hope to hundreds of millions of suffering people. He uses men like Ezra to turn a nation back to God.

He uses ordinary men like Evan Roberts, D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, R. A. Torrey, C. H. Spurgeon, and Oliver Greene. He use ordinary women like Ruth, Ester, Elisabeth, Mary and Priscilla. Ordinary people who had learned they had a very big God.

The sooner we realize we are nothing, the sooner God will be able to use us.

2 Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Nothing is worse than pride (Le 26:19; Pr 16:18; Pr 11:2; Pr 29:23; 1 Co 10:12; Jam. 4:6; 1 Pe 5:5-6; 1 Jn. 2:16).

You may feel like you are a nothing. But, if you will give all of your nothing to God, there is no telling what He might do.

So, this parable teaches us how the kingdom will start small but grow into something that will influence the entire world. It teaches that God will protect His people in spite of false doctrine, and evil influence. It teaches the ungodly will benefit from the presence of the godly. It teaches that God can use small things to accomplish great things.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN 13:13:33

Mt 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Jesus likens the kingdom to a woman putting a piece of leaven into a lump of dough. Leaven was like yeast, it caused bread to rise.

When a lady made bread, she always took a small piece of dough from the loaf she was making, and laid it aside. She would put this small piece in the next loaf when she made bread. This piece is sometimes called a starter. The leaven in this small piece would permeate the new loaf and cause it to rise.

There has been much ink spilled in an attempt to explain this parable. Since Jesus did not explain it, we have to seek direction from the Holy Spirit to find it's meaning.

Some believe the leaven is the good influence of the gospel that spreads throughout the world. Some believe the leaven speaks of evil that spreads through the kingdom.

I personally believe the leaven speaks of the ungodly influence that will spread throughout the kingdom.

I believe this for the following reasons.

- For the most part, leaven is spoken of in a negative sense in the bible

Leaven is used to illustrate something evil, or sinful. It is a picture of sin, false doctrine, hypocrisy, and wickedness (Mt. 16:6; Mk.8:14; Lk.12:1; 1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:7-10).

There is one exception. In Leviticus, God told His people to offer sacrifices that included leaven (Lev. 23:17).

- The bible does not teach that the church will spread godliness and make the world good

In fact, the opposite is true. The world will continue to get worse in spite of the church's godly influence (Mt. 24:36-38; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim.3:13).

I believe Jesus is warning his disciples, and us, about the danger of false doctrine. He had already warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 16:6).

He warned them about the legalists. He warns us about the liberals.

Unfortunately, we are seeing the leaven spreading today.

We see it in the form of false doctrine. The devil loves to sow discord by introducing confusion in a church.

We see it in the form of easy believism. It has become common, even among those who call themselves fundamental, to simply lead a lost person in a prayer. There is no need for conviction, no repentance, and no change in their lives. They say a person accepts Jesus as Savior now, and will make him Lord later.

We see it in the form of worldliness. Many modern churches have allowed worldliness to creep in. It is made evident by the way they talk, the way they dress, and their attitude towards sin. There is a relaxed view towards sin. What used to be sin, they consider acceptable.

We see it in the form of "contemporary worship". We are seeing such a move in this direction. Those who used to hold to old fashion convictions are giving into this dangerous movement. Christians who once held to godly standards have allowed themselves to be swallowed up by this movement.

We are living in the day of compromise and tolerance. We are told to love. But, the type of love that is espoused today, is not biblical love. The bible does not teach a love that compromises with sin.

There is one fact about leaven that we dare not forget. Once it is placed in the dough, it spreads, it permeates the entire loaf. And, once it is in, it will not be removed.

I know of no church, having allowed compromise to get in, that has turned back to the old fashion way of godly standards. I know many who have given in, but none, not one, who has ever recovered from the death grip of compromise.

As the parable of the tares taught us, there will always be godliness and ungodliness in the world. But we dare not allow the ungodliness to infiltrate our personal lives, or our churches. We should, at all costs, avoid the evil influence of compromise and worldliness. Once we allow it in our lives, our families, or our churches, there is no going back.

The devil cannot take our salvation, but he certainly can take control of our lives, if we allow it.

Leaven works strongly. It changes the nature of the dough. The devil would love to control us in such a fashion to where there is no indication that we are even saved.

Leaven works silently. It is working at times when we don't recognize it. There are times when we do not even realize how much the devil is controlling us.

Leaven works completely. The devil wants full control of every believer. He cannot get your soul, so he will settle for your life.

This woman mixed the leaven in "three measures of meal". That is an extremely large lump. A measure was equal to twelve dry quarts. So, three measures would have been equal to nine gallons. But, it seems as though it was common to bake this much bread (Gen.18:6; Judges 6:19; 1 Sam. 1:24).

As the mustard plant started from a small seed, this large loaf was filled from a small piece of leaven.

Mt 13:34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

As we have already discussed, Jesus spoke in parables that those who had refused to listen when he spoke clearly (13:11-16). On this occasion, and probably while he was in Galilee, Jesus spoke only in parables.

Mt 13:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

The things Jesus said, and the things he did, were fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The psalmist spoke of these things (Ps.78:2-3).

JESUS EXPLAINED THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES 13:36-43

Mt 13:36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into a house. So, the disciples were the only ones who heard the explanation to the parable.

Notice, Jesus did not explain the parable until he sent the multitudes away. Once again, we see how these truths were for those who would receive it. Those who rejected the truth could not understand the parables. Jesus had explained the reason in verse 15. Those who had closed their ears to the truth so God fixed it to where they couldn't hear.

The disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable. Even though these parables were for the believers, they still needed divine insight to understand them. The truths of God are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Mt 13:37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

In verse 24, Jesus told us a sower sowed good seed in his field. He says here, the sower was the "son of man". Of course, this is speaking of Jesus (Lk. 22:69, and verse 41 of this chapter).

The sower sowed in "his" field. He owned the field. This world belongs to God. He owns it all (Ps. 50:10).

It would do us well to note how parables can be different. In the parable of the sower, the seed represented the Word of God. In this parable, seed represents people.

Mt 13:38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

Some say this parable deals with the church. But, Jesus plainly said, the field is the "world".

Some have used these verses in an attempt to discourage church discipline. When Jesus said to not pluck up the tares he was not saying we should tolerate sin in the church. We must remember the field is the world, not the church. The bible teaches church discipline. There are times when a member of a church should be removed from the church roll. Church discipline is dealing with church members who refuse to repent of their open sin. There are times when it becomes necessary to deal with a person in this manner.

This is done in order to cleanse the church and keep it pure.

Paul told the church of Corinth to put a person out of the church In (1 Co 5:1-7). Paul said to purge out the old leaven (1 Co 5:7). In that verse, "purge", means to cleanse. Church discipline may be required in cases of those who cause division in the church. Paul mentions this in Ro 16:17. Other scripture that deal with church discipline are Mt 18:17; 1 Co 5:9; Eph 5:11; 2 Ti 3:5, and Tit 3:10.

The act of church discipline is done in order to convict the one who is in sin, and get them to repent. It is not done just to get rid of the guilty person. When the guilty person repents we should accept them back (2 Co. 2:6-8; Gal. 6:1).

The seed he sowed was "good" seed. In this case, the good seed is "the children of the kingdom", or those who are true believers. The tares are the "children of the wicked one", or those who profess to be saved, but aren't (Jn. 8:44).

There are only two types of "children". You are either a child of the kingdom, or a child of the wicked one.

Mt 13:39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

The enemy who sowed the tares was the devil. This tells us the devil plants his people where he wants them.

Just as the tares hinder the growth of the wheat, the devil sows his children in an attempt to hinder the children of the kingdom. You may wonder why that "person" is at work, or on your street, or maybe even in your family. Have you ever considered the devil may have put them in your life in an attempt to harass you?

The servants suggested removing the tares from the field back in verse 28.

The first response is to get rid of the tares so the wheat can grow without hindrance. I'm afraid many Christians have this same idea. We dream of a land with no sinners, and no sin. This sounds wonderful but that is not God's will for this present time. When we isolate ourselves totally from the world we cut ourselves off from any opportunity to win them to Christ. We certainly should not be like the world, or participate with their sin, but we can not cut ourselves totally off from the world. We should be in the world, but not of the world.

So, as we saw in verse 38, just as the enemy sowed bad seed, the owner sowed good seed. The devil wants that person to irritate you, but your God has placed you there to be a godly influence on them. God has placed us where He wants us. Your job, school, neighborhood, or family may not be very difficult, but you must consider the possibility that God put you there that you might be a light.

Notice how Jesus worded the devil's activity. In verse 25, Jesus said the enemy sowed the tares, "and went his way". That is exactly what the devil does.

He sows havoc, and moves on to cause more trouble elsewhere. He never rests. His response to the Lord's question makes it clear, he said "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7). He is still on the move.

Jesus said in verse 25, the laborers were sleeping. This was not really wrong. They had labored all day, so they needed rest. But, this does speak of the spiritual condition of those living during the day Jesus was speaking about. The spirit of slumber has spread across this world like a plague. Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit to wake us up.

The "end of the world" speaks of the end of the age. It is the time when God deals with sin and sinners. This is accomplished because God says it is time. God will not move too soon. All through the bible, we see the mercy and patience of God.

The "reapers" are the angels. God has used His angels to minister to His children (Heb. 1:14). He has also used angel to execute judgment (Gen. 18:12-13; 2 Kgs. 19:35). He will use them again.

Mt 13:40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

The tares will be gathered and thrown into the fire. There is no doubt as to what this fire refers to, it is the fire of an eternal hell (cf. v. 42).

Mt 13:41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

Notice how Jesus identifies the "Son of man" here. It is none other than Jesus himself. Under the instructions of the Lord, the angels will gather the unbelievers.

Those who offended and did iniquity are gathered "out of his kingdom" (cf. Mt.8:12). As we have mentioned, the kingdom deals with all those who profess to be saved. All professors, are not possessors.

Mt 13:42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus will say, "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Mt. 25:41). This is the final home of the unsaved. Whether they be the vile, or the religious. Whether they lived in open sin, or lived a moral life and sat on a church pew every week. The tares will cast into the furnace.

Mt 13:43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Those who have been made righteous by the heavenly Father will shine forth as the sun. The taint of sin restricts the glory that indwells the saint. In that day, all that will be gone. Thank the Lord, there is coming a day when we will be delivered from these sin cursed bodies.

We must remember this parable, and this book, is written primarily to the Jews. Jesus was telling the Jews there will eventually be a kingdom.

At the end of the Tribulation period, Jesus will return to this earth. He will deal with those who are lost. Then, he will deal with those who have gotten saved during the Tribulation period. The children of the kingdom will finally inherit their kingdom. For a thousand years, Jesus will rule and reign on earth (2 Sam. 7:10-13; Micah 4:2-4; Isa.32:18; Zech. 12:10-14; Mt. 24:31; Lk. 1:32-33; Rev. 20:2-7).

There is a purpose for this parable. Those who can hear, need to listen. The believers should listen because there are millions around us who are heading towards hell. The unbeliever who may be blessed enough to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit should listen in order to escape this horrible place.

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE 13:44

Mt 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

In this parable, the treasure is Israel. The man who found the treasure is Jesus. The field is the world.

Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a man who found a treasure in a field. Finding treasure buried in a field would not have been uncommon in Jesus' day. There were no trustworthy banks, so they had no safe place to keep their valuables. It was common to bury them in a field, and mark the spot in a way that only they would recognize. We are told about a man in Matthew 25 who buried his talent. It was a common practice.

It's important to remember, Palestine was a land of war. There would be times when the residents would be attacked. So, they would bury their valuables in case of an attack. Or, if they were attacked unexpectedly, they would bury their valuables and flee. For whatever reason, there would be times when they would not return to claim these valuables. So, the land was literally a treasure chest of riches.

This man finds a treasure somehow. He may have been plowing, or digging, we aren't told. He hides the treasure, goes and sells everything he owns, and buys the field in order to get the treasure.

Some have suggested this man's actions were unethical. How could he take a treasure that did not belong to him? However, as we will see, this man went overboard to do the right thing.

To begin with, Jewish law stated, "If a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder". So, this man was within his rights, and within the law to keep this treasure.

Also, this man did not just take the treasure, and not tell anyone. He could have easily done so. Instead, he sold everything he owned and bought the entire field from it's present owner.

It is obvious that this treasure did not belong to the man who presently owned the field. If it did, he would not have sold the field and left the treasure where it was. So, the present owner had no more right to the treasure than the man who found it.

The original owner of the land (the one who put the treasure in the ground to begin with) must have died without telling anyone about the treasure. His family either inherited the field, or sold it, also without knowing about the treasure.

This man's actions tells us that he was a man of character. Had he not been an honest man, he would simply have taken the treasure when he found it. Instead, he buys the entire field in order to rightfully own the treasure.

Having dealt with the ethics of this man, let's look at the meaning of the parable. What was Jesus saying?

There are different views about the meaning of this parable. Some believe it is a picture of a lost person who discovers the treasure of salvation, and gives all he has to accept the Lord's forgiveness.

I understand some of the reasons why they believe this, but I believe it is speaking of how Jesus paid the price to purchase God's chosen people, Israel. We must remember, Matthew is writing primarily to the Jews.

This parable can be applied to every sinner who has ever been found by the Lord.

Notice these facts about this parable.

- The man finds the treasure

Jesus came seeking the sinner. He said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Lk. 19:10). He said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:32).

God has been seeking man since He came to Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:8-9).

- The treasure was laying in the filth of the earth

Since the fall, all of mankind is stuck in the mire of sin (Ps.69:2,14; 2 Pet. 2:22).

- The man bought the entire field

The field is the world. Jesus' sacrifice paid for the sin of the entire world. I do not believe in limited atonement. The blood of Christ is sufficient to wash every sin of every person who has ever lived. God is not willing that any perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

- The man was willing to pay the price for the treasure

He sold everything he owned in order to purchase it. The God of heaven gave the best He had in order to purchase us (Jn. 3:16). I will never understand why He was willing to do such a thing. But, I sure am glad He was.

Since Jesus bought us, we belong to him (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

It is so easy to say "he bought the field" and move on. We, somehow, have gotten used to the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sin. We think of the cross without really seeing what it represents. We take lightly the agony he endured. God became a man. He experienced what we experience.

He suffered the pain of living in a sinful world. He was misunderstood and mistreated. Then, he was hung on a cross. Jesus took our sin upon himself when he hung on the cross. The perfect, holy, flawless, Son of God, paying for the sin of an ungodly sinner. He endured the wrath of His Father as he paid the payment for my sin. He died for us, but He also died *as* us. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He took our place.

- The man makes the purchase with "joy"

In like fashion, our Savior looked past the pain of the cross and saw the joy that was before him (Heb.12:2). As far as Israel, he saw the day she would be restored, he saw the kingdom, he saw her submitted to Him (Isa. 49:13; 52:1-3; 65:18-19).

As far as the church, He saw her in her glory, holy and pure, as she will be presented as a bride adorned for her husband (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2).

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL 13:45

Mt 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

In this parable, the merchant man is Jesus and the goodly pearl is the church.

Jesus gave these two parables that are very similar. I believe, the parable of the hidden treasure speaks of Israel and this parable speaks of the church. God knew Israel would reject His Son. He knew He would set Israel aside, He knew He would establish the church. These parables tell us about both, Israel and the church.

This parable speaks of a merchant man who is seeking for pearls. A pearl was extremely valuable in Jesus' day. They were the most valuable gem at the time. The pearl was viewed then much like diamonds are in our day. Those who were extremely rich, would flaunt their riches by wearing pearls.

One of the reasons for their cost was because of the way they were harvested. They did not have diving equipment as we do today. In order to reach the depths necessary, they would tie rocks on themselves and jump in the water. Many died attempting to get pearls.

Even though a pearl was valuable during the days of Jesus, the Jews did not see their value.

The Jews could not grasp the fact that God would open the way to the Gentiles. For the most part, the Jews still do not understand that fact. The type of merchant man Jesus spoke about was one who traveled great distances in search of his goods.

The word "seeking" in this verse implies leaving one place and going to another. How true is that of our dear Savior?

Mt 13:46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

This man finds a pearl so magnificent, it is like no other pearl he has ever seen. It is so amazing, he sold everything he owned that he might buy it.

As in the parable of the hidden treasure, this man was willing to sell all he had to buy the pearl. I believe this parable is a picture of what was coming. Israel was going to reject their Messiah. God was going to set Israel aside, and turn to the Gentiles (Isa.49:6; Rom.11:25; Mt.15:13-18). The church was going to be established Mt.16:18).

The pearl is a perfect picture of the church, the bride of Christ. I say that for the following reasons.

- A pearl is costly

This pearl cost Jesus his life (Eph. 5:25-27)

- A pearl is a product of suffering

A pearl is formed when some foreign object gets in the oyster and causes an irritation.

- A pearl starts from something worthless

The pearl starts from the wastes on the floor of the sea. Something like a piece of sand, or bone fragments from a dead fish finds it's way into the shell of the oyster.

- A pearl grows slowly

It can take up to 3 years for a pearl to be formed. God has been working on His church for around 2,000 years.

- A pearl is one part

A pearl cannot be cut without ruining it's value and beauty.

Like the pearl, the church is one. Paul said the body of Christ is one (1 Cor. 12:12-13). The body has many members, but it is still one body. So it is with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:27; Eph. 4:4-6).

When the body of Christ is divided, it loses it value, it's beauty, and it's usefulness.

- The irritant is transformed into something beautiful and valuable

From the grain of sand, comes a precious pearl. God is working on his church. The day will come when she will be something beautiful. He will present His church, the bride of Christ, to His Son. At that time, she will be glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle, she will be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27).

THE PARABLE OF THE NET 13:46-50

Mt 13:47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

Matthew is the only gospel writer who records the parable of the net.

Now Jesus was dealing with the end result of the kingdom. The godly will be gathered into the kingdom, and the ungodly will be cast into hell. The parable of the wheat and tares dealt with the godly and ungodly. However, in that parable, the emphasis was on how the godly and ungodly would exist together. In this parable, the emphasis is on how the godly and ungodly will be separated.

It is vitally important to remember that Matthew is speaking primarily to Jews. We must be careful to not see in these words the truths about the church that were later given to Paul. This speaks of the events that will take place at the end of the Tribulation Period, and at the beginning of the kingdom (Mt. 24:1-31 and Rev. 6-19).

We should recognize the seriousness of this life. It isn't just today that we should not be concerned about. We will spend eternity, either in the joy of heaven, or the torment of hell.

This parable deals with judgment. The summary is found in verse 50. Jesus spoke often about hell. Some have said he spoke more about hell than he did about heaven. This is not true, but he did speak often about the judgment of hell fire.

We must remember, the kingdom of heaven deals with all those who *profess* to be saved. Some are saved, and some are not.

God is being patient with the unsaved for now. But, the time will come when His patience will run out.

In this parable, Jesus told about a net that is thrown into the sea. The word Jesus used for "net" is talking about a seine net.

A seine net was a very large net. It was so large that it could cover a half mile area. They would secure one end of the net to the shore, and the other end to a boat. The boat would make a large circle, and come back to the shore.

The top of the net would float on the surface of the water. The bottom of the net was weighted, so it would drag across the bottom of the sea. Therefore, everything within it's path would be captured in the net.

Mt 13:48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

The boat would come back to the shore, filling the net with fish as it went. Once the boat reached the shore, the fishermen would pull the net to shore, sit down, and separate the good from the bad. They would keep the good, and discard the bad. This task was done carefully.

The fishermen would put the good fish in a vessel that usually contained water. This way, the fish would be kept alive. They would discard the bad.

Mt 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

As the fishermen carefully separated the good from the bad, so will the godly and the ungodly be separated. There will be no mistakes. None of the ungodly will go to into the kingdom, and none of the godly will go to hell.

Mt 13:50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The godly will enjoy the splendor of the kingdom (Mt. 25:21). But, the ungodly will be cast into hell.

Hell is a place where there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth". No one can adequately describe hell. The torment is beyond the imagination.

Notice some things about this parable.

- The net is large

It is large enough to encircle everyone on earth. No one will escape.

- The net is moving

As the net was drawn slowly towards the shore, so time is slowly drawing all things to the end. Some people live as though they have plenty of time. But, the end is coming. We must prepare now, before it is too late. The devil wants you to believe you have plenty of time. Hell is full of people who thought they had more time than they did.

- For a time, the net is unnoticed

As the net is pulled towards the shore, it may bump the fish, but they don't even notice. They just wiggle a little, and are not alarmed. They are prisoners even though they think they are free. The ungodly are the same. They think they are living as they please. In reality, they are prisoners to their sin.

- The net reaches the shore

The day of reckoning will come. In mercy, God withholds His judgment for now. He is giving the ungodly a chance to repent. But, the time of His patience will end. He wants to be your Savior, but if you reject Him, He will be your judge.

Jesus warned about hell many times as he lived in this world. Those who refuse his message are sealing their own doom.

In spite of all Jesus said, the Jews still rejected him, and his message (Mt. 23:37).

Mt 13:51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

And so, Jesus comes to the conclusion of the parables in this chapter. He asked the disciple if they understand what he had said. It is one thing to hear, it is quite another to comprehend.

What good would it do if they did not understand? The greatest teacher on earth is of no value if they are not understood. Even the Word of God is useless if no one comprehends what it says. The truth must be received. It must be consumed like the food we eat.

Jesus' question should cause every teacher, and preacher to take notice. The goal of those who communicate the Word of God should not be to merely speak the truth, but to speak the truth in a way that can be understood by those who listen.

Our goal should be that those who listen to us, really hear the truth. We are not teaching the bible, we are teaching people. Therefore, we should ask the Lord to help us teach, or preach, in a manner that can be understood.

THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER 13:52

Mt 13:52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Jesus gives one more parable before he moves on. He talked about a householder. A householder was the head of the house. He was the one who provided what was needed for his family, and guests. He was responsible for any, and all needs of the estate. The householder had a storehouse from which he took what was needed for the moment. When a plow, or seed, or whatever, was needed, the householder went to the storehouse and got it. Jesus referred to this storehouse as a "treasure" because it was where the goods were kept to run the estate.

Some of the goods in the storehouse were old, and some were new. Both, the old, and the new were needed. So, the householder would bring out whichever was needed to do the job.

Jesus was explaining to his disciples how they had a storehouse to draw from. They had the Old Testament Scriptures, and they had the new truths that he had been teaching them. Both had their place, and both were needed.

Like the householder, the disciples were responsible for the distribution of the goods within that storehouse.

Jesus spoke of a "scribe" in this verse. The scribes began during Ezra's day. They were to study, teach, and preserve the Old Testament law.

Unfortunately, by Jesus' day, they had added so many man-made traditions, the law was almost lost in the process.

Jesus was saying his disciples were going to be like the scribes. He had instructed them about the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. They were supposed to hear, believe, apply, and share what he had said.

Jesus was telling his disciples that they were responsible for what they have heard. They said they understood what he had said. Hopefully, they did because they were now responsible to pass it on to others. They were to help others understand the truths that Jesus had given them.

The new truths these parables revealed were to be combined with the old truths of the Old Testament. The disciples knew a great deal about the Word of God, but, just like us, they were to be always learning more. We should never become satisfied with the level of knowledge we have about God's truth.

Here are some facts about this parable that we can apply to our lives.

- The Word of God can be trusted

The truths of the Word that have stood the test of time. The truths that are found in the Word of God, never grow old. They are as up to date as today's newspaper.

- The Word of God is a treasure house of truth

We have a treasure house of divine truth to draw from.

We should all love the Word of God. Certainly those who teach or preach should love it supremely. We should view it as it is, a treasure.

- We are all responsible for learning what the bible says

How can we help anyone if we do not know the Word ourselves? The bible condemns laziness, whether it be in the factory, the office building, or the preacher's study.

- We should guard the Word of God

The devil would love to water down the truth of the Word. We should guard against compromise.

The treasure was to be given to those who needed it. The householder distributed his goods to those who had need. The truth should be given. The truth of scripture was never meant to be hoarded. We should study it, and pass it on.

Jesus' words should remind us of the importance of protecting the Word of God. I mean by that, those who teach or preach should be very careful to be biblical. Those who hear the Word should be careful to apply what they hear to their lives. And finally, those who hear are to give what they heard to others.

And so, Jesus gave this last parable in order to summarize all the parables in this chapter. In the parable about the sower (vv. 3-9) he dealt with how people would respond to his message. In the parable of the wheat and tares (vv. 24-30) he dealt with how the true and the false will live together. In the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32) he dealt with how the kingdom of heaven would start small, but would grow tremendously. In the parable of the leaven (v. 33) he dealt with how evil would spread throughout the kingdom of heaven. In the parable of the treasure in a field, he dealt with Israel (v.44). In the parable of the goodly pearl, he dealt with the cost of the church (vv. 45-46). And, in the parable of the householder (v.52) Jesus warned his disciples how they were responsible for everything they had heard.

JESUS CONTINUED HIS MINISTRY 13:53

Mt 13:53 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

Jesus moves on. The rejection continues. The time comes when God will quit speaking, and move on.

Mt 13:54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

Jesus went to his home town of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue. We may think, finally he will find some people who will be glad to see him. These were his home town people. Surely, these people would be pulling for him, and willing to stand with him. However, the opposite was true. They didn't believe any more than the rest of the people. They saw him only as the hometown boy who used to live in their neighborhood.

Mt 13:55-56 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

They were amazed at his teaching because they knew who he was. This was his home town. They had seen him as he grew up. They knew he was a carpenter's son. They knew Joseph and Mary. As a young boy, Jesus had played with their children. Some of them were the ones who grew up playing with Jesus themselves. To them, he was an ordinary man.

Even though he was anything but ordinary, Jesus led a pretty much ordinary life until he was thirty years old. He submitted to his parents authority, and he worked the trade of Joseph. It is astounding to realize, the God who made this universe was working in a carpenter's shop.

But, his words and his works were not ordinary. His teaching amazed those who heard him. They knew he had no formal training, yet he spoke with such wisdom. They wondered, where did he obtain this knowledge?

They were amazed also, at the works he did. How could this man do such things?

This was not the last time Jesus was not recognized for who he is. Much of the world does not recognize him now.

His brothers and sisters were still among them. Since Joseph is not included here, there is a good chance that he had passed away. Contrary to what some say, these verses make it clear that Mary had children other than Jesus (cf Mt. 12:46).

Mt 13:57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

The word "offended" means, to trip, or to stumble. They stumbled over the fact that he was the Messiah because they knew him as just one of the guys in the neighborhood.

The fact of knowing him as they did, kept them from believing on him. They would not accept him to be who he claimed to be.

They were too familiar with Jesus to accept the fact that he was the Messiah. I am afraid the same thing happens to us.

We get so used to being saved, we take it for granted. The fact that our sin has been forgiven does not excite us any more. We get so used to being able to pray, we no longer see the glory of being able to enter the presence of the God of heaven and earth. Church becomes boring, prayer becomes ritualistic, and his goodness becomes expected. May he wake us up to the splendor of knowing him.

Mt 13:58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

He wasn't able to do a lot of miracles in that place. The one, and only reason, their lack of faith. Why was this true?

Since they did not believe him, they did not come to him. Jesus told the Jews they would not come to him that they might have life (Jn. 5:40). God never forces anything on anyone.

Since they did not believe him, their unbelief hindered him. Faith moves God. Our lack of faith, keeps Him from working.

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST 14:1-12

Mt 14:1 At that time Herod the Petrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,

Jesus' reputation is growing. He is preaching, and his disciples are going out two by two, proclaiming the Word. Everyone is talking about him. Herod heard about this man who was causing such an uproar.

This is Herod Antipas. He was the son of the Herod the Great who tried to put Jesus to death just after his birth (Mt. 2). He is called "tetrarch". The word "tetrarch" means 'the ruler of a fourth part'. It simply means He had been assigned by Rome to oversee a portion of Israel.

As we will discover, Herod was a man who was driven by fear. He was an ungodly man.

These verses are a flashback to the events that led to the end of John's life.

Mt 14:2 And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

Herod's response to hearing about Jesus is very telling. It reveals the fear that controlled his life. His first thought when he heard about Jesus was that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead.

My first thought is how this honors John the Baptist. John had lived a life that when Herod heard about Jesus, he thought of John. May we live in such a manner.

Mt 14:3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

First, we see Herod's fear that John had come back from the dead. He had put John the Baptist to death.

Mark tells us that Herod feared John because he knew he was a godly man (Mk. 6:20).

It is not uncommon for a murderer to have a fear that the person they murdered would come back from the dead in order to get revenge. This certainly seems to what is happened to Herod.

In spite of his fear, Herod was curious about Jesus. Luke tells us he wanted to see Jesus (Lk. 9:7-9). He wanted to know more about this unusual man named Jesus.

Mt 14:4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

Herod had a half-brother name Philip who lived in Rome. Herod had gone to Rome to visit his brother Philip. While he was there, he seduced Philip's wife. Her name was Herodias. Herod and Herodias divorced their spouses, and were married. No doubt, Herod would regret this decision more times that he could count.

Notice, the Holy Spirit still calls her, "Philip's wife". God never recognized their marriage.

John spoke out about Herod's sin. The Greek tense of the word "said" indicates that John spoke about this sin more than once. Undoubtedly, he must have spoken against Herod's sin on several occasions. He was a man who was not afraid to name sin, even if that sin was committed by the rulers of the land.

Mt 14:5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Herod was furious about John's message against him and Herodias. His first thoughts were to do away with him. He thought, do away with the messenger, and you do away with the message.

But, once again, we see Herod's fear. He was afraid of the popularity of John. He was afraid that John's influence with the people might jeopardize his control over them.

Mt 14:6 But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

John's message also made Herodias furious. No doubt, she laid in bed at night devising a plan to get rid of him. She would silence this man if it was the last thing she ever did. Herod's birthday offered her the perfect opportunity to do just that.

In that day, only pagans celebrated birthdays. The Romans celebrated birthdays with ungodly and vile parties. They involved drunkenness, gluttony, and ungodliness. They would drink and eat as much as they could hold. Then, women would be brought in to dance in a lewd manner.

This is exactly what happened at Herod's birthday party. However, as planned by Herodias, her daughter was the one who danced. She knew Herod would be drunk, and easily manipulated.

Mt 14:7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

Herod made the second greatest mistake of his life. The first was marrying Herodias, the second was making her daughter this promise.

Herod had eaten until he could not eat another bite. He had drunk until he was a blabbering idiot. And now, he had been excited by the dance of this teenage girl. He is ripe for the picking. He fell into the trap.

Mark tells us Herod actually promised her anything up to half his kingdom (Mk. 6:23). This shows the utter stupidity of his condition. Sin controls in such a fashion as to rob all sense of reasoning.

Mt 14:8 And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

Herodias' daughter, as instructed by her mother, asked for the head of John the Baptist. It is difficult to imagine just how ungodly Herodias was. How could she be so wicked as to use her own daughter in such a vile deed?

A "charger" was a platter.

Mt 14:9 And the king was sorry; nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

Herod was sorry, but he still had no backbone. He feared Herodias. He knew he would not have any peace at home if he refused the girl's request. He feared the people. He knew they would think less of him if he did not keep his promise.

He was in a difficult situation. But, how much better would it have been if he had just done the right thing. All he had to do was tell them that he had made a promise in the heat of the moment. He had a chance to do right for a change. Yes, Herodias would have pitched a fit. Yes, some of the people would have thought less of him for not keeping his promise. But, it would have still been the right thing to do.

Some people may have been displeased with him, but God would have been pleased. It is better to have to favor of God than the approval of man.

Mt 14:10-11 And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

Herod sent to the dungeon where John was being held prisoner and had him beheaded.

And so, the deed was done. I wonder what Herodias' daughter was thinking as she carried the head of John to her mother. What thoughts did this young girl have? Were they thoughts of horror, or thoughts of devilish delight?

Mt 14:12 And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

And so, John was dead. But, he died a victor. He died doing the Lord's service. He died obeying the One who would die for him. He died with a clear conscience. I say, what a wonderful way to leave this world.

John's disciples came to get his body and bury it. They made sure Jesus knew.

THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 14:13-21

Jesus performed a miracle, and provided food for a multitude. This is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospel accounts (cf. Mk. 6:30-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13).

Mt 14:13 When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

Jesus took his disciples, boarded a ship, and went to a secluded place.

Some have actually suggested that Jesus feared Herod, and left town because of it. How absurd! Jesus did not fear this little squirrel of a man named Herod. He would later call him a fox (Lk. 13:32). Jesus feared no man. It simply was not time for Jesus to confront. It was not time for him to claim the kingdom. It was not time to fight. It takes wisdom to know when to not fight.

Mark tells us that Jesus was seeking for a place where he, and his disciples, could have some time away from the crowds (Mk. 6:31). They needed rest. They needed time to recuperate. Finding such a place was not an easy task. Galilee was only about 50 miles long and 25 miles wide. In this small area there were over 200 towns. So, finding a private place was not easy.

He did find a place but their rest was short lived. Once the people heard about him being close, they followed him on foot. A man who can heal diseases and raise the dead can not expect to have much "alone" time.

Mt 14:14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

John tells us it was the time of Passover (Jn. 6:3-4). The roads would have been full of people heading towards Jerusalem. Since entire families traveled to Passover, there is no telling how many were in this crowd. Matthew described it as a "great multitude".

The sad truth is, most of them were seeking him only for healing. John tells us a great multitude followed him, "because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased" (Jn. 6:1-2). They had no intention to give themselves totally to him. They would stay only as long as he did good things for them. What amazes me is the fact that Jesus, knowing their hearts, still had compassion on them, and gave them food.

This verse says Jesus had compassion on these people. That is more than just feeling an obligation to them. It is more than just feeling like he should do the right thing. He genuinely cared. He felt their need. I am glad he still does. We have a high priest that is touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15).

He needed rest but the needs of the people were more important. He knew most of them were only after his healing, and cared nothing about making him their Lord. Yet, he helped them anyway.

Mt 14:15 And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

As the day wore on, the disciples began to get concerned about the welfare of the multitude. They had not eaten and the disciples knew they were getting weak and hungry.

John tells us a little more about this conversation. As Jesus was talking to his disciples, he asked Philip (no doubt in the presence of the other disciples) where they could get bread for the crowd (Jn. 6:5). The bible says, He did this to test Philip (Jn. 6:6).

He was actually testing all the disciples. Had they paid attention to his many miracles? Would they trust him? They should have expected him to do something unusual. They had seen him do the impossible so many times, they should have not doubted.

Philip's response is recorded in John. He said "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for the, that every one may take a little".

Perhaps two hundred pennyworth was the amount in the bag the disciples had as a treasury (cf. Jn. 12:6 and 13:29). Philip was thinking the way to solve the problem was to go and buy food. But, they certainly did not have enough money to buy even a little for everyone in such a great multitude.

The disciples finally devised a plan. Their remedy to the problem was, "send the multitude away". They were saying, let them deal with their own problems. How many times is that our remedy. We just want to get rid of our problems.

Mt 14:16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

How could Jesus say such a thing? The disciples did not have the food it would take to feed this multitude.

He said this to make them face the facts. He wanted them to realize that they did not have what was needed. They needed to know that they could not do what was required. They were about to learn a lesson we all need to learn. The lesson of helplessness. We cannot do what is needed. We do not have sufficient supply. It must come from, and through, Jesus.

Mt 14:17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

Andrew told Jesus about a little boy who had his lunch with him (cf. Jn. 6:9). It consisted of five barley loaves, and two small fish. Barley was the cheapest grain available. It was what the poor used to make their bread.

So, there was a multitude of hungry people, and they had what was equivalent to a McDonald's Happy Meal.

Mt 14:18 He said, Bring them hither to me.

Jesus asked for the little boy's lunch. When we learn to bring what we have to him, we have learned a valuable lesson.

Mt 14:19 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

He had them sit on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mk. 6:40). They were sat in groups with an open path between them. This checkerboard of humanity must have been a sight to behold.

Jesus did this for at least three reasons.

One, he did it to keep things orderly. Can you imagine the chaos that would transpired as this crowd stampeded towards Jesus if he simply started handing out food to whoever was closest to him? Having them sitting made it possible to feed them without a riot.

Two, he did it make sure everyone got fed. In these small groups it was easy to see that all were fed.

Three, he did it to make sure everyone could see what was happening. Had he just started handing out the food it would have been passed throughout the crowd. Those deep in the crowd would have not been able to see where it came from. His way, every person there knew their food came from Jesus.

John tells us Jesus gave thanks before he broke the bread (Jn. 6:11).

Jesus didn't break the bread and pile it up in piles so the people could come and get what they wanted. He broke some off a loaf, gave it to a disciple, and broke off another piece. He continued doing this until everyone was full. Like the widow's meal (cf. 1 Kgs. 17:13-16) the bread kept coming. Undoubtedly, as Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, the loaves, and the fish, did not diminish.

Mt 14:20 And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

They were all "filled". This means they were so full, they had no desire for another bite. They had eaten all they wanted.

If they *all* ate all they wanted, that means the young lad who gave his lunch was included. He ended up eating more than he had originally. He gave what he had, but he got more in return. We never lack when we give what God asks.

Some have suggested that everyone had actually brought their own lunch with them. When they saw the little boy's willingness to share, they brought out their lunches, and shared also. To begin with, the bible does not say this is what happened. Also, had this happened, no one would have returned the next day seeking more food from Jesus (Jn. 6:22-26).

There were 12 baskets of leftovers. These were small baskets that individuals carried. There was a basket for each disciple.

One of the amazing things about this miracle is the fact that Jesus made just enough for everyone, including his disciples. Jesus made exactly enough, and not one crumb too much. He knows how to restrain his power when the occasion calls for it.

Mt 14:21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

There was 5,000 men, not counting the women and children. Children were considered a blessing from God at that time. Every family had several. Considering it was the time of Passover, and entire families traveled together on the way to Jerusalem, it not unreasonable to assume there was 15 or 20 thousand gathered there. After all, Matthew said it was a "*great multitude*". He was there, he ought to know.

The bread and fish were BROUGHT, BLESSED, BROKEN, and there was a BOUNTY.

The LUNCH WAS CONSUMED, the LEFTOVERS WERE COLLECTED, the LIVES WERE CHANGED.

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

- Rest is needed

Jesus sought rest for himself and his disciples. Our bodies wear out. We need to take time to rest.

- Fellowship is important

Jesus didn't seek a place of solitude merely to rest. He knew the importance of his disciples spending time together. Christian fellowship is vital for us all.

- God cares

Jesus was truly moved by their need. If He was, we should be. We should care for those in need.

He taught them that even though rest is important, there will be times when rest has to be forfeited in order to help someone.

He was WEARY, but he helped. He was WATCHING, he saw the need. He was WILLING, even though he was tired. He was WORKING, he fulfilled the need.

- God can

Even though the supply was lacking, it was no problem to Jesus to provide what was needed. Nothing is too big for God. The God who created the universe, created food.

What God asked of Jesus' disciples, He provided. He told them to feed the multitude, but he gave them the food to do it. God never asks us to do anything without providing what is needed to do what He asks.

Do you ever feel like life is too much for you to handle? Does it seem like job is too big for you? Just remember, he still multiplies. He still has the touch. He can make your little, more than enough.

Don't give up when it seems like all is lost. Your God can make a way when there is no way. Do what the Psalmist did, put your hope in God. Ps 43:5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.

- God is a God of order

He had them sit down in groups. We should do things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

- God is not wasteful

Jesus had the leftovers taken up. He used what was leftover. Nothing was wasted.

- God should be obeyed

I can't imagine what the disciples thought as they were having the multitude sit down in groups.

We need to learn how to obey Him, even when it doesn't make sense to us.

- Everyone was used

The way Jesus worked this plan, every one of the disciples had a part. No one was excluded. God's work involves all of His children. He has a job for you to do. Are you doing it ?

- We must be broken if we are to be used

He "brake" the bread.

He TOOK the bread, he TORE the bread, and he TRANSFORMED the bread. It could not be transformed until he took it. The disciples had it in their hands, but they could not do what he did. It could not be transformed until he tore it. Simply holding it in his hands would accomplish nothing. Before the Lord can use us we must be broken.

- We should give

The disciples received the food from Jesus. But then, they had to give it away. We should be funnels. A funnel doesn't hang on to anything. It lets what comes into it, pass through. What we get from God, we should be willing to pass on to others.

Also, we must consider one thing that is not discussed in these verses. That is, what did Jesus eat? We may assume that he ate nothing, but I believe some of the disciples gave him some of what was in their baskets.

- God deserves the glory

What happened that day could have only be done by God. Those who ate the loaves and fish knew where their lunch came from. Every time they took a bite, they remembered, this came from God.

JESUS WALKED ON THE WATER AND CALMED THE STORM 14:22-33

Mt 14:22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

John tells us Jesus left because he knew they were going to try to make him king (Jn. 6:15). The crowd was at a fever high now. They had seen him feed a multitude with a little boy's lunch.

They had been looking for the Messiah all their lives. This man must be the one they had been looking for. If he was hesitant to march in and overtake the Roman government, they would prod him along.

They were more concerned about their bondage to Rome than they were their bondage to sin.

But, the fact still remained. Jesus came preaching about having their hearts changed. He spoke of an inward change. He preached "Repent" because their hearts were so far from God. He could not be their leader until they repented of their sin.

Immediately, Jesus told his disciples to get in a ship. He stayed behind. The text says, "to go before him". This suggests that he is expected to follow at some time.

The word, "constrained" means he compelled them to get in the ship. They were reluctant to board the ship. Perhaps they were reluctant to leave the place where such a wonderful miracle had taken place. I understand that. There has been many times when the Lord moved in a church service and I didn't want it to end.

Perhaps they were reluctant to leave because they knew he was not going with them. I believe he was wanting to teach them a lesson they would soon need to know. That is, how to keep doing the Lord's will when he isn't present. The day was coming, he would really be leaving them. The cross would take him away.

Mt 14:23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Jesus sent the multitude away and went to a mountain to pray.

Jesus prayed often. I am astounded at the times we read of Jesus praying (In the book of Matthew...Mt. 11:25-26; 14:23; 15:36; 19:13-15; 22:26; 26:36-46; 27:46. In the book of Luke...Lk. 3:21-22; 5:15; 6:12-13; 9:18; 10:21; 11:1; 22:31-32; 23:34; 23:46; 24:30. In the book of Mark...Mk. 1:35-36; 7:31-37. In the book of John....Jn. 6:11; 11:41-42; 12:27-28; 17:1-26).

Someone needs to see the need for intercessory prayer. We need someone who will leave the world behind, get away from everyone, and seek the Lord on behalf of those in need. Are you a pray-er? Do you pray for others? Do you stand between them and God?

There are so many who are hurting, they need a pray-er. There are so many who are straying, they need a pray-er. There are so many who are lost, they need a pray-er. Our homes, churches, country, and even our enemies, need a pray-er.

Mt 14:24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary.

This was not an ordinary storm. The word "tossed" means "torture". It was a torturous storm.

The word "contrary" means "opposite". The wind was blowing them away from the direction they supposed to go. How many times has it seemed like the circumstances of your life have been working against you doing the Lord's will? We should expect opposition.

The ship was in the midst of the sea. It was at the point to where it was as far to shore if they turned around, as if they continued forward.

A storm blows in. Storms were common on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea lies at around 700 feet below sea level. There are mountains at the edge of the sea. The cold air coming across these mountains swoops down across the moist sea air and causes violent storms to come quickly and without notice.

Mark tells us the disciples were rowing with all their might (Mk. 6:48). They were doing all they could to survive.

As they fight the storm, no doubt they are wondering, where is Jesus, why did he send us into this storm. We ask the same type of questions. We wonder why the Lord allows the problems that come to our lives.

Little did they know, while they were wondering where he was, he was on the mountain, praying for them (v. 23). He knew their situation. We can rest assured, he always knows where we are and what we are facing. Even now, he is making intercession for you (Heb. 7:25). He is calling your name before the Father. As he prayed for Peter (Lk. 22:32) he prays for us.

Mt 14:25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

They divided the night into four hours "watches". The first watch was from 6 pm to 9 pm. The second watch was from 9 pm to 12 am. The third watch was from 12 am to 3 am. The fourth watch 3 am to 6 am. So, Jesus came somewhere between 3 and 6 am.

The sea, nor the storm, was a problem for Jesus. I have often wondered what it looked like to see him walking on the water. Were the waves calm immediately under his feet? Or, were the waves as violent under him as everywhere else? I wonder, did he even get wet?

Mt 14:26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

They thought Jesus was a spirit. They came to this conclusion because the last time they saw Jesus he was on the shore. I'm not sure which the disciples feared the most, the storm, or what they thought was a spirit.

Mt 14:27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Jesus told them to stop being afraid. He identified himself.

There are two reasons for a person to not fear.

One, the situation is not as bad as we think. In other words, we are overreacting to the situation. This was certainly not the case with these disciples. There was no way to overestimate the situation they were in. There was real danger. They could have easily been killed.

The second reason to not fear is if there is real help for the situation. We may fear a bully at school. However, if we have a big brother that we know will take care of the bully, we will not be afraid. The disciples were in a very dangerous situation, but they had someone who could protect them. Even though Jesus was not present with them, he was very much aware of their situation. He wasn't there in his presence, but he was there in his power.

Mt 14:28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

What is the best thing to do when we are afraid, get to Jesus as fast as we can.

Peter knew, if it is him, everything will be okay. Peter made many mistakes during his life, but one thing can be said for him, he was one who always wanted to be close to Jesus.

Another thing we can commend Peter for, he did not step out of the ship until the Lord told him to. He waited until Jesus spoke, before he moved. We would do well to learn that lesson. So many times we move before he tells us to and end up in trouble as a result.

Mt 14:29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

A perfect picture of walking by faith. We do the impossible. Peter was, to begin with.

Mt 14:30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

Some believe Peter should not have left the ship, some say Jesus told him to come and he was right to get out of the ship.

I understand the reasoning for both viewpoints. I believe we can make good points for both. However, I believe we do better to assume that Peter was in God's will to step out of the ship and head to Jesus.

I wonder, did Peter expect the storm to end when he stepped out of the ship? Whether he did or not, I know we do. Somehow we think if we obey the Lord our problems should end. Have you ever thought, "Lord, I have done what you told me to do, why is my world still falling apart"?

The fact is, there will be times when our problems will be their worse when we are doing exactly what God has told us to do. We pray for a raise, and our factory goes out of business. We ask the Lord to heal us, and we get worse. We pray for things to improve, and they get worse.

So was Peter's case. The storm not only did not end, in many ways, it was worse after Peter stepped out.

While in the ship, Peter did have something to stand on. The ship did keep him above water. Once he was out of the ship, he had nothing to hold him up. While in the ship, Peter had something to hang on to. The waves tossed the ship around like a toy. Having something to hang on to was vitally important. Once Peter was out of the ship, he had nothing to hold on to.

I wonder, did Peter expect the other disciples to follow him when he went overboard? Was he disappointed to find out none of them went with him? It's bad enough to face a storm when you have some friends to go with you, but when you feel like you are all alone, it is terrible. Those who walk by faith must learn there will be many times when they walk alone.

No doubt as Peter began to sink, he thought, "oh no, not again". Peter was a man who great successes, but he also had great blunders. I am sure it broke his heart every time he failed the Lord. Here he is, going down again. However, he still had enough sense to call on the Lord. It should break our hearts when we fail the Lord, but we should never allow our failures to keep us from calling to him for help. Even when we fail, we should run to Jesus as fast as we can. We will find him waiting, with open arms.

Peter had enough sense to realize Jesus could help him. He called on Jesus for help. Even when we don't deserve his help, he grants it.

Jesus was Peter's only hope. He may have gotten his eyes on the storm, but he still knew who to call for. For him, it was Jesus or sinking. The same is true of us.

Our spirituality is not gauged only by our successes. Our spirituality can be gauged by how we handle our failures. We will fail. It should break our hearts when we do. But, failure should not stop us from serving God. When we fall, we need to get up immediately, confess our failure to God, accept His forgiveness, and go again.

Even in Peter's sinking we can see the Lord's hand. I mean, have you ever seen anyone "begin" to sink? I learned early in life, when you sink, you sink quickly. I learned to swim as a young boy by stepping in a hole in a lake. I was at a lake where we spent some time each summer. I was walking in waist deep water and suddenly stepped in a hole. All of a sudden, I found myself in water over my head. It was either swim, or drown, so I swam. One thing I learned that day, you do not "begin" to sink. When I went down, I went down in a hurry. I am convinced, even though Peter got his eyes on the waves, the Lord was holding him up. He let Peter go down but he let him sink slowly enough to where he would have time to call for help.

Mt 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Jesus didn't let Peter go all the way down.

The words, "O thou of little faith" are all one word in the original. That word means, "little confidence". Jesus was actually calling Peter one of little faith. Little faith is better than no faith. Little faith does believe in the Lord. But, little faith does not see all that God can do. Little faith does not please the Lord.

In essence Jesus asked Peter, why did you "doubt"? The word "doubt" means "to waver in opinion". It means to be double-minded. That is what happened to Peter. He was looking at Jesus to begin with, but then, he looked at the waves. We do the same when we doubt. We get our eyes off of Jesus, and on the problem. And, our faith wavers as a result.

Was the storm real. Yes! Was the storm dangerous? Yes! Could the storm have been deadly? Yes!

Yet, there had been no reason for them to fear. They had been safe all the time because they were doing what Jesus had told them. He had told them to get in the ship and he had told them to go to the other side. They were doing what he said when the storm hit.

The safest place on earth is the center of God's will.

The real danger was not the storm. It was his lack of faith.

Mt 14:32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

When Jesus and Peter entered the ship, the storm stopped.

Mt 14:33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

They are worshiping Jesus because they saw him as he was, the Son of God. This is the first time the disciples openly expressed their belief in Jesus being the Son of God.

It is important to notice that Jesus did not stop them from worshiping him. He would have stopped them had he not been God. The angel stopped John from worshiping him because he was God (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

Mt 14:34 And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

John tells us the ship was immediately at shore (Jn. 6:21). This was another miracle.

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

- Jesus keeps his promises

Jesus said in verse 22 that they were going to "the other side". When the Lord makes a promise, we can depend on it.

- Jesus is always praying for us

The disciples were facing the storm of their lives, and Jesus wasn't even there. No doubt, they wondered why Jesus had left them to face the storm alone. The truth was, he was on the mountain praying for them the entire time (v. 23). Jesus is, at this very moment, at the right hand of God, making intercession for you (Rom. 8:34 and Heb. 7:25).

- Storms are meant for our good

God sends storms in an attempt to teach us we can trust Him. When God gives us grace to endure the storm, we learn that we can depend on Him no matter what. It is not always God's will to rush to our rescue and take our problems away. There are times when He wants us to trust Him in spite of the storms.

- Doubt is needless

Peter doubted. So do we. But, why do we? What good reason can we give for doubting God? Faith is us believing the *evidence* we have received. We have heard the Word, we have seen God work, and we believe it. That is faith. And that faith is based on the evidence we have been given.

If we are going to doubt, we should have some evidence for it. I mean, if I doubt God, I should have some reason for doubting. If I don't have any evidence that convinces me that God can not be trusted, I have no reason to doubt.

So, I ask you simply. Do you have any evidence that would prove you have a right to doubt God? Has He failed you in the past? Have you found His Word to be a lie? Has He stopped keeping His promises? Is your problem so big that God is not able to handle it? Has God changed?

The obvious answer to each of these questions is "no". No, God has not failed us, God Word is not a lie, God has not failed to keep His promises, no problem is too big for Him, nor has God changed. So, we have absolutely no evidence that should make us doubt Him, at all.

Can we give, even one, reason why doubt is reasonable? Of course not.

- It is important to take a step of faith

After Peter heard Jesus' command to come, he stepped out. We need to be willing to do the same. Some are quick to point out how Peter sank. And, he did. But, he also walked on water. For a little while, he was walking above the storm. How many do you know who have done that?

I don't know about you, but I would love to walk on top of my storms. Are you going to be the type who always stays on the ship? Will you not take a step of faith?

JESUS HEALS IN GENNESARET 14:34-36

Mt 14:34 And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

Gennesaret is not a town or city. It is an area (about four miles long and two miles wide) on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. The historian, Josephus says it was as the garden of the whole land because of its fertility. It was so fertile they could have three crops a year.

Mt 14:35 And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;

As usual, the news of his arrival spread like wildfire and people came to be healed. They actually sent out people spreading the news about his arrival.

Mt 14:36 And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

This shows an unusual faith. They believed if they could but touch the hem of his garments they would be made whole. And, they were not disappointed, they were rewarded for their faith. It did not matter what disease afflicted them, Jesus took care of them all.

Notice, there were no progressive healings. Those who were healed, were healed completely and instantly. Unlike many of the so-called modern "faith healers" of our day, there was no instance where Jesus told the sick person their healing had begun and they would slowly get well. I know of no faith healer who can restore missing limbs as Jesus did. I know of none who can open the eyes of the blind. I certainly do not know of any who can raise the dead. I am not trying to be critical. I am simply saying, if they have what Jesus had, as they claim, they should be able to do what Jesus did.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONFRONT JESUS 15:1-20

Mt 15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

John tells us this happened close to the time of Passover (Jn. 6:4). This would have been the third Passover since he began his ministry. He would live to see one more Passover. He had about one more year to live.

Many came to Jesus. Some came for healing, some for food, some for answers, some for forgiveness, and some to argue. The scribes and Pharisees were of this last group. They should have stood with Jesus. After all, they were supposed to be the spiritual people. They were coming to Jesus with one thing in mind, they wanted to get rid of him. They wanted to discredit him in such a manner that people who stop following him.

These scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was supposed to be the spiritual headquarters of the world. The temple was in Jerusalem. The higher schools that taught Judaism were in Jerusalem. Those who claimed to be spiritual thinkers of the day were located at Jerusalem. And yet, from Jerusalem, came the most spiritually ignorant and ungodly of all men. From this city came the ones who would eventually hang our Lord on a cross.

These men were not coming in an attempt to settle their differences with Jesus. They were not coming in order to become more informed. They were coming to discredit Jesus. They approached Jesus in public, and confronted him with an issue in which they felt certain will serve to embarrass, if not totally discredit him. They were weary of his popularity and they were going to do something about it.

We must see these men as they were. They were not lovers of God, they were not spiritual men. They were spiritually blind and willingly ignorant. They were haters of God because they hated the message of God. The message of Jesus, and the message of the Pharisees could not have been more opposite.

The Pharisees were supposed to be the spiritual giants of the day. Unfortunately, they had become self-righteous hypocrites because they thought their good deeds gained them favor with God. They missed totally the need to have their hearts right with God.

The scribes were the ones who were supposed to study, copy, and teach the Old Testament. They also had the obligation of protecting the Old Testament.

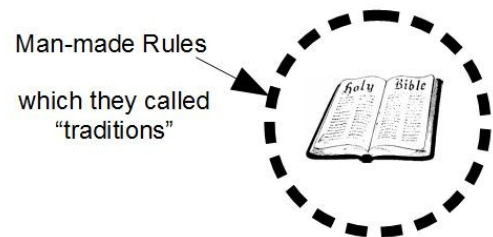
Mt 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

The "tradition" that Jesus spoke was referring to the man-made rules the scribes and Pharisees had devised.

Man has a way of perverting anything he touches. That is true, even if it is the bible. So, the scribes were supposed to make sure the Old Testament stayed pure. In an attempt to make sure no one violated the scripture they added their own rules. They to put walls of rules around the Word to protect it. As time progressed, they added more and more rules. It finally got to where their rules actually hid the scripture.

As the diagram below shows, they surrounded the Word of God with their rules and traditions. The Word became obscured by their traditions.

For further explanation, please refer to the information in these notes that is explained in Matthew chapter 12, verse 2.



They were so dedicated to their rules (traditions) they forgot about the Word of God. By the time Jesus came on the scene, they considered these traditions more important than the scripture itself. The Talmud said, "The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the law". It also said, "My son, attend to the words of the scribe more than the words of the law". So, they actually said it would be better to disobey the scripture than the traditions. Their motives were probably right to begin with, but they ended up perverting the Word.

Man-made tradition can be very dangerous. Before we condemn the scribes and Pharisees, we may need to take a good look at ourselves. How much of what we do today is because we have always done it this way? How much of your spiritual routine is the result of your tradition and not because you are walking in the Spirit?

The scribes and Pharisees said the disciples transgressed because they, "*wash not their hands when they eat bread*". They certainly were not talking about merely washing their hands before they ate to make sure they were clean. They are referring to one of their traditions.

They believed as they went through the day their hands became defiled. If they touched a Gentile, or a dead body, or a leper, they would be ceremonially unclean. They believed if they ate with defiled hands, that defilement would enter their body. So, they devised a method in which they claimed their hands could be cleansed. They first poured water on their hands, with the fingers pointed upward. The water had to run as far as the wrist and drop off the wrist. Water was then poured on the hands with them pointing downward. A devout Jew would do this before every meal.

They were very serious about this procedure. One of their Rabbis said, "To eat with unwashed hands is a sin as great as adultery". Another Rabbi taught, "Whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain eternal life". So, they thought they would be assured of eternal life by doing this, so they did it.

And then, Jesus came along and wasn't teaching his disciples to observe this ritual of cleansing their hands. To them, that was horrible.

I believe they had thought long and hard about this question. To them, they were coming with a question that struck the heart of the matter. They thought they had Jesus backed in a corner. The fact that he and his disciples transgressed the traditions was inexcusable to them.

They thought this would be the thing that would finally open the eyes of those who followed Jesus. Now, they would see him for what he was. But, their plan backfired. You don't corner God.

Notice, they did not ask Jesus why did "he" transgress their traditions. They asked why did his "disciples" transgress. Their point was, he was not just doing these things himself, but he was teaching others also. To them, this was far worse than he simply being guilty himself.

Mt 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

Jesus turned the tables on the scribes and Pharisees. They had given Jesus an example of how he broke their tradition. So, he gave them an example of how they broke the scriptures. Their traditions actually caused people to break the commandments of God. We will see this in the next few verses.

Notice, Jesus did not deny breaking their traditions. The word "*also*" acknowledges the fact that they had not kept the tradition the scribes and Pharisees were referring to. Jesus doesn't even consider their tradition as worthy to be acknowledged. It was of man and he would not give it the time of day.

Jesus and his disciples may have broken their traditions, but they had broken God's law, by their traditions.

Mt 15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

Jesus gave an example of what the Old Testament scripture said. He mentioned a command that said that they should honor their father and mother, and the consequences of disobeying. The command to honor thy father and mother actually was one of the ten commandments (Ex. 20:12).

When Jesus said, "*He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.*" he was referring to the Old Testament scripture that taught that the child who disobeyed the command to honor his parents was to be put to death (Ex. 21:17). To "*curse*" is to disobey, to treat irreverently, to swear at, or to do some evil to the parents. The scribes and Pharisees were very much aware of these verses in the Old Testament. They could not argue that point.

Mt 15:5-6 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

This can be confusing to begin with, but it is simple once we understand what Jesus was speaking about. There was no doubt that the Old Testament taught that parents were to be cared for by their children. This included taking care of them when they reached the age where they could not take care of themselves. The scribes and Pharisees were very much aware that the bible taught this. However, they had devised a way whereby they thought they could side-step this commandment.

The words, "*It is a gift*" speak of one of their traditions whereby they could dedicate all their money to God. They taught, if they declared their possessions were a gift to God, they would not have to use them to assist their parents. So, when their parents needed assistance, they would say, "I'd love to help you, but all my money is dedicated to God". To make matters worse, their tradition said once they had dedicated their money to God, they could still use it for themselves in any way they pleased. How corrupt. This was just one of the many ways their traditions had violated the Word of God.

Notice, Jesus did not say all tradition is bad. But, if we elevate our traditions above the Word of God, we are in error. If we hold to tradition so tightly that it hinders our walk with the Lord, we are at fault.

Mt 15:7-8 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13. The word "*hypocrites*" speaks of an actor, someone who is playing a part in a play. They are pretending to be someone they are not. The scribes and Pharisees acted like they were super spiritual, but their hearts were sinful. Jesus had already referred to them as wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15). He would later call them "*whited sepulchres*" (Mt. 23:27).

They spoke about being close to God, "*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth*". They talked about honoring the Lord, "*and honoureth me with their lips*". But, Jesus said, "*their heart is far from me*". It is easy to say we love the Lord. It is even easy to act the part. But, it is our heart that tells our true condition.

Mt 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

All of their efforts were useless. Imagine, all they did was in vain. All their elaborate system was a mockery to God. Their doctrine was of man, and not of God. As in Isaiah's day, I'm sure God was saying, "*Bring no more vain oblations*" (Isa. 1:13).

The same can be true of us. We can appear to be right with God by how we act, but our heart is the real test. God is not interested in our ritualistic religion. He wants us to worship Him from a pure heart. He wants us to serve Him because we love Him.

Do you do what you do out of obligation? Do you do what you do because you are afraid of God. Or, do you serve God because you truly love Him?

Mt 15:10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

Jesus called the multitude close to him so he can speak to them. The scribes and Pharisees would not listen, so he turned to the common people. He was about to rock their boat. He said, "*hear, and understand*", not because what he was about to say would be very difficult to comprehend. He was about to say was going to be difficult for them to accept. What he is going to say will be completely opposite to everything they have believed. So, he was telling them to listen closely, think about it, and let it sink in.

Mt 15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

What goes in a man is not what defiles him. This was difficult for them to accept because there were certain foods they were forbidden to eat. The Old Testament taught them to abstain from certain types of foods (Lev.11). Now, Jesus was saying that all foods could be consumed. Peter is taught this same lesson (Acts 10:9-17). The voice of God told Peter, "*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*". It took Peter three times before he finally got it (Acts 10:16). This was also an issue with Paul had to deal with (Rom. 14:1-3).

Jesus was not saying that nothing we consume is sinful. Certainly, drinking alcohol is a sin. Looking at pornography is a sin. In this instance, Jesus was referring only to the intake of foods that had been considered unclean.

Jesus will explain this further in verses 17-20.

Mt 15:12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

The disciples were concerned about the scribes and Pharisees being offended. Of course, Jesus knew he had offended them. He refused to water down the truth in order to keep from offending anyone. If the truth offends, so be it. Jesus did not coddle them. He refused to pamper them. They had willingly defiled the Word of God, and they deserved his harsh dealing.

I must make one point before we move on. If we offend others, let it be because we gave them the truth, and not because we are offensive ourselves. Our attitude does matter. Our delivery of the truth does matter. We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Mt 15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Jesus used an illustration of farming to make his point. Every plant in the field was not planted by his heavenly Father. All who claim to be of God are real. The ones that are not of God, will be rooted up. The day will come when God will deal with those who are false.

Mt 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

Jesus told his disciples to leave the scribes and Pharisees alone. He was literally telling them to stay away from them and leave them to their deception. Unfortunately, some people are beyond help. If they refuse the truth, what hope do they have? There are times when God gives up on people (Rom. 1:24 and 26).

Jesus' statement about blind leaders of the blind was a play on words. The Pharisees fancied themselves as leaders of the blind (Rom. 2:19). They saw themselves as the ones who held all wisdom, trying to help the poor, ignorant, and uninformed common people. In other words, they saw themselves as the only ones who had the truth.

The sad thing about blind leading the blind is they both fall in the ditch. Whenever the Word of God is replaced with the teaching of man the end will not be good.

We should be extremely careful about who we are following. We must also be extremely careful about those we are leading. Someone is following you. Where are you leading them?

Mt 15:15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

Peter asked Jesus to explain what he had just said. As I have mentioned, this was a big deal to them.

Mt 15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Jesus let Peter know that he should have been able to understand already.

Mt 15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

Jesus explained the physical aspects. Food enters the through the mouth and is passes through the body. That which is received in the mouth affects only the body. It has no effect on the heart (Mk. 7:19). It has no effect on our nature, our conversation, or our conduct. In essence, the food has no effect on us spiritually.

Mt 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

That which comes out of our mouth reveals what is in our heart. The evil that dwells inside is what defiles us.

Mt 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Jesus gives some examples of the corruption that can be found inside man. The heart is the source of who we are. As they say, what is in the well, will come up in the bucket. And, the bible says we are sinners (Ec. 7:20; Rom. 3:10; 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:8). So, from the heart of sin, comes ungodliness.

From the evil heart comes "*evil thoughts*". From evil thoughts come evil actions. No one ever sins without thinking about it first. The word "*thoughts*" has the idea of "discussion" or "debate" connected to it. It makes me think of the discussion that goes on inside a person when they are thinking of doing something wrong. The conscience says "no", but the sin nature says "yes".

Matthew said, "*out of the mouth come forth*". Mark said, "*That which cometh out of the man*". The idea, whether the word "mouth" or "man" is used is that which comes out of a person.

And then there are "*murders*", which means the taking of the life of another (1 J. 3:15). Also, "*adulteries*" and "*fornications*" which speak of sexual sins. The word "*thefts*" speaks of stealing, or taking from others what belongs to them. The words "*false witness*" is making an untrue statement about a person. And, the word "*blasphemies*" is talking about speaking evil about God.

Mt 15:20 These are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Jesus summarized the issue with this verse. What defiles a person is what is inside. He sins when he does what God has forbidden, not when he violates some man-made rule. But, to eat without going through the ritual of hand washing did not defile anyone.

JESUS LEFT THE LAND OF ISRAEL 15:21

Mt 15:21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus left the land of Israel and went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. These cities are almost always mentioned together because they are so close to each other. This region was called Phoenicia.

As the map shows, these cities are outside of the land of Israel. This was a Gentile region. So, Jesus left the land of Israel for the first time in his public ministry.

I believe he did this for three reasons.

One, some of the Jews were rejecting him more and more. The rejection of Jesus had continued. He had send his disciples throughout the cities of Israel and they also had been rejected. Now, the scribes and Pharisees were devising a way to kill him.

Two, other Jews were wanting to force him to become king. As previously stated, Israel could not have a king if they refused to repent. They were not fit for a kingdom.

Three, he simply needed rest.



THE FAITH OF THE GENTILE (CANAANITE) WOMAN 15:22-28

In the following verses Jesus healed a Gentile woman. This is an indicator that Jesus would eventually open the way to the Gentiles.

Mark tells us more. He said Jesus "*entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid*" (Mk. 7:24). It seems to indicate that Jesus went here in an attempt to finally get some rest. He did not get the rest he so badly needed because he was flocked by people wanting help. Mark indicates he healed many while he was there (Mk. 7:31-37).

Remember, this was a Gentile area. Even though he had not officially opened his ministry to the Gentiles he had healed many of them. The centurion who had a sick servant was a Gentile (Mt. 8:5-6). The woman of Samaria was a Gentile (Jn. 4:9).

What a blessing this is. He had not yet turned from the Jews, and he had not yet turned to the Gentiles, so both could come to him and find help. He had said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). He was proving that he meant what he said.

I believe the people in the area of Tyre and Sidon were receptive to the Lord. Not just for his healing, but for his message. Back in chapter eleven he said, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Mt. 11:21). The indication is the people of Tyre and Sidon would have been receptive if they had seen the wonders the Jews did.

Mt 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

This woman had at least five things going against her.

One, she was a woman. The Jewish male considered it an honor to be a male. They considered a woman a second class citizen. They thanked the Lord every day for three things. One, that they were not a Gentile, two, that they were not a slave, and three that they were not a woman.

Two, she was a Gentile. The Jews viewed Gentiles as dogs. As a Gentile, she had no right to expect any help from Jesus. He had come to the Jews.

She was not just a Gentile, but verse 22 tells us she was a Canaanite. The Canaanites were the people who lived in the Promised Land before Israel possessed it. They were vile, ungodly, idolaters. They were so wicked God told His people to destroy them all (Dt. 7:1-5).

Three, the devil was afflicting her daughter. She was demon possessed. Anytime the devil is after us, it can't be good. He meant to do her daughter harm. His intention was to wreak havoc to her life, and then condemn her soul to hell.

Four, she was ungodly. Remember, she was a Canaanite. It is quite possible that she blamed herself for her daughter's condition. Demon possession can be the result of playing around with sin. Perhaps this woman's wicked lifestyle had an influence on her daughter.

Five, no one else could help her. Jesus was her last hope. If Jesus didn't help, her daughter was doomed.

This lady is a perfect picture of a lost sinner. She realized her need. She had no right to access to the Lord. She came realizing her helplessness and asked for mercy. And, she received what she so desperately needed.

In spite of all of this, she came saying, "*Have mercy on me*". Mercy is for those who cannot help themselves. She couldn't. Mercy is for those who do not deserve it. She didn't.

I thank the Lord for His mercy. He helps those who cannot help themselves, and do not deserve it.

She may have had a lot going against her, but she also had a lot going for her.

First, she had a burden. It was her own daughter that was afflicted by the devil. The word "*cried*" means to "*clamor*" or "*shout*". She came screaming for help. She was in agony. She did not care who heard her or what they thought about her. There is no love like a mother's love.

Secondly, she knew she needed help. She realized she could not help her daughter.

Thirdly, she had faith. She called Jesus "*Lord*". Somehow, she had heard about him and she had believed what she heard. She knew he could help her daughter.

So, she cried to the Lord because she had a burden and because she had faith. Without a burden, we will not pray. Without faith, our prayers accomplish little, if anything.

She first addressed him as "*O Lord, thou Son of David*". That was his Jewish title. Being a Gentile, she had no legal right to come to him in this fashion. She had no claim to him as the Son of David because she was not a Jew.

Mt 15:23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Her request, mercy. Jesus' response, silence. At first, Jesus did not even acknowledge her. Again, she had no authority to come to him since she was a Gentile.

This was an indescribable scene. She is wailing out loud, possibly tugging at Jesus, begging him to help her daughter, and he is completely quiet. He is acting as though she isn't even there.

But, she refused to give up. After she cried to Jesus and got no response, she went to his disciples. Undoubtedly, she was asking them to persuade Jesus to hear her request. She was constantly crying to them and would not be quiet. She was doing everything she could to get the help she desired.

The disciples were, more than likely, asking him to heal and send her away.

His silence did not silence her.

Mt 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

It was still God's desire to send the Messiah to Israel, and then reach the world through Israel. It was not yet time to move to the Gentiles. Jesus, in essence said, "You aren't a Jew, so I can't help you".

This seems terribly harsh considering the agony this woman was in. Why did he do this? I think there are three reasons.

One, he is still going after Israel. In spite of their rejection, he is still committed to Israel.

Two, this lady had to know that she really had no right to expect Jesus to help her. Who of us can say we have ever deserved any of the help we have received from the Lord? No one can. We are all undeserving. None of us have any claim to God, apart from Christ.

Three, he is testing her faith. Like Israel's faith was tested at the Red Sea (Ex.14). Like Abraham's faith was tested when God told him to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:2). Like Mary and Martha's faith was tested when Jesus delayed four days (Jn. 4). The Lord will test our faith. If He seems to say "no" the first time you pray, don't stop, ask again. Jesus taught to ask, and ask again, to knock, and knock again, to seek, and keep seeking (Mt. 7:7).

Mark enlightens us further to this scene. Jesus also said, "Let the children first be filled". In other words, he was saying, "I'm going to feed Israel first, then it will be your turn".

Mt 15:25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

She came to Jesus again, but she worshiped this time. She saw him as he was. The religious bunch called him gluttonous, a winebibber, and a friend of sinners (Mt. 11:19). But, this sinful woman saw him as holy God.

How different is her respect for Jesus compared to the "Big man upstairs" mentality of our day. Songs with lyrics like "Give me hot sauce for my taco, let me witness in Morocco. Give me wax for my board, keep me surfing for the Lord" show us the casual attitude about God.

This also shows her humility. She worshiped him. She humbly asked for help. She realized, he wasn't just the Son of David, he was the Lord. So she was coming to him as God.

She was like the person Jesus spoke about in the Beatitudes (refer to comments on Matthew 5:2). She was poor in spirit. She was coming as a beggar asking for what she so desperately needed. She knew she did not deserve it. She knew she could not provide it, so she asked. She knew he was able, so she asked.

He called her a dog, but she didn't get mad. She didn't get mad because her need was more important than her feelings. When our desire gets bigger than our feelings, we will get some help from God.

Mt 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

Jesus' second response was much the same as the first. He refused because she was a Gentile. He gave an illustration to make his point. He said, "*It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs*".

There are two words in the Greek language for 'dogs'. One is the mangy, dirty, viscous sort of dogs. The other is the word for a small dog that is a pet. This is the word Jesus used. This dog sits beside you while you are eating. Jesus was saying, "No matter how much a dog begs, no one takes the food that is for their children and gives it to their dog".

Jesus was saying, "The children having finished eating yet, so the dogs shouldn't expect anything".

Mt 15:27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Most people would have given up at this point. But, not her. She simply refused to give up. Like the dogs that grab the crumbs that drop from the table, she asked for whatever the Lord might be willing to give her.

Mt 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

He healed her daughter. Her faith paid off. Her persistence was worth it. The children may eat first, but the dogs get to eat the crumbs. This was exactly what happened with this lady. But, she got more than a few crumbs. He granted her request.

Like the crumbs that dropped to the floor, some of the Gentiles were already getting in on God's grace. As the Word was being spread, there were some Gentiles who were hearing.

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

- Our need can be met only through Jesus

This lady came to Jesus. She knew who could help her.

- We should care about the needs of others

She was not asking for a need of her own. She was coming on behalf of her daughter. She cared.

- We should never give up

Her persistence paid off. We should keep praying until He answers or until He tells us to quit asking. When the answer comes it will be worth the struggle it took.

- Faith is our greatest virtue

The reason she did not give up was because she had faith. She believed Jesus could help. The reason Jesus helped her was because of her faith. Faith will do what nothing else will.

Jesus spoke of this woman's "great" faith. He had used this term before. Amazingly, he was speaking of the faith of a Gentile then also (Mt. 8:10). He actually honored this woman faith.

Her faith was "great" faith because she had not been exposed to the word and works of Jesus. Jesus just rebuked his disciples for their small faith, but he commends this Gentile woman for her great faith. The disciples had heard and seen more than anyone on earth. Jesus told them they had "little" faith. She had not walked with the Lord for months as the disciples had. She had not seen the thousands of miracles as the disciples had. But, what she had heard, she believed. After all, how many times do we have to hear God speak before we believe Him? Since He always speaks the truth, do we have to hear Him more than once to believe Him? If He speaks twice, is it more believable? How many miracles must we see before we believe? Should not one miracle enough?

- We must believe the right thing

This woman's faith was in Jesus. Even though her knowledge of Jesus was limited, she believed he had power over the devil. And, she was not disappointed. Real faith is based on something trustworthy. Faith is not a leap in the dark. I have heard people say, "I believe in music", or, "I believe in love", or maybe even, "I believe in fate". How ridiculous. If you are going to believe in something it better be something that you can trust. You can trust in God.

You can have great faith in the wrong thing. I can believe I am 6' 3" and good looking, but that does not make it so. I may believe it with all my heart. However, no matter how much I believe, my "faith" does not change reality. In like fashion, a lot of people really believe they are going to heaven. They believe it for several reasons. They may believe God is too good to send anyone to hell. They may believe they are good enough to go to heaven. However, their belief accomplishes nothing for it is based on something false. They may be totally sincere, but that doesn't change the fact that they are wrong.

THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000 15:29-38

This miracle is not to be confused with the feeding of the five thousand mentioned in Matthew 14. This miracle is very similar to the feeding of the five thousand. We may wonder why God would have Matthew record it. For one reason, this miracle shows how slow the disciples were to learn. They had already witnessed the feeding of the five thousand, and yet, they are giving the same signs of doubt they had earlier. I want to ask them if they are ever going to learn. But, then I would have to ask myself the same question. Another reason God had Matthew record this miracle, as we will see, was to show God was willing to do for the Gentiles what He had done for Israel.

Mt 15:29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

Jesus left the region of Tyre and Sidon and went toward the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us he went to Decapolis (Mk. 7:31). Decapolis is in the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. This is very important because this was also a Gentile area. And, I believe, this is why Jesus did this miracle. He was letting the Gentiles know that what he would do for the Jews he would do for them. He fed the five thousand in a Jewish land (Mt. 14:13-21). Now, he will feed the four thousand in a Gentile land.

Mt 15:30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

As always, the news of his arrival spread quickly. The word, "*multitude*" means "*throng*". There were so many they were thronging him.

They brought people with all types of issues.

Mt 15:31 Inasmuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

This event was so indescribable that it caused the multitude to wonder.

The word, "*maimed*" is especially interesting. It means they had body parts missing. Maybe someone had an arm that was missing. He replaced it. If someone had lost an eye, he gave them a new one. How astounding this sight must have been, to see these body parts suddenly appear.

The most amazing thing is the fact that he healed them all. They were being brought to him in droves, yet he didn't miss one. No problem was too great or too small. Jesus took care of them all. What an amazing sight this must have been. Mark tells us what the multitude had to say about this experience. They said, "*He hath done all things well*" (Mk. 7:37).

Remember, these are Gentiles. They were amazed that Jesus would have such compassion on them. They "*glorified God*". No doubt, this means they realized it was God who did this wonderful work. Notice, it says, they glorified the God, "*of Israel*". They knew who this God was. These were people who had a background of idolatry. Archaeologists have discovered many statues to false gods in this area. But, when they saw the power of Israel's God, they knew He was real.

Mt 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

As amazing as it was, this continued for three days. Maybe he healed during the day and taught them in the evening. When they got sleepy they just laid down and went to sleep. The second day, the same thing happened, and then the third day rolls around. Just a note, with Jesus things always seem to pick up on the third day.

Jesus had "*compassion*". This word means "*to feel sympathy*". It speaks of feeling someone's pain as though it is yours and also having a desire to elevate that pain. This is the theme of this event. That is why Jesus healed these people, that is why he fed them. He felt their need and wanted to do something about it. By the way, that is why he left heaven and came to earth. He saw our need and wanted to do something about it.

This tells us about our God. He didn't want them to go hungry. He cares about the smallest matters our our lives. He cares enough to clothe the fields with lilies (Mt. 6:28). Certainly, he cares about you.

Mt 15:33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

The disciples have not learned much. They had asked the same type of thing when he fed the five thousand (Mk. 6:37).

Mt 15:34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

He forced them to acknowledge how much they had, or didn't have. They had seven loaves and a few fish. They did not have enough to feed this crowd. God will force us to acknowledge our lack. He does it by letting us run out of our own resources. When we realize how empty we are we also realize how desperately we need God.

Mt 15:35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

As with the feeding of the five thousand he had them sit down.

Mt 15:36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Jesus gave thanks. We thank the person who was the source of our blessing. We thank someone because they have done something for us. Jesus knew His Father had provided the food they were about to eat. He still does. We may work and earn money to buy the food we eat but the strength it took to work came from God.

Thanking someone is acknowledging the fact that they have done something for us that they did not have to do. God does not have to give us the blessings He does, but I am glad He does. We ought to thank Him.

The loaves and the fish had to be broken.

Once again, Jesus used his disciples to assist in his work. He did not have to. He could have easily produced food and placed it in the laps of every person there. But, he wanted his disciples involved. He wanted them to see the need first hand. He wanted them to look into the hungry eyes of those people. He wanted them to care like he did.

As they distributed the food, the crowd suddenly became individuals. They no longer saw the vast multitude, they saw the young mother was showing signs of weakness. They saw the old man who was obviously needing to eat. They saw the young child who was crying in its mama's arms.

Dear friend, the Lord wants to do the same in your heart. The vastness of this world hides the actual people. But when we go to them and see them, really see them, the burden Jesus had, becomes ours. When they are no longer a number, but a real person, we begin to feel their pain. That is why many of us never reach out. We don't want to feel. It is easier to keep our hearts closed. But, in the process, we are missing the thrill of being used by God, the excitement of seeing someone helped, and the joy of knowing God is pleased.

Mt 15:37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

Everyone ate all they wanted and there was still some left.

The baskets mentioned at the feeding of the five thousand were small baskets (cf. Mt. 14:20). However, these baskets were Gentile baskets, and Gentiles use large baskets. These were somewhat like the basket they used to lower Paul over the wall (Acts 9:25). So, they were good sized baskets.

Mt 15:38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

As with the five thousand, only the men were counted. There could have been as many as 20,000, or more.

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

- Your problem is not too big for God

He healed everyone no matter what their problem was.

- Your problem is not too little for God

He not only healed them from horrible diseases, he fed them lunch. He cared about their blindness, but he also cared about their bellies.

- God uses people to accomplish His work

Jesus certainly did not have to use the disciples, but he did. So does his Father. Will you make yourself available today just in case He wants to put a fish in your hand? Be sure to keep your hands open.

- The goal of service is worship

The end result of it all was many of them worshipped the Lord. If our service does not make us love Him more we are serving for the wrong reason. If our service does not make others love Him more we have not been successful.

- God is not a respecter of persons

Jesus fed this multitude while in a Gentile land. He did come to the Jew first but the blessings of God were about to be offered to the Gentiles as well.

JESUS RETURNED TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL 15:39

Mt 15:39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

Jesus sent the multitude away, boarded a ship, and went to the coasts of Magdala. When he stepped on the shore he was back in the land of Israel. He wouldn't be there long before the opposition would begin again.

Jesus' ministry had taken him to several places. He had been in Tyre and Sidon (Mt. 15:21). He left Tyre and Sidon and went to the region of Decapolis where he fed the 4,000 (Mt. 15:29 cf. Mk. 7:31). He left Decapolis and sailed to the west side of the Sea of Galilee to Magdala (Mt. 15:39). He boarded a ship again and sailed northeast to Bethsaida where he was confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 16:5 cf. Mk 8:13).

THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES UNITE AGAINST CHRIST 16:1-12

Chapter sixteen is an important chapter. In this chapter Jesus mentions the church for the first time (16:18). In this chapter Jesus first speaks of his death (16:21).

Mt 16:1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus. This was absolutely unheard of. These two groups did not get along at all. They certainly did not work together. They disagreed on pretty much everything (please refer to page four of these notes). However, all it takes for enemies to become friends is a common enemy. They were like the two dogs who stopped fighting when a rabbit ran by. These two groups set aside their differences long enough to attack Jesus. They hated Jesus more than they hated each other.

The word "*tempt*" is the same word used where Jesus was tempted by the devil (Mt. 4:1). It is heart breaking that the worse opposition against Jesus was from the religious crowd.

They came to Jesus with one thing in mind. They wanted to show everyone he was a fraud. They asked him to show them a sign. The word "*from*" has the idea of "being out of". In other words, they were asking him to show them a sign out of heaven. They wanted him to make the sun go backward like in Hezekiah's day (2 Kgs. 20:11), or make the sun stand still like Joshua did (Josh. 10:13), or call fire from heaven like Elijah did (1 Kgs. 18:38). If he was from God, surely he could do such a thing.

They were trying to get him to attempt something they thought he could not do. This is not the first time they had tried this tactic (cf. Mt. 12:38).

They asked him to show them a sign from heaven. But, *he* was a sign from heaven. He had been born of a virgin. What other sign did they need? He had opened blinded eyes, healed the paralyzed, restored missing limbs, fed multitudes, and raised the dead. What else did they need? Of course no sign would have been good enough to change their minds about Jesus. The fact that they asked him to show them a sign makes it obvious that they had already rejected all the signs he had already given.

They loved darkness. A dark heart is not changed by proof. Like Pharaoh who saw the many signs from God but hardened his heart anyway. A dark heart always curses the light.

These people were in darkness and they wanted to stay there. These are those who John spoke of when he said, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (Jn 1:5).

Try to imagine a room that is totally dark. Into this pitch black room someone brings a brilliant light. Yet, no one even notices the light. Jesus was the light of the world but these people who loved darkness did not even comprehend who he was.

Mt 16:2-3 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Jesus gave them a simple illustration to show their ignorance. He gave a little weather report. They knew if the skies were red at night, it was a sign the next day would be good weather. And, if the skies were red in the morning it was a sign it would be a stormy day. An old sailor's poem says, "Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning". They were able to discern the signs of the weather but not the signs of Jesus.

It is amazing that people can determine what is in the future as far as stock prices, interest rates, real estate sales, ball games, styles, and elections. They determine what is likely to happen by looking at what is happening. Sadly these same people are unwilling to look at the signs of the times and realize Jesus could come at any time. As Jesus said, they cannot "*discern the signs of the times*".

The Rapture is the next great event on God's calendar (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Th. 4:13-17; Phil. 3:20-21). It happens before the Great Tribulation Period. At the end of the Tribulation Period Jesus will come again. This is commonly called The Second Coming of Christ (Mt 24:4-6; Mt 24:14-15; Mt 24:30; Acts 1:11; 3:19; 2 Th 2:3; Jude 14; Re 1:7; Re 19:14).

As there were signs then, there are signs now. There are no signs that point directly to the Rapture but there are many that point to His second coming. God has given us signs that point to Jesus' second coming. Jesus will come back and establish the kingdom He promised. When we see these signs we can know we are in the last days.

Some of the signs we are to look for...

SIGNS IN THE WORLD...

War (Mt. 24:7). Famines (Mt. 24:7). Pestilences (Mt. 24:7). Increase of earthquakes (Mt. 24:7). Troublesome times (2 Tim. 3:1). False prophets (Mt. 24:11). Scoffers (2 Pet. 3:3,4). Seducing spirits (1 Tim. 4:1). Things getting worse (2 Tim. 3:13).

SIGNS IN THE CHURCH

A great falling away (2 Th. 2:3). Love growing cold (Mt. 24:12). Lukewarmness (Rev. 3:15). Worldliness (2 Tim. 3:4). Formality (2 Tim. 3:5). Hypocrisy (1 Tim. 4:2). Backsliding (1 Tim. 4:1).

Without a doubt we are seeing these signs. Since the Rapture is seven years sooner than His second coming He could come at any moment. We should live as though today might be our last day on earth, because it might be.

Mt 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

Mark tells us that Jesus actually sighed before he responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mk. 8:12). That lets us in on the emotions that Jesus was experiencing as he tried to deal with this bunch. His human emotions are being seen. It was a sign of exhaustion. He had done everything possible to get through to them and nothing had worked. It was a sign of love for people who were willing to stay blind.

Jesus called these people, "*wicked and adulterous*". They claimed to be godly but Jesus said they were wicked. They were wicked because they were against Jesus. They were wicked because they were trusting their good works to please God.

When we think of wickedness we usually think of people who are living in vile sin. But, wickedness is anything that displeases God. Cain brought the best he had to God. However, God was not pleased with his offering. He was not pleased with the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees either.

He called them adulterous because they had been unfaithful to God. In the Old Testament the Jews were referred to as the wife of Jehovah. God spoke to Israel about her departure from Him as a wife who leaves her husband (Jer. 3:20). They were a part of God's chosen people, yet they had forsaken the God who loved them. Like an unfaithful spouse they had committed spiritual adultery against their God.

The Pharisees and Sadducees weren't really seeking a sign, they weren't searching for proof, they weren't willing to hear, they simply wanted to make a mockery of Jesus. They loved darkness because they were people of darkness. Their hearts were wicked.

Jesus got to the root of the problem. The problem wasn't that he hadn't given enough signs. The problem was they would not believe no matter how many signs there were. As we have seen before, they were willingly blind. They refused to see. None is so blind as he who will not see.

It would be easy to say that Jesus refused to give these groups a sign, but he actually did. He gave them one more sign. He pointed to the sign of Jonah. He had mentioned this before (Mt. 12:39-40). Like Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so would Jesus be in the heart of the earth for three day and three nights. He pointed to his own death and resurrection. If people reject that sign there is no hope for them.

There would be no sign other than the sign of Jonah. He refused to give a sign to wicked people. God does not respond to the wicked and rebellious heart. Yet, He is quick to receive the open and repentant heart. Just ask the prodigal, he will tell you (Lk.15:20).

The rebellion of these people is astounding. Jesus had done many indescribable miracles since he announced his public ministry. He demonstrated his power over nature (Mt. 8:27). He did many mighty works (Mk. 6:2). He had power over the devil (Mt. 15:22-28). He spoke like no other man (Mt. 7:28-29; Jn. 7:46). His entire life should have been proof enough.

Yet they still demanded a sign. These people were so hard they paid the soldiers to lie after Jesus rose from the dead (Mt. 28:12-13). If your heart is so hard you are willing to accept a lie, when you know it is a lie, you are in trouble.

He spoke these words, "*And he left them, and departed*". He left them. Jesus doesn't stay where he is not wanted. These are such sad words. The word, "*left*" means to abandon. As far as offering forgiveness, he left them for good. This would be the last time he offered them any type of invitation. From this point any time he met them it was with condemnation. From this point, he turned primarily to his disciples. Instead of reaching out to those who rejected him, he poured himself into his disciples. He spent more and more time with them. He was attempting to prepare them for what was ahead. There would be no more signs to those who rejected him, only instructions to those who received him.

God still "leaves" people. Those who refuse to believe even though God has given them many opportunities may be sealing their eternal destiny.

JESUS WENT BACK ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE 16:5

Mt 16:5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

Jesus' ministry in this section of the book of Matthew had taken him back and forth across the Sea of Galilee. After he was confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees he got in a boat and went back to the other shore. His disciples followed him. They desired the truth. The work God had done in their hearts was pulling them towards the Lord.

In the hustle and bustle of travel the disciples forgot to get bread. Taking bread with you as you traveled was important in that day because there were no fast food restaurants along the road. Mark tells us when they realized there was no bread they searched and found one loaf in the boat (Mk. 8:14). Certainly one small loaf was not enough to satisfy the hunger of all the disciples.

JESUS WARNED DISCIPLES ABOUT THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES 16:6-12

Mt 16:6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Jesus used this opportunity to warn his disciples about the wickedness of false doctrine. He used this experience to teach the disciples a valuable lesson. A good teacher knows how to use the circumstances of life to impart truth to those who are listening. The best way to make a disciple is not to bombard them with a hundred question test. The best way to make a disciple is to take the every day circumstances as they come and teach them how to handle them in a spiritual manner. In the process of living they learn how to live life.

He said, "*Take heed*". The word, "*heed*" means "to see clearly". He was telling them to open their eyes and see. He also told them to "*beware*". They needed to beware because there was danger. If they were willing to crucify Jesus they would not hesitate to mistreat his disciples.

Jesus knew he was about to leave. He wouldn't be there to protect them as he had been. He wanted to prepare them for what was ahead.

They added leaven to bread to make it rise. Leaven was used as a picture of sin or false doctrine several times in the bible. For more information about leaven, please refer to these notes dealing with Matthew 13:33.

When Jesus spoke of the "*leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*" he was referring to their false doctrine. The Pharisees taught that obedience to the Law and traditions was the way to gain favor with God. They believed their good works would cause the Messiah to usher in the kingdom. The Sadducees did not even believe there would be a kingdom. Both of these heretical beliefs were to be avoided.

Mt 16:7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.

Of course, the disciples missed Jesus' point entirely. When Jesus mentioned leaven they thought he was talking about bread.

Mt 16:8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

Jesus knew about their conversation. No doubt, they were trying to keep their voices down so he would not hear them. But, how do you keep a secret from God? He knew what they were talking about.

By this time they should have had great faith. And yet, their faith was little.

Jesus let them know that he had not been talking about bread. It is sad indeed that we humans think about our bellies before we think of our spirits.

Mt 16:9-10 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

Jesus referred to their "*little faith*" in verse eight because the disciples should have had enough faith to trust him by now. If anyone on earth should have trusted him without reservation, it should have been them. They had seen and heard more than anyone. Yet, they still struggled with faith.

Mark gives us more details about this part of the conversation (Mk. 8:17-21). Jesus rebuked the disciples for their hard hearts. Why would they worry about bread when the one who multiplied bread was with them?

Jesus reminded them the exact details of the feeding of the 4,000. He wanted them to remember how he had provided in the time of need.

It is amazing that these men would give the lack of food a second thought. Why would they have any doubt after seeing Jesus feed the 5,000. They certainly did not have to worry about food. Jesus could have easily provided as much food as was needed.

Mt 16:11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

He rebuked them for their ignorance in that they did not perceive his point about the leaven. The leaven he was talking about was not the leaven used to make bread, but the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

He rebuked them for their lack of faith in that they were worried about where to get food. Having no bread was not a problem for Jesus. He could have produced what they needed as he had when he fed the multitudes. The disciples, like many of us, were focused more on the physical than the spiritual.

Jesus was trying to get their minds off the physical and on the spiritual. The world has always focused on earthy things. They have always been preoccupied with fashion, styles, and the latest trends. But, unfortunately, the modern church has fallen into the same trap. I am convinced if Jesus came to the average church today he would have to teach us exactly what he had to teach his disciples. Our minds need to get off the physical and on the spiritual. After all, which is really more important, the latest trend or having our hearts in tune with the Lord?

What we don't comprehend can harm us. If we don't see how powerful our foe is he will easily defeat us. If we don't see how powerful our flesh is we will give in to it every time we are tempted. If we don't see how powerful our Father is we won't trust Him when the battles come. Our enemy may be powerful, but our Father is more powerful. God is able to give us grace to defeat the devil when he attacks us.

Mt 16:12 Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

They finally got it.

JESUS' GREAT QUESTION....PETER'S GREAT CONFESSION 16:13-20

Mt 16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

Jesus and his disciples went to the coast of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi about 25 miles to the north-east of the sea of Galilee. It was in the area that Philip, Herod's son, ruled. Philip had rebuilt the city in honor of Tiberius Caesar. Caesarea means, "Caesar's town". And Philip added his own name by adding Philippi. Philippi means "belongs to Phillip".

This was a Gentile territory. Jesus had been spending a good deal of time in the Gentile areas. Many had believed on him. Now, we see him withdrawing even further away into a more obscure place that he might have an opportunity to deal even more directly to his disciples.

As they were traveling Jesus must have stopped for a time of devotion with his Father. Luke tells us Jesus was alone and praying (Lk. 9:16). After this time of prayer Jesus asked his disciples a question.

Jesus called himself the "*Son of man*" because he was truly man. This was a title that spoke of his humanity. He took upon himself the infirmities and limitations of the human nature. This title was used eighty-eight times in the New Testament.

Jesus asked the most searching question of all time. What did the people think of him? Jesus was asking what the common people were thinking about him. He was not asking about the Pharisees, Sadducees, or Scribes. They had made their opinion of him very obvious.

Of course, Jesus knew the answer. He was not in the dark about what men were saying. But, as he did many times, he asked questions of which he already knew the answers

Some people say Jesus never claimed to be God. The truth is, he did claim to be God on more than one occasion (Mk 14:61-62; Lk 5:20; Jn 4:26, 5:17-18; 8:58, 10:33; 17:5, 15).

What man thought about him did not change the truth. No matter what man believed, he was, and is, very God in flesh.

Mt 16:14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

The disciples revealed the fact that there were differing opinions about Jesus. Some thought he was John the Baptist returned from the grave. Herod was one of the ones who believed this (Mt. 14:1-2).

Perhaps the message Jesus preached caused some to have this opinion. He preached "repent" as John had (Mt. 3:1-2 cf. Mt. 4:17). He preached about the kingdom as John had.

Some thought he was "*Elias*", or Elijah.

Perhaps they heard the fiery messages of Jesus and that is what made them think he was Elijah. Maybe it was his miracles, since Elijah was a man who did great miracles. Also, Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would come (Mal 4:5). The Jews believed Elijah would return to the earth before the Messiah would come. There are some Jews even today who sit an extra chair at the Passover feast. This chair is for Elijah. They are hoping he will come and sit in that chair for that would mean the Messiah would be coming soon afterward.

Some thought he was Jeremiah. This idea came from a legend about Jeremiah. The legend says that before the Babylonian captivity Jeremiah took the ark of the covenant and the altar of incense so the Gentiles would not desecrate them. The legend continues to say that before the Messiah comes, Jeremiah will bring the ark and the altar of incense back and place it in the Temple. Of course, some believed this legend, so they thought Jesus was Jeremiah.

Perhaps they saw the broken heart of Jesus and that is why they believed him to be Jeremiah. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because of his many tears for his people and their condition.

Some said he was "*one of the prophets*". One thing was common of all these opinions of him. They knew he was not an ordinary man. All of them knew he was from a different world. They could not deny his supernatural power. They could not say he was an ordinary man. Yet, they refused to accept the fact that he was the Messiah. They came so close to the truth, and yet, they were so far away. The same is true today. So many will admit that Jesus was a unique man yet they refuse to turn to him that they might be forgiven.

Notice what the disciples did not say. They didn't say that some were calling him Beelzebub (Mt. 12:24). They didn't say anything about those who were calling him an impostor, or a fraud, or a madman. The disciples understood Jesus' question. He was wanting to know about those who were open to him.

The sad thing about this discussion is the fact that no one got it right. Many thought Jesus was a good man, even a goodly man, but very few believed he was God.

Remember Jesus asked this question in Caesarea Philippi. This is important because it was a place of idolatry. They worshipped many false gods there. They were always open to adding another god to their list. Yet, they soundly rejected Jesus.

Mt 16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

Jesus turned the question toward the disciples. He had asked what others thought of him, now he was asking them what do you think of me. Jesus' question is the question every person on earth should ask themselves. Who do you think of Jesus? What does he mean to you?

This question is formed as a test. He was testing them. Jesus' first question had to do with what others thought of him. His second question was directed towards the disciples themselves. This is like their final quiz before the big test. They had been in the school of the Messiah for approximately two years. Had they learned the lesson he had tried to teach them? If they get this question wrong, it would have all been in vain. Failure was certain if they did not have the right answer to this question.

The question is, who is he. But a second question must also be asked, what will I do with him? How we answer these questions will determine where we spend eternity.

Our view of Jesus does matter. Our view of Jesus makes us what we are. Do you see him as only a good man? Do you believe he was a fraud? Do you see him as God. Do you see him as merely a spectator in this universe? Do you think he is simply watching the events without intervening or input? Or, do you believe he is involved with every detail? The bible says Jesus is in control of every detail of this universe (Col. 1:17).

Our God is indescribable. There is none like him. The Psalmist said there is none like the Lord (Ps.86:8). He is beyond everything we know and understand. His greatness is unsearchable (Ps. 145:3). As the heavens are higher than the earth, so is our God's ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:9).

Isaiah tells us he measures the water of the earth in the hollow of his hand (Isa 40:12). Since there is one trillion gallons of water in each cubic mile, and 332 million cubic miles of water on this earth, he must have pretty big hands.

God said he sits in heaven and the earth is his footstool (Acts 7:49). He must be pretty big seeing that just our galaxy, the Milky Way, is 100,00 light years wide, and there are over 50 billion galaxies. The universe mankind is aware of measures over 10 billion light years. I believe a God that big can handle any problem you or I could ever have.

Mt 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

As usual, Peter became the spokesman for the disciples. It seems like he often spoke without thinking, but he got this one right. He blundered often but he didn't this time.

Peter said Jesus was the "*Christ*". The word, "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah". The word "Christ" means "Anointed One". This is another way of saying the Messiah. Peter was saying that Jesus was the One they had been waiting for. He believed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah who would sit on David's throne.

Peter said he is Son of the "*living*" God. The pagan beliefs of that day had many gods. But all those gods were dead. Their gods could not see or hear (Dan. 5:23). Their gods did not see the problems of those who worshipped them. When they cried to those gods, they were not heard.

He was the living "*God*". He was, and is, very God. They were willing to say that he was a good man, but they refused to say he was God. But, he was more than a good man. In fact, if he was not who he claimed to be, he was not a good man. If he was not who he claimed to be, he the worse deceiver this world has ever seen.

Mt 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus told Peter he was "*blessed*". This is the same word he used in the beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12). It has the idea of being fortunate.

Jesus called Peter, "Simon Barjona". Barjona means, "son of Jonah". No doubt Jesus used this name to emphasize the human nature of Peter. Peter did not receive this information through his intellect. It was not something he could have learned in a classroom. He received it directly from the Heavenly Father.

Peter did not receive this truth by merely hearing Jesus speak. Many had heard the same words Peter heard, but they did not understand what Peter did. Peter did not receive this truth by seeing the many miracles Jesus did. Many saw the same miracles Peter did but they did not receive the insight Peter did.

Jesus told Peter his "*father*" had revealed this truth to him. Simply put, the heavenly Father opened Peter's eyes to this truth. The word, "*revealed*" means, "to take the cover off". That is what God did for Peter. All men are blind until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to divine truth (2 Cor. 4:4).

Peter's confession must have pleased Jesus. He had poured himself into his disciples for two years. He wanted them to recognize him for who he was. I cannot help but believe a smile came across his face when Peter spoke those words. Peter had caused him much heartache, but at that moment, he was pleased with Peter.

Mt 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus talked about his "*church*". This is the first time the word "church" is found in the bible. The word Jesus used for "church" is the Greek word "ekklesia". It means, "called out".

Contrary to the opinion of some, Jesus was not saying he was going to build his church on Peter. Jesus was using a play on words. The name "*Peter*" is the Greek word, "petros". It means a "small stone". The word, "*rock*" is the Greek word "petra". It means a "large rock". He was saying Peter was a little rock, but the church would be built on the big rock, namely Jesus himself. I personally believe when Jesus said the words, "*upon this rock*", he pointed to himself. He is the foundation of the New Testament church. It all depends on him. Believe me, I am not interested in a church that is built on a man like Peter, or on any other man.

Jesus said, "*I will*" build my church. That indicates he had not yet done so.

When Jesus said he would build his church he was not referring to a building and a steeple. The church is not the building, it is the people who have been called out by the Holy Spirit and birthed into the family of God. The church is those believers who have trusted Jesus as their personal Savior.

The church is a group of people who believe what Peter said. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is what brings us together. We are not united because we have the same history. In fact, we are very different, and come from very different backgrounds. We are not united because we have the same hobby. We aren't like the book club, or the hot rod club, or the garden club. We are not united because we have the same civil interest. We are not like the Moose Lodge, or the Civitan Club. We come together as one because we all believe Jesus is God. That is the one, and only, thing that unites us.

You don't join this church. You must be born into it. This church is for members only, family members that is. It is for those who have been birthed into the family of God by God's work of regeneration. The church Jesus was talking about was the body of believers who live around the world. All true believers are a part of the church. He is the head and his believers are the body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:25). Jesus has been calling people out of the world and into his church for over two thousand years.

Jesus claims this church for his own. He said it is "*my*" church. It will do us well to learn that the church does not belong to us. It is HIS. The local church should be directed by Jesus. He is the head, therefore he should be the one in control.

We can be confident because Jesus said he would protect his church. He said the "*gates of hell shall not prevail against it*". The church is like the house built on the rock that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7. When the storm came the house stood firm because it was built on a strong foundation. The devil may fight, but he will never win.

Jesus referred to the gates of hell. The first mention of a city gate is found in Genesis 19:1. Lot sat at the gate of Sodom. He must have been there with the city leaders of his day, discussing the matters of importance. The importance of city gates can be found in Dt. 21:18-21; Ruth 4:1-11; 2 Sam. 18:1-5; 2 Sam. 19:1-8.

So, in Jesus' day the gates were an important part of any city. The gate was a part of the wall around most cities. So, it was part of the protection of the city. Inside the gate was a wide open area where business affairs were handled, court was held, and public announcements were made.

It was a place where people gathered. It was a place of commerce. Items were bought and sold there. It was also a place of legislation. It was the place where the city officials met for business concerning the city. So, the gate was recognized to be the place of power and authority of the city. So, when Jesus spoke of the gates of hell he was referring to the power and authority of Satan.

Jesus' comment about the gates of hell can be taken two ways.

The word, "*prevail*" can mean, "*to prevail*". If taken in this manner, it would seem that Jesus was saying the church is attacking the powers of Satan (hell) and those powers will not prevail against her. The church should be on the offense. We should be living in such a manner as to attack the very powers of Satan.

However, the word, "*prevail*" can also mean, "*to overpower*". If taken in this manner it would seem that Jesus was saying the church is the one under attack by the powers of Satan (hell). He said the gates (power) of hell would not prevail against the church. The church certainly must be on the defense, because the devil will attack her. We must stand against our enemy.

Either way, the church wins and Satan loses. Even though the devil has great power, he is nothing compared to the church. The church is great because it is built on Jesus. The church is indestructible because Jesus protects her. In spite of all the devil's ingenuity Jesus said he would make sure the church would not be defeated. God has promised to always protect His church.

Mt 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Jesus gave Peter the "*keys of the kingdom of heaven*".

Keys speak of authority. The person who has the keys to a business has authority over that business. Keys are not given to a person who has no authority. God gave Peter the authority to speak on His behalf. Many claim to speak for God. But, only God can grant that authority to a man.

Keys are used to unlock doors. The keys Jesus spoke of were the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. He was giving Peter the authority to open the doors to heaven and invite certain people in. Of course, the way any one enters is by being born again (Jn. 3:3).

Peter used these keys to open the gospel to the Jews in Acts 2. He preached the gospel on the Day of Pentecost and around 3,000 Jews got saved (Acts 2:41). He used the keys again to open the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 10. God gave Peter a vision and revealed to him that the gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles also (Ac 10:15). Peter was directed by the Lord to go to Cornelius' house and preach the word. Cornelius was a Gentile and those gathered in his house were Gentiles. When Peter preached the gospel, they believed and were saved (Ac 10:44-45).

Keys are used to lock doors also. Peter was given the authority to say who would *not* be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. He was given the authority to tell those who refused the gospel message they would go to hell. That was not an authority that Peter assumed on his own, it was given to him by Jesus.

When Jesus told Peter, "*whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" he was, once again, talking about the authority he was giving Peter. Peter was given the authority to speak to a sinner and tell them their sin would be forgiven (loosed) if they would believe and repent. The binding or loosing was based on their rejection or acceptance of the gospel message.

Mt 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

God has always encouraged His people to tell others about Him and His work. He gave His people a bible to help them in telling others. He placed the Holy Spirit in each believer to aid them in telling others. He told the Jews there would be a kingdom and intended that they tell every Jew about this kingdom. But then, Jesus told his disciples to not tell anyone.

One of the reasons he did this because it was not yet time for the kingdom. Israel had rejected him. It was the time for the cross and not the crown. In the next verses we will discover how Jesus began to tell his disciples about his death and resurrection.

God is a God of order. He not only does right, He does right at the right time. God has a plan for your life. It is vitally important that we do what He wants us to do. But, it is equally important that we do it *when* He wants us to do it. God is able to bring all the circumstances together that are necessary to accomplish His will. We are an important part of these circumstances so we need to be ready when He moves on us to do our part in His work.

Another reason Jesus told them to keep quiet was because they were not ready to tell about him. They misunderstood Jesus. They understood who Jesus was but they did not understand what Jesus had to do. They were not prepared for the cross. Had they told others at that time they would have done more damage than good.

Mt 16:21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Jesus was the Messiah, but he was not the Messiah the disciples had expected.

Jesus began telling his disciples about the cross. He began to unfold the plan that had been determined since before the foundation of the earth (Gen. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 13:8). The entire Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to Jesus and the cross. The disciples had recognized the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They had even recognized that he was God in flesh. However, even though the Old Testament spoke often about the death of the One who would come (Ps. 11:10, 16-18; Ps. 22:1, 7-9, 10-14, 16-18; Ps. 41:9; Isa. 50:6; 52:13-53:12; Zech. 11:12-13), they would still have a very difficult time accepting the fact that he was going to die.

Jesus said he would "*be killed*". He explained that his death would be caused by the chief priest and scribes. This would happen near "*Jerusalem*". The place that was supposed to be the most spiritual spot on earth would be the place where they would reject their Messiah. The ones who would deny him would not be the awful sinners in the gutter. Instead, he would be betrayed by the, self proclaimed, religious giants of that day. He would be betrayed by the "*elders and the chief priests and scribes*".

Jesus was quick to tell them his death would not be the end. He would be arrested, tried unjustly, and he would be "*be killed*", but he would not stay dead. He would "*be raised again the third day*". Thank the Lord, the story had a happy ending. When God is writing the story the ending is always good.

Not only would the devil not prevail against his church, but neither would death. He would die but he would not stay dead.

Mt 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Peter rebuked the Lord because he could not comprehend what Jesus had said. Hearing of his death was so foreign to Peter and all the disciples.

It is easy for us to condemn Peter for rebuking the Lord. But, we have no concept of what the Messiah meant to a Jew. They had been taught since birth about a man who would be sent by God to deliver them, and set up a kingdom. Everything they knew about the Messiah said he would come with power and sat up his kingdom.

Peter rebuked the Lord because he loved him. He truly loved Jesus. He did not want to see him die.

Also, part of the reason why Peter rebuked the Lord was because he saw his dreams falling apart. He, like all the disciples, expected to be a part of this kingdom.

When Jesus spoke of his death, he was in essence, telling them they would miss out on the part of the kingdom they had expected to enjoy. If Jesus died, there would be no deliverance, no peace, and no authority for Peter or the disciples.

Peter could not comprehend the cross because it was the absolute opposite of what he had believed his entire life. In spite of these facts, Peter was still wrong. He had given his mind over to the devil's influence, and therefore, deserved the rebuke he was about to receive from the Lord.

Mt 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Peter and the disciples understood crucifixion. Crucifixion was common. History tells us there were around 30,000 who were crucified during Jesus' day. However, they could not comprehend their Lord dying in such a manner.

Jesus wasn't calling Peter Satan. He was speaking to the source of Peter's comment. The words Peter spoke came from Satan. Peter was letting the devil control his thoughts and speech. The devil was trying what he tried in Matthew 4 when he offered the kingdom to Jesus by by-passing the cross (Mt. 4:9). I wonder, how many times have we been guilty of allowing the enemy to speak through us.

The word, "*offence*" means, "snare" or "stumbling block". It has the idea of hindering someone from doing what is right. It gives the idea of trying to walk a path where there is a boulder in the way. The boulder would hinder your progress.

How could one man go from one extreme to another? In verse seventeen Jesus was commending Peter for his unbelievable insight. And a mere six verses later he is rebuking Peter for allowing Satan to speak through him. What a display of the fickleness of mankind. We are not unlike our brother Peter. Like Peter, we raise to the lofty heights, only to fall to the pit in utter failure.

He told Satan to get "*behind*" him. He was telling the devil to get out of his way. Jesus had set his face like a flint toward the cross (Isa. 50:7). He would not be sidetracked. May the Lord place in our hearts the same resolve to do His will.

Mt 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

In verse 24, Jesus was describing what a true disciple is. There were four points to Jesus' instructions about a true disciple.

- One, a true disciple was one who followed Jesus

Jesus spoke about those who would "*come after me*".

The phrase, "What would Jesus do" has become a mockery in our day, but its concept is still correct. A true disciple is one who does what Jesus would do? Coming after Jesus implies that we leave the world behind and follow Jesus' path. We go to the places he would go. We speak the things he would speak. We react as he would react.

- Two, Jesus said a true disciple is one who is willing to "*deny himself*"

The world, and even some Christians, tell us we are supposed to love ourselves. Even the Christian book stores are full of books that teach self-love, self-worth, and self-dependence. However, the bible teaches that we should hate ourselves. In this context, self means our old self. It is talking about the part of us that desires and demands its way. The bible teaches there is nothing good in us (Ps. 5:9; Rom. 7:15, 18-19; 8:8; Gal. 5:19-21). Paul said we are to have no confidence in our flesh (Phil. 3:3).

The self part of us is the part that wants its way. It is the part that does not want to serve, suffer, or sacrifice. Jesus said we have to die to that part of us if we want to be his true disciple.

When you can be mistreated, neglected, ignored, or insulted, and you don't strike back, you know a little about dying to self. When your desires don't matter, when your goals aren't important, when what you want is set aside for what Christ wants, you know a little about dying to self. When you are willing to suffer if that is what it takes to do his will, you know a little about dying to self. When you are content with what God gives you, you know a little about dying to self. When you don't need the best house, the most expensive clothes, the fanciest car, or the latest electronics, you know a little about dying to self. When you are sincerely glad to see others prosper while you go without, when you are thankful when they are recognized while you are overlooked, you know a little about dying to self. When he comes first, truly comes first, you know a little about dying to self.

- Three, Jesus said a true disciple is the one who is willing to, "*take up his cross*"

We are often told that we must bare our cross. But, what does that mean? Some say it means your mother-in-law moved in. Some say it means we have battles we must face and problems we must carry.

But, a cross meant one thing, it meant death. It meant death in the worse possible manner. A cross was an instrument of punishment. It had one purpose, to bring about a slow, agonizing death. It was for those who had broken the law. It was for the worse of criminals.

When someone was taken to a cross, they went in shame and reproach because they were getting what they deserved. A cross meant a death that included condemnation, shame, reproach, pain, and agony. And so it is with the true disciple. A true disciple will suffer reproach from the world. The world does not understand the disciple of Christ. They are seen as ignorant. The world thinks we are crazy to live the Christian life. But, the child of God understands what Paul said. Paul said our suffering was not even worthy to be compared to the glory we share enjoy (Rom. 8:18). What we gain is so much greater than what we lose.

And Jesus said, the one who wants to be his true disciple must be willing to bare his own cross. This was not the first time he had spoken about the cross of a disciple (Mat. 10:38).

- Four, Jesus said a true disciple is one who is willing to "*follow me*"

The Christian life can be summed up by saying we are walking with Jesus (1 Jn. 2:6). Luke tells us a little more about what Jesus said. He said, "take up his cross *daily*, and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). This walk with the Lord is a daily thing. Following Jesus should become a way of life. We should start each day by committing ourselves to him and his will. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, than are ye my disciples indeed (Jn. 8:31).

Mt 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

In verse 24, Jesus spoke how the life of a true disciple could be difficult. But, in verse 25, he tells us it will be worth it. Those who give their life for Christ "*shall find it*". They shall find what real living is all about.

Our lives are like our bank accounts. Instead of money, our life bank account consists of the time. We all have so much time allotted to us. None of us know how long we will live. As with a bank account, we decide how we will "spend" our time. We cannot keep it and spend it at the same time. We will use it for ourselves, or for God

Jesus spoke of those who "*save*" their lives. This means we hold on to our lives and use it as we please. We do what we want to do. He also spoke of those who "*lose*" their lives. This speaks of us giving our lives for him.

Saving our lives means we live a life of selfishness. We live for ourselves. We do what we want to do with little regard for what God wants. Losing our lives for his sake means we live for him and not for ourselves. What he wants is more important than what we want. His will truly comes first, all the time.

Modern religion says God is a God who wants to give to His children. The average Christian broadcast sounds more like a home shopping network than a proclamation of truth. They teach that God wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and happy. Very little, or nothing, is said of the sacrificial life that Jesus spoke of in these verses.

There is no doubt about it, every true disciple would say they are glad they gave up the things of this world. What we give up for Christ is always replaced by something far better. Should we not be willing to trade the world's trinkets for the peace of God? Are you willing to give the cotton candy fun this world offers in order to gain the joy that comes from Christ?

Life is like a seed. We don't lose a seed by planting it. We lose the value of a seed by keeping it. The bible concept of discipleship is, we get by giving, we go up by going down, we are strong when we are weak, and we win by losing.

It is contrary to our normal way of thinking but we will never be happy trying to live for ourselves. The only way to find true joy and contentment is to serve the Lord and others.

We are all spending our lives. We spend our allotted time each day. We can't save our lives for ourselves and spend it for him at the same time.

Mt 16:26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Jesus said the only way we can discover what real life is about is to give ourselves to Him. We have to decide. Do we want our blessings now, or later? What is there on earth that is worth giving up the blessings of God for?

If you could gain the entire world what good would it do you? The things of the world never satisfy. Things leave you empty. There will always be a desire for more.

So the question arises, do you want your riches now, or later? Would it not be better to be poor now and rich later? This life is temporary. Heaven is forever. I would rather have the glory of heaven forever than the riches of the world for now.

Mt 16:27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

The word "*For*" in this verse ties it with what Jesus had said in verse 25 and 26. The reason we should "*lose*" our lives for the Lord is because of what he says in this verse. He will "*reward*" everyone according to their works. It will be worth it all.

The Son of man "*shall come*". This speaks of Jesus' second coming. This is when Jesus will return as he left (Acts 1:11). He left from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12) and he will return to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus will come in the Rapture to meet His saints in the air. (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 2 Cor. 5:8, 1 Th. 4:13-17). After the Rapture, there will be the seven year Great Tribulation Period (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:24-27; Mt. 24:15-31). At the end of the Great Tribulation Period Jesus will come in His second coming when His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). When he comes the second time, he will return with his saints (those already in heaven) and the angels (Mt. 24:27-31; 25:31; Jude 14; Rev. 9:11-21).

The Old Testament foretold of his second coming. In fact, there are some 1,525 prophecies in the Old Testament that speak of his second coming. In the New Testament one out of every twenty-five verses speak of his second coming. His first coming was marked by pain, his second coming will be marked by power. He came in humility the first time, he will come in glory the second. When he came the first time he was rejected and crucified, when he comes the second time he will rule and reign.

When He returns the second time Jesus shall be revealed in the "*glory of his Father*". The "glory" of the Father speaks of the full manifestation of who he is. It speaks of God truly being revealed. It speaks of seeing God in all of His majesty, all of His attributes, all of His love, all of His holiness, and all of His power. It is talking about really seeing God. Moses asked God to show him His glory (Ex. 33:18). God allowed Moses to get a glimpse of His glory. He withheld some of His glory or Moses would not have lived (Ex. 33:20).

This world has yet to see Jesus as He is. He was veiled by flesh when he walked the earth. The real "him" was hidden behind flesh. Isaiah said "There is no beauty that we should desire him". There was nothing remarkable about his physical appearance when he walked in flesh. But, the day is coming when we shall see him in his glory (1 Jn. 3:2). Jesus will be seen in all of his glory when he returns the second time.

When Jesus comes the second time "*his angels*" will come with him. God will use His angels to accomplish part of His mission when His Son returns. They will gather the unbelievers (Mt. 13:41; Mt. 13:49; 2 Th.1:7-10). They will give glory to the Son. Luke tells us part of the glory of Jesus' return will be the presence of the angels (Lk. 9:26). Imagine the great host of angels surrounding Jesus and giving him honor. What a sight it will be.

When Jesus returns the second time he will judge those who are living. Every man will be judged "*according to his works*". They can be judged by their works because a righteous (saved) person will have works that are righteous and the unrighteous (lost) person will have works that are unrighteous. Our works reveal who we really are. Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Mt. 7:16, 20).

He will judge the ungodly (those who never got saved). They will be sent to hell to await the Great White Throne Judgment when they will be cast into the eternal Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Some of those who professed to be God's children will be found to be liars (Lk. 19:20-27). They will be judged accordingly.

He will judge the godly (those who were saved). They will be given places of honor in the Kingdom (Lk. 19:17-19; Mt. 19:28) and will later receive the rewards of an eternity in heaven.

The sinner will be punished for their works were unrighteous. The sin and selfishness of the sinner will be replaced with suffering and agony. The believer will receive rewards for their faithfulness. The suffering of the saint will be replaced by glory. The believer's sacrifice and suffering will be replaced by delight.

Considering these facts, it no wonder why Jesus told us we should lose our lives for his sake. When we stand before Him, we will be glad we did.

No doubt Jesus' mention of his second coming was confusing to his disciples. They expected him to set up the kingdom then and there. I am equally sure his words were comforting to his disciples. What he said gave them hope for the future. They may not have understood it all at that point but it assured them that they were not crazy. They had not wasted their lives believing in a Messiah who would never come.

Mt 16:28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Jesus said some who are, '*standing here*', shall "*not taste of death*", until they see "*the Son of man coming in his kingdom*". He said some standing there would live to see him in his glory.

Who was he talking about? What was he talking about? The who of his statement is simple. Since he said "some standing here" he had to be speaking about some of the disciples who were with him at that moment.

But, what was Jesus talking about? This is not as simple to discern. There are various ideas about what Jesus meant in this verse. Each of these views have problems. Let's look at them.

First, some believe Jesus was speaking about the birth of the church in the second chapter of Acts. The problem with this view is the Holy Spirit was the one who came at Pentecost, not Jesus.

Second, some believe Jesus was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The problem with this view, like with the first view, is Jesus did not actually appear in 70 AD when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. God's judgment certainly came upon the Jews but Jesus did not appear.

Third, some believe Jesus was referring to John and what he recorded in the book of The Revelation about Jesus' return to earth and the kingdom (Rev. 19:11-16). The only problem with this view is that Jesus said "some" in verse 28, which certainly sounds like he was speaking of more than one person. Yet, only John saw the kingdom in The Revelation.

Fourth, there are some who believe Jesus was referring to the Transfiguration which is recorded in Matthew 17. The problem with this view is the fact that Jesus said "some" of them would not taste death. This makes it sound as though there are some who would die before the event he was speaking of. The fact is, none of them would die before the Transfiguration.

Considering the information above, I personally believe the answer to this question lies in the verses that follow in chapter 17. I believe Jesus was talking about Peter, James, and John. They were about to see Jesus transfigured before them. Jesus was about to give these three disciples a preview of his coming kingdom. They were about to get a glimpse of Jesus as he would be when he came in his kingdom.

Peter seems to agree with this in his second epistle. While referring to the Transfiguration, Peter would say they were eyewitnesses to the power and coming of the Lord. He connects the second coming with the Transfiguration. He wrote, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pe 1:16-18). He said they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' glory, and he likened this experience to Jesus' coming.

Jesus had begun to prepare his disciples for his death. Now, he was about to show them they had nothing to fear. The end result would be glorious. He had spoken about his glory, but now he was going to show them his glory. He was about to let them see just a little about who he really was. They would never get over it.