

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Jesus healed a paralyzed man 9:1-8*

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

To this point, Jesus was known as a preacher, a teacher, a miracle worker, but now He would forgive 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.*

Leaving the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus went to Capernaum, the place He called home for the time being (cf. Mt 4:13). It seems as though He stayed at Peter's house while in Capernaum (Mt 8:14).

The pig farmers asked Jesus to leave, but He did not quit. He continued to do good, He continued to help people, He continued to preach, and He kept doing His Father's will. People may reject us and our message, but we should not quit. Others who will want to hear. We must keep going, keep telling, and keep doing right, no matter what.

*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 the most wonderful examples of compassion in the Bible. Mark tells us there were four men (Mk 2:3). They cared enough to go to extreme measures to get the paralytic to Jesus. Mark and Luke give us a more detailed description of this event.

Jesus could help this man, but he could not get to Jesus on his own. Someone had to care enough to go where he was and bring him to Jesus. These four men cared enough to do what it took. They were willing to tear up the roof of the house to get the sick man to Jesus (Mk 2:3-12 and Lk 5:18-26).

The man had more than one problem. He was sick, but more importantly, he was a sinner. Jesus addressed the most important problem first. He said, "thy sins be forgiven thee". God is concerned about our physical needs, but He is more concerned about our spiritual needs. Having the power to remove sickness was wonderful, but being able to remove sin is far greater.

Jesus told the man to "be of good cheer". At that precise moment, Jesus willingly forgave him and released him from the guilt of his sin. It is a delight to realize that our sins are forgiven and the God of heaven holds nothing against us. We are no longer chargeable because He has declared us forgiven.

Our brother, H.G. Spafford 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 him 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 was doing. The scribes accused Jesus of blasphemy. The word "blaspheme" means to speak evil against, or to injure with words. To blaspheme God is 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. The truth is, since only God can forgive sin, if Jesus were 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 not spoken aloud, but Jesus knew their thoughts. This is something only God can do. He knows our thoughts.

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

When Jesus said "whether is easier", He meant it was more difficult to forgive sin than to heal the body. The greatest miracle Jesus ever performed was forgiving sin.

The damage from sin is worse than the damage from any physical affliction. 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 said, "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins". By showing He had power to heal, Jesus was also showing His power to forgive sin. 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 proved He is who He claimed to be. The scribes could not refute what had happened, for the man had obviously been healed. Jesus' work took away any argument they could have offered. Their attempt to discredit Jesus backfired. I love it when the Lord shuts down the arguments of the world. Try as they may, they are no match for the almighty God of heaven.

Jesus' words, "the Son of man hath power", mean He had the power within himself to do this work. He did not just receive the power from God; He was God.

These verses teach us that only God can really forgive sin. We can forgive others for their wrong against us, but that will not do away with their sin. Only God can truly forgive sin.

Taking up the old, dirty, stinking pallet he had lain upon would be a testimony to all who saw him. They had seen him lying on that bed for a long time. Now, that old pallet was a sign of a God who could change lives.

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

He did as Jesus said; he went home. I would have loved to have seen his family when he walked through the door. I am glad he did not head to the closest beer joint or the closest temple of a false god. God's touch changes us; we are different, so we do not do what we used to do (2 Co 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 refused to believe and walked on in spiritual blindness.

### *The king called Matthew 9:9-13*

Every king has his subjects, and every leader has those who follow. But this king was not your average king. This king chose 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. He chose those. He did so that God would 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 called Matthew (the writer of the book of Matthew). Matthew, a Jewish tax collector, was sitting "at the receipt of custom", which was the place where the Romans collected taxes.

Tax collectors were hated by all people, but especially by the Jews. The Romans demanded that taxes be paid by all. Many tax collectors, having demanded a person pay more than the Romans required, 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. Since many of the Jews were living in poverty, it is easy to see why they despised the tax collectors.

Jesus simply said, "Follow me", and Matthew obeyed. The Holy Spirit moved in the heart of Matthew, and he listened. Many have heard that call.

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

For this reason, many have left the comforts of home and gone to the jungles of Africa as missionaries. With the call comes the desire (Phil 2:13). They not only will be willing to go, but 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.

God's protection and provision are 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 was invited to a meal at the house of an unnamed friend. Luke tells us 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, for Luke tells us Matthew invited them (Lk 5:29). No doubt, Matthew wanted them to hear the words of the person who had changed his life.

This was a commendable action. Even though we are admonished to avoid those who walk in an ungodly

manner (Ps 1:1; Pro 1:10; Pro 4:14; 2 Co 6:14-18; Jam 4:4), we should try our best to win them to Christ. Jesus 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 that 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 Jesus did. It is sad that those who claim to know Jesus refuse to go to the same type of people He went to. Notice, the Pharisees 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' entire mission on earth can be summarized by what He said here. Simply put, He came to help those who needed help (Lk. 19:10; Lk. 15:4-7; Lk. 15:32; Mt. 18:11). He was the "physician" who came to help those who could not help themselves. A physician has the knowledge and ability to assist the sick. Sin is pictured as sickness in the Bible (Ps. 41:4; Ps. 6:3; Ps. 103:3). Jesus is the only one who can heal our sin sickness.

Those who are well do not need a physician. The implication is that all are sick and need the physician. The Pharisees failed to see their need. They 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 emphasizes the ignorance of the Pharisees. The words, "go and learn what that meaneth," were a common phrase used to rebuke those who did not know something they should have known. The Pharisees were ignorant of their need for the Great Physician. Jesus told them to go away until they learned what they needed to learn. There is no help for the person who will not admit they have a need.

Jesus said He would have mercy when they learned their need. God would rather act in mercy than in judgment. He has no delight in judging the wicked (Eze 33:11).

Jesus was, and is, calling "sinners to repentance". The word "repentance" means "reconsider". It 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.

- Repentance is not a work of the flesh

Repentance comes from a work of conviction accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the sinning person (2 Co 7:10). As a result, they are sorry for who they are, and what they have done, and they "turn" from their sin, and to the Lord for forgiveness.

- Repentance is more than reformation

Many promise to stop their bad habits every New Year. Sadly, most of these resolutions don't last. Real repentance involves a 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 more than changing our minds

Repentance is a change of mind, but it is more. A drunk may change his mind about drinking and determine to never drink again when he wakes up with a terrible hangover. He is just sorry because his drinking made him feel bad, but he will probably get drunk again.

But if that same drunk wakes up and sees his drinking as sin. This time, he not only sees his drinking as something that makes him feel bad, but he sees it as a sin. This time, he turns from his drinking and to God because he wants to be forgiven. This is true repentance.

- Repentance is necessary for salvation

Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to the Lord. Repentance is necessary for true salvation (Pro 28:13; Ezk 3:19; 18:21; 18:27; 33:16; Hos 1:2; Lk 15:10; Jn 3:8; Jam 4:8-10). The book of Acts, the history of the early church, makes clear the necessity of repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). The Holy Spirit's conviction will bring a person to repentance (2 Co 7:10). Peter said God wants all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

*Jesus answered 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?*

John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet and the forerunner of the Messiah (Lk 1:17). A forerunner went before an official to prepare the people for his arrival. John pointed people to Jesus, making it clear that he himself was not the Messiah (Jn 1:23-27; 1:29-30; 3:28-31; Acts 19:4).

Some of John's disciples were wondering why they, and the Pharisees, fasted, but Jesus' disciples did not fast. By comparing this Scripture with Luke's account, we find the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist agreed together to ask this question of Jesus (cf. Lk 5:30-33). Surprisingly, these very opposite groups would join together. Probably, John had already been placed in prison by this time (Lk 3:19-20), and his disciples are struggling to understand.

The Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews and fasted often. Many of them did it to impress, and not for spiritual reasons (Mt 6:16-18).

The Jews were instructed to fast once a year at the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32). We should note that Jesus fasted at least once that we know of, but He did it privately (Mt 4:1-2).

Fasting has a viable place in our lives today. However, 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; Mt 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 explained His comments about fasting by referring to a wedding celebration. The Jewish wedding was a time of celebration. No one was expected to fast during such a joyous occasion. It would actually be considered rude to do so. Jesus (the bridegroom) was present, so it was time to celebrate and not to fast. Fasting, when rightly done, was connected to times of sorrow and fervent prayer.

There was coming a time when the bridegroom would be "taken from them". This is the first mention in the book of Matthew about Jesus' death and departure. After Calvary, Jesus' disciples had 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 gave two illustrations to explain what was happening at that time. The first showed how the Old Testament system would end. The second showed how the New Testament system was coming. A big change was about to take place.

The Old and New Testaments are both ordained by God, but they are totally different. The two cannot be mixed. Law and grace will not mix.

Jesus' first illustration was that of a garment. They would never use a new piece of material to repair a tear in an old garment. When the garment was washed, the new fabric would shrink, tear the garment, and make the whole worse.

Jesus let them know a new day was coming. The Old Testament system had fulfilled its purpose, and He had 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 of wine bottles. The wine bottles of Jesus' day were made of sheep, goat, or ox skin. Over 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 bottles. However, a bottle made of new skins was flexible and strong enough to withstand this expansion.

As already stated, Jesus was saying you cannot mix two totally different things. The old covenant was good, and it accomplished what God intended it to do. But the new was coming and would fulfill the old.

Notice what Jesus said about "both are preserved". The Old and New Testaments have their place. The Old being fulfilled by the New does not mean it had no value (Mt 5:17-18). The Old Testament law shows us we are sinners (Rom 3:19), our good works are not good enough (Rom 7:7), and 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 was, we must move on to the New Testament. We are no longer under the Law (Gal 3:25).

*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 was 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.

Jairus' daughter was at the point of death (cf. Mk 5:23). No doubt, when Jairus left to find Jesus, his daughter was so close to death that he expected her to have already died.

Jairus came and worshipped Jesus. He realized Jesus was his only hope. Somehow, he had heard what Jesus had done for others and believed He could do the same thing for him. He realized if Jesus did not 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 and 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 rose and followed him. As far as we know, Jesus did not speak a word; He simply "arose, and followed him". I am so glad we have a God who comes where we are. It is one thing for us to follow Jesus, but here we find him following the one in need.

Jesus' disciples followed. They would be eyewitnesses to what was about to happen.

#### *Jesus healed 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 were on the way to Jairus' house, a woman with an issue of blood for twelve years touched Jesus. 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 Jesus' garment, she would be healed. The hem was probably one of the four tassels sewn at the bottom corners of garments (Num 15:38; Dt 22:12). She believed what she had heard about His power over sickness.

*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 this conversation (Lk 8:43-48). Jesus asked, "who touched me". The disciples were surprised that He would notice anyone touching Him since there were crowds of people pressing against them. But Jesus knew power had gone from Him. This does not imply that Jesus had no control over His power. Jesus was always totally in control.

Many of the multitudes had touched the Lord that day, but there was only one who touched Him by faith. Do we touch Him by faith? When we pray, do we expect Him to answer?

Mark says she realized she had been healed and came "fearing and trembling" (Mk 5:32).

Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole". We have reason to believe she was saved from her sin at this point. The word "whole" is also translated as "save" which refers to being forgiven (Mt 1:21; 10:22; 18:11; 19:25; Ro 11:26; 1 Co 1:21; 5:5; Eph 2:5; Ja 1:21). 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.

The tense of the word "whole" means her healing would be permanent. She would not suffer from this problem again.

We must remember, Jairus was waiting while Jesus was dealing with this lady. It must have been torment for him to wait. I am sure he was not untouched by the condition of this lady, but his focus was on his daughter. Jesus had the situation very much in control. I am so glad that I have a Savior who is able to help me and the millions of others at the exact same moment.

#### *Jesus raised 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, Luke tells us that as they were heading to Jairus' house, they received word that the girl had died. (Lk 8:49).*

They continued to Jairus' house, where people were mourning the death of his daughter. It was common to have paid mourners at funerals (Jer 9:17-21; Amos 5:16). These "mourners" would weep, wail, and cry out the name of the deceased. The "minstrels" were flute players. Some attending the funeral had no true sympathy, but simply wanted to make their money and leave as quickly as possible. Some were truly heartbroken. Jairus would not have traveled to find Jesus had he not loved his daughter. No doubt, many others truly loved her also.

*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, was telling them to get out of His way. He shocked them by announcing that the girl was not dead, but only asleep. Of course, they did not believe him. They had touched her dead body, and they knew she was dead. He was not saying they had made a mistake in thinking she was dead. He was saying she would be alive soon. He was about to wake her from death. Even death has no power over the Lord of life. No problem is too difficult for Him.

They laughed and scorned him. So is the heart of the unbeliever. They can see only the facts. They do not 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 was now alive. I would love to hear what the scoffers had to say then. I would 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.

#### *Jesus healed 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. This is the first account in the New Testament of Jesus healing the blind. We are not told who they were, but somehow these two men had found each other. When you're hurting, it helps to have a friend who knows how you feel.

Them following after Jesus reveal their desire for His help. I wonder, did the Lord slow down just enough so they could keep up?

The title, "Son of David", was another way of calling him the Messiah. The Messiah had to be the offspring of David (2 Sam 7:13). Of course, Jesus met that requirement.

They asked for "mercy". They knew they did not deserve what they were asking for. Mercy is for those who are needy, cannot help themselves, and do not deserve it. Our God is a God of mercy and comfort (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph 2:4). 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.

I cannot 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 went into a house, but that did not stop these blind men. They followed him in. They did not give up.

Jesus asked if they believed He could help them. Their response was "Yea Lord". If he asked you that same question, what would be your answer? God is looking for someone who will not just believe He can, but 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. 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.

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

- 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. That isn't too much to ask. Trust is a vital part of any relationship. Our lack of faith displeases God (Mk 4:40; 1 Co 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; Mt 13:58). As Jesus said in these verses, as our faith is, so we receive from God.

- Our lack of faith hurts us

Lack of faith robs us of the peace that comes from trusting the Lord (Jn 20:29). We worry needlessly. There is no greater peace than that which comes to the person who completely trusts the Lord.

- Our lack of faith hurts others

There is a generation coming after us that needs to know they can trust God. They need to see faith in our lives. They need to see 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. 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.*

After Jesus opened their eyes, He told them not to 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.

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

- 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 did not give up

Jesus tested their faith by ignoring them, by continuing down the road, and by going into a house. 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. Jesus' words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Mt 7:7), are in the present tense, which means we are to keep on seeking, knocking, and asking. How often do we just give up when the Lord doesn't answer the first time we call?

- Their faith was rewarded

They received what they needed. It was worth their effort.

- Their faith was increased

Surely, seeing the power of God at work in them must have caused their faith to grow. If he could restore their sight, that was no problem he could not handle.

#### *Jesus healed a dumb man who was possessed by 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 was brought to Jesus. This man, being possessed by a demon, was unable to speak. Once again, we find someone who was suffering a physical affliction because of demon possession.

*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.*

When the "devil was cast out, the dumb spake". Jesus dealt with the source of the problem, not just the symptom. Jesus did not just have power over sickness, He also had power over Satan.

The crowds marvelled because they had never seen anything like this before. The Jews have a heritage of miracles. God performed miracles 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. He would later heal multitudes (Mt 15:30).

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

The multitudes marvelled, but the Pharisees tried to discredit Jesus by saying He cast out the demons by the power of Satan. They could not deny the miracle, so they tried to deny the source of the miracle. Why did they despise Jesus so? There is more involved here than just men hating Jesus. The kingdom of darkness was opposing the kingdom of light.

Since they could not deny the miracle, they tried to explain it away. Since the casting out of the demons could not be the work of man, there were only two possible options. It had to be either God or the devil. They certainly would not admit it to be God, so they turned to the only alternative available.

The Jews and the Pharisees both saw the same miracle, but they saw it from two totally different viewpoints. Things have not changed. The so-called experts of science tell us that mankind evolved from monkeys because the only other alternative is that God made all things, including mankind. They would rather believe a lie.

*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.*

Instead of firing back at the Pharisees, Jesus simply continued to preach the truth and do what is right. Our best defense against error is truth. We never win an argument with those who refuse to accept the truth. Instead of arguing with those who rejected the truth, Jesus continued to do what He could to reach those who would listen.

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

Jesus continued to offer the kingdom to the Jews by telling them to be 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, instead of repenting, the Jews, as a whole, 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.*

Jesus saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are helpless without their shepherd. They depend totally on the shepherd for food, protection, and guidance. Like sheep without a shepherd, a man without God is hopeless.

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.

The same can be said of our present world. I wonder if we see them as Jesus did.

The word "fainted" means "to be weary" or "heavily burdened". They had laid upon themselves the burden of keeping the law. There is no greater burden than trying to please God by our own merit.

*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 also saw the multitudes as a field 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. Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (Jn 4:35). 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 present, there are 8.2 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 field is ready right now for harvest. Certainly, many do not want to hear, but some do. 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 because he knows it will be worth it in the end.

We should sow the seed of the gospel and anticipate the harvest. Don't give up if they refuse to listen the first time. Very few get saved the first time they hear the gospel. Keep sowing and keep expecting. God can touch their heart.

- ACCOUNTABILITY

We are accountable for the ones we are supposed to witness to (Ezk.. 3:17-21).

- ASK

Not only is the harvest plenteous, but the laborers are few. This was true in Jesus' day, and it 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. 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).

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **6. THE KING'S MISSION 10:1-12:50**

Jesus' mission was to tell the world the truth.

#### **JESUS SENT 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 described this event in more detail (Lk. 6:12-16). Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. The next day, He chose twelve of His disciples. There being twelve apostles probably has a relation with there being twelve tribes of Israel.

The word "disciple" means "student". Jesus called them to learn from Him and to do what He did.

Notice, He called them "unto him," and then He sent them out for Him. If we expect to go out for Him, we must first come to Him. Only by coming to Him can we gain the power necessary to go out for Him.

He sent them to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nation of Israel (v. 6). God has always used people to reach people. The power to cast out demons and to heal all manner of diseases proved that they had come from God and were doing His work.

These twelve men were from different backgrounds, different occupations, and different life experiences, yet Jesus used them. 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 available. He gives His power needed to the one who is willing to say, "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 in this book. The 12 disciples were listed in three places in the gospels (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lu 6:14-16). Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always last.

These twelve disciples were also called "apostles". The word "disciple" means student, but the word "apostle" means a "delegate" or "sent out one". They have been learning from Him, now they are about to do what they have been taught.

As America sends out its ambassadors, they go in the name of, and speak with the authority of, the One who sent them. They were to say and do only what they were told to say and do.

There were specific qualifications for a true apostle. Peter explained these qualifications (Acts 1:15-26).

- \* An apostle had a special calling from the Lord (Acts 1:17; 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; 4:33; 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 (Rom. 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 called for a specific reason, and for a certain period of time. The office of apostleship ended when these men died. There is no evidence that these apostles were replaced when they died. God chose the apostles to lay the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). 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:*

The "Gentiles" were anyone who was not a Jew. The "Samaritans" were a mixed race. At this time, the disciples were not to enter the Gentile or Samaritan areas.

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

At this time, the kingdom message was for the Jews only. 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.

Jesus saw the people of Israel as sheep who were lost. Israel was God's chosen people,

but they had wandered from His will. Jesus was sending His disciples in an attempt to draw them back to God.

I have to be honest. I think God is being better to the Jews than they deserve. 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 that wanted to destroy them. But, despite all He did, they rejected Him, they disobeyed Him, and they worshipped false gods. And yet again, we find the Lord being merciful and reaching out to Israel.

But then, I think of the modern believer. I remember how God has been as merciful to us as He was to Israel. We, like Israel, have devoured the good things of God and lived selfishly. We have also 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.

By going two by two...

- \* They could reach more people than if the entire group stayed together
- \* Having a companion makes it easier to go out and share the gospel.
- \* Each of them would have a witness in case of trouble.

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

They were to preach the same message Jesus had preached. The kingdom of heaven was at hand (cf 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. The apostles raised 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 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.*

The apostles 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 food or supplies.

Some want to claim verse 8 but ignore verses 9 and 10. They want the part about supernatural power while rejecting the part about having nothing.

They were to take nothing because "the workman is worthy of his meat". The ones who heard the apostles were to provide their necessities. God has always used His people to provide for the needs of the ministry. We 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).

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 it worked. It would be inhumane to muzzle the ox so that 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.

*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.*

Since there were very few inns in Jesus' day, homeowners would open their homes to travelers. Jesus instructed the apostles to accept this hospitality from those who were godly, but to decline it from those who were ungodly.

*Mt 10:12-13 And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

Upon entering a home, the disciples were to discern if those who lived there were godly. The spiritual condition of the homeowner would determine the disciples' treatment of those in the house.

The usual way to greet people who entered your home was to say, "Peace be to you". It was, in effect, asking God to bless the people of the home. The ungodly homeowner did not deserve this blessing, so the apostles were to withdraw themselves and their peace. God will not give His peace to those who refuse His message.

Imagine, just the disciples' presence provided peace to the house they entered. Our presence should 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 their treatment of God's people. If they received the apostles and their message, they received peace. If they refused the men and the message, the peace they could have enjoyed would be withheld. This is true today. We forfeit His peace when we walk our way.

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

God is merciful, but His mercy will run out on those who reject Him.

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

What a terrifying verse. Jesus said 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.

God judged Sodom and Gomorrha quickly and severely (Gen 19:1-29). The "day of judgment" will be when those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrha stand before God. Their judgment will be more severe on that day.

Jesus said those who reject the light of His disciples will receive a greater punishment than those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrha. Some of them had seen, heard, and rejected the very Son of God Himself.

The worst 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.

Disciples sent out as sheep among wolves

*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.*

What Jesus said in verses 16-42 can be applied to three different time periods

First, they can apply to the disciples of Christ who were living when Jesus spoke these words.

Second, they can apply to the believers who will live through the torment of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

Third, they can apply to the present-day believer.

Jesus said that He was sending His disciples into unfriendly territory. All disciples of Christ have been sent into a world that does not want them, with a message they do not want to hear. It is no wonder that Jesus described it like a sheep going into the middle of a pack of wolves.

They would need to be "wise as serpents".

Serpents in Jesus' day were considered the perfect example of wisdom and perception. A snake is one of the most perceptive of God's creatures. It is very much aware of its environment.

Being 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 does not change, but our methods will. The only message we have is the gospel of Jesus Christ. How we get that message across takes a God-given wisdom.

They would need to be "harmless as doves".

Doves in Jesus' day were considered to be a perfect example of meekness and innocence. Our lives must be beyond reproach if we are to win the lost. The world around us may be evil and corrupt, but we must live above reproach.

Jesus told his disciples what they could 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;*

The word "beware" means to "pay attention", or to "be cautious". Jesus meant what He said when He said they would be like sheep among wolves.

The word "deliver" was a word used for turning a prisoner over for punishment. Their godly lives would not keep them from being persecuted. In fact, there are times when a godly life will be the reason for persecution. Ungodly people do not like godly people.

The "councils" were the judicial system set up in most cities that would settle disagreements between parties.

Scourging (whipping) was a part of the Old Testament method of punishment. This whipping was supposed to be done in the presence of the judge and limited to forty stripes (Dt 25:2-3). To make sure they did not exceed forty stripes, the Jews would apply only 39 stripes. Paul talked about receiving forty stripes, save one (2 Cor 11:24).

Those who hated the disciples ignored the guidelines given in Deuteronomy and scourged the disciples in the "synagogues". Each of the synagogues had an area where they could

scourge those who had broken God's law. Paul talks about beating Christians in the synagogues (Acts 22:19; 26:11).

A place of worship was turning into a place of sin. A place built to open eyes had become a place of spiritual blindness, and the sound of the sacred sermon was replaced with the crack of a whip.

What made it worse was the fact that the abusers of the apostles would think they were doing God's will.

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

The "governors and kings" were the Gentile authorities of that day. The Jews would bring some of the apostles before the world's judicial system, like common criminals. Jesus said the persecution would be "for my sake". The apostles were hated because they stood for the Lord, not because of some wrong they had done. They were persecuted, not because the Jews hated them, but because the Jews hated the One they spoke of.

Jesus said these actions would be "a testimony against them and the Gentiles". The Jews (them) and the Gentiles will be held accountable for their actions against these men of God.

The mention of Gentiles shows how the gospel would be opened to Gentiles. God was not surprised when the Jews rejected His Son (Jn 1:11). Jesus' prediction was fulfilled (Acts 5:26-28; 12:1-4; 23:33-35; 26:1).

*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 seemed to be a horrible experience would become a great opportunity for them to testify about the goodness of God. God can take something bad and make something good out of it. He has a purpose with every trial we face.

Paul learned this. He would testify of his imprisonment and say, "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.

The disciples were not to fear because the God of heaven would give them the words they should speak (cf. Ex 4:12; Jer 1:7). They were not to give it a thought beforehand, for, at the proper time, God would fill their minds with the words they should speak.

This is not suggesting that a preacher need not prepare for the messages he preaches. The Holy Spirit will speak through the preacher as he delivers his message, but he should pray, study, and prepare (Pro 23:12). Paul said, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God." (2 Ti 2:15).

*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 Holy Spirit would give them the words they needed to say. We can rely on Him to do the same for us. But we must be sensitive to the voice of the Spirit within us.

Please notice, the Holy Spirit was not going to give them a way to talk themselves out of their problem. Jesus wanted the apostles to be prepared for the trouble ahead. What they would endure would be difficult, but it would have been a lot worse had they not known it was coming.

*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 endured horrible persecution. Ten of the twelve died a martyr's death.

This verse certainly applies to the believers who live during the Tribulation Period. The Antichrist and his followers will put to death as many believers as possible. Family members will turn other family members over to the officials to be put to death. Their hatred for God will be stronger than their love for family?

The message of Christ has always caused division. Even now, many wives are mistreated by their husbands, husbands are ridiculed by their wives, and children are abused by their parents, because they are believers.

Is it any wonder why Jesus told His disciples to shake the dust of these people off their feet (v. 14). Their rejection of the truth causes God to withdraw His 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 that a person can lose their salvation. The word "saved" speaks of being saved from death, not being saved from sin. Those who 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 (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.*

This applies especially to the Tribulation believers. They must keep on the move to avoid the persecution of the Antichrist. Realizing the "Son of man" could come at any moment will keep them going through such difficult circumstances.

During the Tribulation Period, God will prepare a place of refuge for the people of Israel (Rev 12:6). Many believe this will be the city of Petra.

We see the tenacity of the devil in verse 23, in that he pursues believers from one city to another. We also see the spirit of the believers. They would rather die than deny their Lord. They suffer horrible torture, but they will not deny Him.

God will give 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 will mistreat 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 talked about the disciple being "as his master". The word "master" means "teacher". Any student would be pleased if they could learn as much as their teacher. The math student would love to know as much as his teacher. The musician longs to play as well as their teacher. In like fashion, every Christian should strive to be just like Jesus.

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

Wouldn't it be wonderful....

- If we could love as he did

Jesus' entire life was a display of love. 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 as he did

Jesus showed mercy everywhere He went. He helped, healed, and forgave those who did not deserve it. May that same mercy be demonstrated in our lives. If he can give us mercy, we 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. Jesus could say, "I do always those things that please him" (Jn 8:29). 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?

- If we could endure the difficulties as he did

I know Jesus was God, but it still amazes me how He did not let what He endured affect His actions. It takes so little to stop us from doing the Lord's will. A little rain on Sunday, the slightest insult, or the smallest problem, will keep the average believer away from church.

If they said Jesus was doing His work by the power of "Beelzebub", His servants should expect no different.

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

They were not to fear because God will settle it all in the end. He was keeping the score. All mankind, whether saved or lost, will eventually stand before Jesus and give an account of their lives.

*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.*

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

They were not to preach their personal beliefs, opinions, or experiences. Our opinion does not matter. Only what the Lord says can be trusted always.

Whether preacher or layman, there is no greater privilege than to be a spokesman for the Lord.

This tells us they were to speak the message from the housetops. I think this can have two meanings.

First, they were to share the Word with individuals. The flat roofs were used as a patio to relax. This provided an excellent place for the disciples to meet with individuals and share the Word of God one on-one.

Second, they were to preach the Word to everyone. A rooftop provided an excellent place to preach the word of God to whoever was within hearing distance.

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 remain silent and let the world go to hell all around us. 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 told his disciples not to fear (v. 26,28,31). Even though Jesus knew His disciples would suffer, He told them not to fear. Their enemies may take their physical life (body), but they cannot 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 wrote, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro 8:31).

We are not to fear the person who can "kill the body". But, we are to fear the One who is able to "kill the soul". We are to fear the One who can send a soul to hell.

Jesus was not suggesting that a true disciple can lose their salvation and go to hell as a result. He was merely pointing out the fact that physical (temporary) things are not as important as spiritual (eternal) things. Those who persecuted the apostles could not do any permanent damage.

Jesus' words indicate that those who go to hell have some type of body. The rich man in hell felt pain and was able to see and speak (Lk 16:23-24). He had some type of body with eyes and a tongue.

The torment of hell will be both physical and spiritual. The pain of fire for the body and the pain of the emotions for the soul. Perhaps the worst 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 golden street of heaven or in the scorched pits of hell.

The word "hell" is the Greek word Gehenna and refers to the lake of fire (Mt 9:47; Rev 20:10).

Some have actually said that "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 or heaven and hell.

### The importance of a disciple

*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 used the sparrows to assure His disciples of their value. Sparrows, one of the smallest and least valuable of all birds, were sold at the market two for a farthing. A farthing was one tenth of the Roman penny. Five sparrows were sold for two farthings (Lk 12:6). These birds were so small that they were sold five for the price of four.

In other words, everyone thought a sparrow was unimportant and insignificant. Yet, God is very much involved in the life of every sparrow. At the time of this writing, there are an estimated 1.4 billion sparrows on earth. God knows every one of them.

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

God controls even the smallest matters of this earth. Why do we worry and fear? If God cares for every sparrow, certainly He can be trusted to take care of His children. 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 does not know about us.

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

This is the third time Jesus told his disciples to fear not in this chapter (v. 26,28,31).

It is important to remember that Jesus said these things while talking to His disciples about going out to tell His message. They could expect to be persecuted. However, they could remember that their God loved them and was watching over them every second. 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" is the same word translated as "confession" in Romans 10:10, where it refers to a person who acknowledges the fact that they have been saved. To "confess" Jesus is to acknowledge publicly our dependence on Him for our salvation publicly. 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? If you do not, please believe on the Lord Jesus right now, call on Him to forgive you and save you.

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".

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

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

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).

### The gospel causes division

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

He was the Prince of peace (Isa 9:6), but His coming caused much turmoil. There cannot 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. Those who reject His message will be at odds with those who receive it.

*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. 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.*

We should love Jesus more than anyone, including those of our own family.

We determine how much we love someone by how we treat them. We put the one we love before our own desire. The one we love most comes first. If our families (or anyone) have more control over us than Jesus, we love them more than we love Him.

Jesus was not saying it is okay to mistreat our family. Neglecting or abusing our families is unspiritual and displeasing to God (Dt. 27:16; Lev 19:3; Pro 15:5, 25:22).

### Taking up our cross

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

Taking up our cross and following Jesus means we follow the path He walked. His path was the path of obedience to His Father's will.

A cross involved pain, suffering, and disgrace, but its primary function was to kill. In Jesus' day, crucifixion was used as punishment for crimes worthy of death. The criminal was compelled to carry their cross to the place of execution (cf. Mt 27:32). Jesus had this in mind when He talked about His disciples taking up their cross.

Paul talked about dying daily (1 Cor 15:31). We need to die out to our flesh every day. We cannot do our will and the Father's will at the same time.

Jesus' path may be difficult, but it is the best path. The rewards far surpass the pain. We receive present rewards here and now and eternal rewards in heaven.

*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 by indulging in the things of the world will lose real life in the process. In the process of seeking to find something to make them happy, they are missing the one thing that gives 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 I found real life when I met the Lord.

Is your life empty? Is there something missing? Perhaps it is because you have not really met Jesus. Make sure today.

### Rewards for those who assist

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

The word "receiveth" refers to the custom of homeowners receiving travelers in their homes for the night (Gen 18:3-5, 24:28-32; Ex 2:20; Judges 13:15; 2 Kg 4:8-11). The homeowner accepted the traveler and assisted them on their journey. Those who received the disciples, like the homeowner, were accepting them and their message.

Jesus said those who received Him also "receiveth him that sent me". Jesus' comment reveals the connection between Jesus, His Father, and the disciples. Their message was the same. So naturally, if you receive one, you are receiving the other. 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 promised a reward to those who would aid His disciples. Those who receive a prophet because he was a prophet will receive the type of reward a prophet will receive. Those who assist the prophet are partially responsible for the results of the prophet's ministry. They have a little bit to do with every message 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. 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. We are laborers together in the work of God.

These verses also remind us of how every believer 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. 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 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 will not force mankind to hear His message.

### **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

*John the Baptist sent messengers*

*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 ended his instructions to His disciples and sent them out to preach the Word of God (11:5-6). Later, the disciples would meet with Jesus and tell Him what had happened (Mk 6:30).

Jesus went to teach and preach in the cities of the disciples.

Notice, Jesus preached, but He also taught the Word of God. Some resist the idea of teaching. No doubt, preaching is necessary (Mt 10:7; 11:1; Acts 10:42; 16:6; 1 Co 1:17; Rom 1:15; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11) but teaching the Word of God is vitally needed (Mt 4:17;

11:1; 28:19; Mk 4:1; 6:2; 8:31; Lk 4:43-44; Jn 3:2; Acts 1:1; 5:42; 1 Co 4:17; 1 Tim 1:3; 3:2; 4:11; Heb 5:12). Jesus preached and taught (Mt 11:1).

*Mt 11:2-3 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

John the Baptist had 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 sent two of his followers to ask Jesus if He was the One that should come. Of course, this refers to Jesus being the promised Messiah (Ge 49:10; Num 24:17; Isa 42:1).

There are two opinions about this verse.

One, some believe John's two disciples were having doubts and John sent them to Jesus to get help. In my opinion, this is unlikely. As we will see in next verse, Jesus sends the two disciples back to John with words of encouragement. If John's disciples were the ones doubting, it seems Jesus would speak directly to them instead of sending them to John with the message.

Two, some believe it was John who was lacking faith and sent his disciples to get help for himself. I believe this is the more likely of the two options. John was not doubting whether a Messiah would come, he was simply making sure Jesus was that Messiah.

In one way, John's wondering is shocking. After all, he baptized Jesus, heard the voice of the Father from heaven, and 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. He expected the Messiah to come with might, overthrow Rome, and set up a kingdom. But, instead of starting a kingdom, Jesus was preaching love (Mt 5:44), healing the sick (Mt 12:15), and helping the needy (Mk 10:21). To make matters worse, Jesus has been rejected by many (Mt. 8:34) and instead of being a part of a mighty revolution, John was in prison.

No doubt John thought through every Old Testament promise he could think of to determine if Jesus lined up with what the Old Testament said. In spite of it all, he could not get settled on the issue. The doubt lingered.

John's lapse in faith should alert us. If the mighty John the Baptist could doubt, certainly we can. No matter what experience we have had with the Lord, we can still battle with doubt. The devil whispers his lies in the ear of God's greatest believers.

More than likely, John's faith was strong when he was first to prison. But as time went by he started wondering. Our faith is tried when trials go long.

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. We defeat doubt with truth and we find the truth in the Word. This should remind us 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.*

Instead, of rebuking John, Jesus sent him evidence that would help him conquer his doubt. Luke tells us Jesus performed some miracles in the presence of John's disciples (Lk 7:19-22). Hearing about what God has done is wonderful, but, seeing it with your own eyes is

much better. So many believers have heard about what God has done in the past but have not seen it for themselves.

Jesus told John's disciples to tell John "again". 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. If the old message worked for John, it will work for us.

Jesus had rebuked others for doubting (Mt 6:30; 8:26; 12:31; 14:31; 16:8-11; 17:20), so why did He not rebuke John? I believe it was because this is not a lapse of John's overall faith. Jesus' response will make that clear (v. 11). He asked if Jesus was the Messiah, or should they look for another. He still believed a Messiah would come. He simply wondered if Jesus was that 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' 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 hear the conversation between Jesus and John's disciples. As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus asked the multitudes, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see". They had heard and believed John, but if he was doubting, maybe they should not believe what he had said.

Jesus' description of John tells us that he, unlike a reed that would shake at the slightest breeze (cf. Mt 3:1), was a man's man who lived in the wilderness.

John was bold enough to preach the truth to all. He courageous enough to call the Pharisees and Sadducees a bunch of snakes (Mt 3:7), and tell King Herod he was sinning (Mk 6:18). Yet, he was humble enough to tell Jesus, "I have need to be baptized of thee" (Mt 3:14).

John did not bow to the opinion of man. If they were wanting a wishy-washy preacher there were many of that sort at the Temple. But, John would never be that type of man.

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 day has come when people will not accept sound doctrine. Instead of a preacher who tells the truth as it is, they want someone to tickle their ears (2 Tim 4:3).

*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.*

Not needing the luxuries of life, John dressed in camel's hair and ate on locusts and wild honey (Mt 3:4). He lived such a spiritual life that people wondered if he was the Messiah (Lk 3:15). He did was not attempting to appease God or to earn forgiveness. He did it because he loved God and wanted Him to come first in his life. His lifestyle was not easy, but I am sure, he would say it was worth it.

There is a connection between John's separated life and his power with God. He preached the message of God with a power that few, if any, ever had.

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

Jesus said John was a prophet but "more than a prophet". John was a prophet in that he told what was going to happen. He was more than a prophet because he was the one the prophecy had spoken of.

Like all true prophets, he had strong moral convictions (Mt 3:7-8), preached the Word without fear or apology (Mt 3:2-3), and always put God first and himself last (Jn 3:30).

He had taken the Nazarite vow. This was a vow whereby a Jew would totally dedicate themselves to the Lord and His will (Num 6:1-21).

The Nazarite vow consisted of three things.

- They were to abstain from grapes, wine, any produce of the vine, and all strong drink (Num 6:3-4)

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

- They were forbidden to cut their hair (Num 6:5)

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

- They were to not touch or come close to any dead body even if a parent or sibling dies (Num 6:6-7)

This separation from dead things spoke of a desire to avoid any thing that was corruptible. Touching a dead body made a person ceremonially unclean (Num 19:11).

Usually, the Nazarite vow was taken for a limited period of time (Num 6:8,13a). However, John had made it for life. The Bible records three men who were Nazarites for life, Samson (Judges 13:4), Samuel (1 Sam 1:11) and John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15).

*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.*

As I just mentioned, John was one of the ones the Old Testament prophesied about. He not only preached the Scripture, he was a fulfillment of Scripture. He was the forerunner of the Messiah the Old Testament had spoken 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.*

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 there was none greater than John the Baptist. What a statement.

John was greater than all the Old Testament prophets because he actually lived what they only talked about. As I have mentioned, he was the fulfillment of what they wrote about. They wrote about the forerunner, John was the forerunner. They wrote about the Messiah coming, John introduced 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 continued by saying, "notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". The least in the kingdom is greater than John because John never saw the completed Scripture. He did not live to see the fulfillment of the gospel message. He didn't see the crucifixion, the resurrection, or the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The New Testament believer has the completed, inerrant, Word of God, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the unity of other believers. No believer of any other dispensation has enjoyed such blessings.

*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. The words, "from the days of John the Baptist" refer to the days when John began to preach.

The word, "violence" means, "to crowd oneself into". It speaks of someone who pushes through obstructions that they might reach a desired goal. They are determined to reach the goal no matter what it takes.

The word, "violent" means "energetic" and speaks of someone who is aggressively

pursuing something they desire. Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force". Keeping the meaning of these words in mind, there are two ways to translate this phrase.

One, it can be taken in a negative sense. This would mean Jesus was talking about how His enemies had been aggressively opposing Him and His kingdom. The aggression of the Pharisees and Scribes began with John the Baptist and continued even after Jesus died.

Two, it can be taken in a positive sense. This would mean Jesus was talking about those who were eagerly accepting His message and the way of forgiveness. The publicans, harlots, and sinners flocked to Jesus because they recognized their need of forgiveness. With earnestness (violently) they sought the forgiveness offered.

I believe the second sense is the right way to interpret Jesus' words.

The "violent take it by force" refers the battle a lost person goes through when they are under conviction. Every saved person remembers this fight. No doubt, it was a violent one. Your flesh wanted to hang on to the things of the world and the devil kept telling you put it off till later.

To make the battle even more violent, those under conviction in John's day had the additional struggle of knowing they would be persecuted if they got saved. I doubt if there were many false professions when John, or Jesus, preached. When someone made a profession, they meant business.

Salvation is a free gift but there is a cost for becoming a disciple of Christ. Repentance is necessary for salvation. John the Baptist said, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Lk 3:8 emphasis added). The sinner not only turns to the Lord in faith, he turns from his sin in repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20). Jesus told the rich man to give his money to the poor because He knew the man loved his money too much (Mt 19:21-22).

Sadly, the so-called evangelism of our day sounds more like an escape route from problems than a way to get right with God. Many sinners have been persuaded to pray a little prayer and were left just as lost as before.

Jesus talked about a violence (energetic) with those who are thinking about getting saved. We need this type of "violence" among believers. What if every Christian was violent in serving God? 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 the first five books of the Old Testament and the "prophets" are the rest of the Old Testament.

All the prophets of the Old Testament were leading to the time of John the Baptist. The Old Testament pointed towards the one who would point to Jesus. The prophets announced, "the Messiah is coming", John announced, "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.*

The word, "Elias" is the Greek mode of the Hebrew word "Elijah".

Jesus explained how John was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Mal 4:5-6). He would 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 was 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 went to heaven in a chariot of fire without dying (2 Kgs 2:11). More than likely, he will be one of the two witnesses that will preach during the Tribulation Period (Rev 1:3-12). That means, Elijah will come again before the Second Coming of Christ.

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

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

Jesus' message had the power to bring conviction, forgiveness, peace, joy, and contentment. 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.

## **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 likened the people of His day to little children playing at the marketplace who could not be satisfied. The market, an open area in the middle of town where vendors would sell their goods, was full of people and activity. Children would play there 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.*

When Jesus said, "We have piped unto you", He was talking about a game children played while at the market, where they would laugh and sing as though they were at a wedding.

When Jesus said "we have mourned unto you", He was talking about a game where they would cry and mourn as though they were attending a funeral.

When Jesus said, " We've piped, but you didn't dance, and we've mourned, and you didn't lament, He was talking about children who refused to play no matter what the game was.

Jesus was pointing out the fact that those He was speaking to were never satisfied. He continued this thought in the next verse.

*Mt 11:18-19 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. 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.*

John came with a somber attitude, living in the wilderness, drinking no wine, fasting often, and avoiding all types of worldly amusements. Jesus, however, associated with people, went to weddings (Jn 2:3), and funerals (Lk 7:11-16), and was a friend to sinners. They were like the children in the market who refused to be satisfied with John or Jesus.

A note of interest: Jesus did not partake of their sin, but He did all He could to reach them. One of the worst 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. We should not partake of their sin, but we should reach out to them in Christian love.

Even though Jesus' and John's styles of ministry were different, their message was the same. Sadly, a preacher's style and personality, not the content of his message, have become the focal point of the modern church.

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 willing.

When Jesus said, "wisdom is justified of her children," He was saying wisdom is proven by its results. The wisdom in John's and Jesus' messages was proven to be true by the changed lives. People may have questioned their methods, but they could not deny the results. 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:*

This verse tells us the primary reason Jesus did miracles was that people might see their need for forgiveness and repent.

Jesus began to talk about the price of ignoring the voice of God and rebuked the cities that had rejected His message. They rejected Him even though He did many unexplainable works. They had refused to repent, and they would pay.

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 these people saw and heard. Yet, they rejected Jesus and His message.

*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.*

God knows all things. He even knows what would have happened if things had been different. He knows what would have happened if you had been born in another country, at a different time, or in a different family. He knows what would have happened if you had gotten that job you wanted so much. He is a God we can trust completely.

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.

Tyre and Sidon were cities on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Being seaport cities, they were filled with sin of every sort. They had all the riches, luxury, and 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 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 was saying those in Tyre and Sidon 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" speaks of the severity of punishment and indicates there are degrees of punishment in hell (Ps 62:12; Pro 24:12; Jer 17:10; Ezk 18:20, 30; Rom 2:6; Rev 20:12). This does not suggest there will be some in hell who will not suffer. Those who suffer the least in hell will be in indiscernible pain (Lk 16:23-24).

One of the greatest factors that determines the degree of punishment is the light the person had. Those with more light are more accountable because they know what God

demands. Jesus talked about a servant who was beaten with many stripes because he knew His lord's will and did not do it (Lk 12:47).

Those who sit in church, hear the Word, see God move, and still reject Him, will suffer the worst punishment in hell. It isn't just the amount of sin they committed, but 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 and did many mighty works there. He healed the centurion's servant (Mt. 8:13), raised Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:15), healed the demoniac of Gadara (Mt. 8:28-32), and healed the paralyzed man (Mt. 2:1-12).

Capernaum had, as it were, been "exalted unto heaven" by having 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 and blessed with so much light. We have so many modern marvels to aid us in knowing the Word of God. I fear what might be ahead if we do not 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 did not 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).

Most people believe Sodom was the most wicked city in the Bible, but Jesus said the most wicked is 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 those things.

Jesus implied that Capernaum was the most wicked city simply because they ignored His message. They didn't arrest Him, or whip Him, or mistreat Him horribly; all they did was ignore Him.

They did not think they needed Him or His message. The worst sinners are not those who commit the most vile deeds, but those who think they are good enough that 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.*

Jesus called His Father, the "Lord of heaven and earth". He is the Lord of everything. That means He is Lord over what you are going through right now. So, hear Him, trust Him, and obey Him.

The "wise and prudent" are those who are proud of their intelligence. Man's philosophy has always been contrary to the gospel message. Jesus probably had the scribes and Pharisees in mind since their pride refused to allow them to admit their spiritual need.

The time had come when God "hid these things". God may blind those who continually refuse His message to the point where they cannot believe.

The Lord reveals these things "unto babes". God is looking for the person who, like a little child, believes what they are told without hesitation.

Of course, God deals with the educated and learned person. There are many examples in the Bible. But so many of this sort find it difficult to admit their sin and their need of forgiveness. Unfortunately, more often 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.*

God 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 reminds us of how limited we are and how limitless God is.

The Father has given all authority to Jesus (Mt 28:18; Jn 3:35; 6:46; 10:15; 13:3; Col 1:16-17). Jesus had already shown His authority over disease, sickness, demons, and even death. He also had the authority to judge the guilty and forgive the repentant. He has the authority to offer salvation to those who will accept Him.

Jesus was saying that only God the Father can truly understand the magnificence and majesty of the Son of God. Only God can truly comprehend God. A feeble man will never fully comprehend the magnificence of the God who rules the universe and everything in it.

These words prove Jesus is God and the Father and Son are totally equal.

Jesus continued by saying, "and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him". We can know the Father only when the Son reveals Him to us. 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.

The natural man cannot receive the things of God because they are spiritually discerned (1 Co 2:14). Spiritual things are not understood with natural means; the Spirit reveals them to us (1 Co 2:9-10).

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

Here, Jesus gave 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; 7:37; Rev 22:17).

Jesus likened the lost person to someone who is laboring, but at the same time, carrying a heavy load. He invites that person to come to Him for relief.

#### THE WHO OF THIS INVITATION

Who was Jesus inviting?

Primarily, this invitation was directed to Israel, but it applies to anyone tired of trying to do right on their own.

#### THE WHY OF THIS INVITATION

Why did Jesus offer this invitation?

He gave this invitation because there were some Jews who were working hard trying to keep the Old Testament Law.

The word "labour" speaks of working to the point of exhaustion. The Jews had been laboring in an attempt to find favor with God by keeping the Old Testament Law. They also had the burden of trying to keep their man-made traditions. For more information about these traditions, please read the comments on 12:1.

The words "heavy laden" refer to the person to whom the rules had become more than they could bear. 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, and they did the best they could, but it wasn't working. They did not

have peace, they were not at rest, and the more they worked, the worse they felt. They felt no better because keeping the rules cannot produce favor with God, and without God's favor, there is no peace.

To make matters worse, despite their best effort, they still sinned. At our very best, we are still horrible sinners. We 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 (Ro 3:23). None of us is righteous (Ro 3:10).

### THE WHAT OF THE INVITATION

Jesus was offering "rest" to the weary, but what is rest?

First, "rest" means to stop working. God created all things, and "rested" on the seventh day (Gen 2:2). God rested, not because He was tired, but because He had finished His work. His work of creation was complete, and nothing else needed to be done. In like fashion, Jesus completed the work of salvation when He hung on the cross. He cried, "It is finished" because His work was complete (Jn 19:30). Nothing else needs to be done, nothing else can be done, it is finished.

Jesus was saying we don't have to do any work to be saved because He did everything necessary to provide salvation. 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; Titus 3:5). Jesus said to the Jews, and to us, you can quit working; it isn't helping anyway.

Secondly, rest means to "lie on". When we lie on a bed, we are not trying to hold ourselves up. We don't help the bed; we simply trust it and are completely dependent on its ability to hold us up. 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, and start trusting God only.

Salvation isn't us trusting Him, and ourselves. Salvation is us trusting only Him. That is how a lost person receives God's rest. To receive His rest, we must stop all self-effort and 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 be placed 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 was not telling the Jews they had to add another yoke to their already overlaid lives. He was asking them to exchange their yoke for His. Their yoke was the yoke of keeping the law, the yoke of self-effort, the yoke of following all the man-made traditions. It was a yoke so heavy it was impossible to bear.

But Jesus' yoke was easy. 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.

Jesus' yoke is easy because He is "meek and lowly in heart". He was the opposite of the Pharisees. He does not add burdens; He relieves us of our 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 man-made yoke of the law, of self-effort, of works, or of doing our best is a heavy yoke. But Jesus' yoke is easy. His yoke does involve service, but it is a service that is

delightful. He enables us by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to do His will. There is no greater thrill than to be used of the Lord.

What Jesus promised in the New Testament, God the Father promised 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 emphasis added). Unfortunately, they weren't any more interested in Jeremiah's day than they were in Jesus' day. They said, "We will not walk therein".

He still calls to those in need. His invitation still stands.

I cannot leave these verses without mentioning how urgent Jesus' invitation is. This invitation demands a response. 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 didn't say, Stop sinning and come. He didn't say, improve yourself and come. He simply said, "come". 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, but you still need Christ, so come to him. Will you accept or reject his invitation? There is no middle ground.

Even though Jesus was speaking to those who are lost, I believe the principles in these verses can be applied to those who are saved. Sadly, many believers find themselves troubled, burdened, worried, and weary. Unfortunately, when we get saved, we don't always rest in Christ.

There is nothing sweeter on earth than to rest completely in God's forgiveness, to trust Him to take care of us, to rely on Him for victory over temptation, and to expect Him to empower us for service.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONTINUE TO REJECT THE KING 12:1-50**

The anger of the religious leaders becomes even more apparent in this chapter and the ones to follow.

*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.*

The word "Sabbath" actually means "to cease" from labor. As mentioned earlier (11:28), the seventh day rest goes back to when God "rested" on the seventh day. This doesn't mean God was tired or needed to rest. It means God was finished, so He stopped His work.

The Sabbath day was not instituted until God gave Moses the Law (Ex 20:8-11) and was for Israel only (Ex 31:12-13). God told Israel to work six days and rest on the seventh.

The Saturday rest was the fourth of the Ten Commandments and 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.

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.

*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 not upset because Jesus' disciples plucked some wheat. They were upset because they did it on the Sabbath day.

The disciples had not broken the Old Testament Law, but they had broken the man-made rules (traditions) the Jews had added to the Law. The Jews had elevated these rules to the point where they believed it was worse to break their traditions than to break the Scripture. Jesus said the Pharisees were shutting up the kingdom of heaven by their traditions (Mt 23:13) and called their traditions a transgression of the commandments of God (Mt 15:3).

On one occasion, the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why His disciples did not live according to the tradition of the elders. Jesus' response was sharp, to the point, and truly revealing. He called them hypocrites, pointed them to the Word of God, and said they were teaching the doctrine and commandment of men (Mk 7:6-11). We need to stay with what the Bible says and shun that which has been added by man.

To their credit, the Jews did what they did because they wanted to protect the Old Testament Law. This is commendable, but in their attempt to make certain the Law was not broken, they added restrictions that God never intended.

Let's take a brief look at 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, and what Moses wrote 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 and 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 called the Mishnah. The Jews say the Mishnah explains 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 Old Testament Law, and the Gemara was given to explain the Mishnah.

#### THE TALMUD

The Gemara and the Mishnah were put together and called the Talmud. To further complicate matters, there are two versions of the Talmud, the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud. The entire Talmud, in standard print, is over 6,200 pages long. So, to say the least, it is quite exhaustive and can be quite confusing.

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 for you to travel more than 3,000 feet from your home on the Sabbath. However, you could increase that distance by, on Friday, placing food at a location 3,000 feet away from your home. Since there was food there, you could consider that to be your "home," and you could travel 3,000 additional feet.

On 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.

If a man were sick, you could stop him from dying, but you could not do anything to make him well. You could apply a bandage, but you could not put any medicine on his injury because that would aid his improvement.

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 was 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 water. 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.

These regulations go on and on. There's no wonder the Jews were so mixed up by the time Jesus came on the scene.

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 are following Jesus and His disciples and 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. There is much more to these commands than merely rules to follow.

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

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 to the Pharisees by asking, "Have ye not read". They believed themselves to be masters of the Law, but now Jesus is asking them if they had even read 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, being tired and hungry from running from Saul, asked Ahimelech the priest for bread for himself and his men. The only bread available was the shewbread in the Tabernacle. The shewbread was replaced every week, and the loaves removed were to be eaten by the priests only (Ex. 29:32-33; Lev 24:5-9).

God allowed David and his men to eat the shewbread because of their great need. God never intended the Law to overrule human need.

It's very important to understand that Jesus was not implying that David did wrong and got away with it. Neither was He excusing His disciples from doing something wrong. He was, however, showing how God's Word does not ignore the needs of mankind.

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 working on the Sabbath. Jesus counteracted their attack by referring to the priests who served in the temple on the Sabbath.

Every Sabbath, the priests would labor by starting fires (Ex 35:3), killing animals, and preparing them for the sacrifice. Their labor was doubled on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10). Despite 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 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 wanted the Pharisees to see that His disciples were not just serving in the temple, they were serving the God of the temple. The Pharisees struggled with this because the temple was the central place of their worship and the most sacred place on earth.

The Pharisees were right to respect the temple, but the One standing before them was greater than the temple. If they honored the building of God, should they not honor the God of the building?

Jesus was unmistakably claiming to be God. The temple was the holiest place on earth, and the Sabbath was their holiest day, but Jesus was more holy than both.

As marvelous as the temple was, it was still just a building. It was the place where God met with His people and blessed them with His presence, but 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.

## 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 rebuked the Pharisees because they did not know what they should have known. They did not know as much as they thought they did.

The word "sacrifice" refers to the sacrificial part of the Old Testament that dealt with sin. The word "mercy" refers to the moral part of the Old Testament that dealt with loving mankind.

The Pharisees focused on the sacrificial and ignored the moral. They saw the Law as a bunch of mechanical rules and were more concerned about keeping the rules than caring for people. Jesus is trying to get them to understand that God is more interested in the heart of man than in a bunch of regulations. God wants a people who love Him, and love others, not a bunch of robots who follow all the rules.

The focus of this verse is still about whether Jesus' disciples broke the Sabbath. In Mark's account of this event, he adds, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath".

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.

The Pharisees had accused the "guiltless". Jesus, nor His disciples, had done any wrong.

## Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath 12:8

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

If Jesus 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? You may serve the Lord, but do you serve Him because you love Him? If we truly love Him, our service will be more than keeping a bunch of rules; it will be natural and genuine because it is 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 went to the synagogue. Luke tells us this happened a week later (Lk 6:6).

Notice, Matthew said "their" synagogue, not "our" synagogue. It had been God's house, and He had done great things for His people there. Unfortunately, they had resisted the Spirit of God to the point 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 could not happen to us. How awful would it be to go to church and God not be there?

Jesus knew the Pharisees were upset at Him, and yet, He went straight to the place where they could find Him easily.

*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.*

Luke tells us it was the right hand that was withered (Lk 6:6). Someone 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 worst hypocrites can still be found at church. We must not miss the fact 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 hypocrites, but that does not excuse us from neglecting God's house. In fact, we should be even more dedicated to the church, for the church needs those who are real.

They asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. As I have mentioned (12:2), their traditions said 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; they asked Jesus this question 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 so they could take him 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.

Their asking the question proved they believed that Jesus had the power to heal, but they still rejected Him. How could anyone see His miracles and still reject 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 trapped them. Not one 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.*

Since man is more valuable than a sheep, and it is right to help a sheep on the Sabbath, certainly it would be wrong to refuse assistance to the person in need. The Pharisees thought nothing of helping a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, yet they refused to help their fellow man.

*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). 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 thief.

The man did as Jesus said without hesitation. He didn't try to explain how his condition made it impossible for him to do as Jesus said. 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 when it was inconvenient

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 when there were people there who did not like Him
- Some people refuse to go to church because there is someone there with whom they don't Jesus went to church when He knew someone was there who wanted something from him

Jesus knew the man with the withered hand would be there. Many use the excuse that all the church wants is money.

- Jesus went to church when it wasn't safe

Jesus knew the Pharisees wanted to put him to death. All around the world, there are Christians who faithfully gather to worship in spite of the danger. Those who look for excuses to miss church better hope they don't stand near these dear saints when they stand before the Lord.

#### 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 nor by the power Jesus displayed. They were determined to destroy Him.

The Pharisees met together to devise a way whereby they could see Jesus put to death. How can anyone be so hardhearted as to 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). As mentioned earlier, during the time of Christ, there were three Jewish groups who held positions of authority. There were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians.

The Herodians were a Jewish political group that was committed to Herod and to Rome. They believed Herod would bring about peace for the Jews. They saw Jesus as a threat and would oppose him again (Mt 22:16).

The Pharisees and the Herodians, though 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 began His turn toward the Gentiles. God was not surprised by the Jews' rejection of His Son (Isa 49:6; Zech 2:11).

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. Before I read this verse, I would have guessed that Jesus healed a couple of hundred people, at most, while He was on earth. But this verse says He healed multitudes on this one occasion. Matthew tells us of more than one occasion when Jesus healed multitudes (4:23; 12:15; 15:30). Jesus 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 could you be quiet after the Son of God healed you of an awful disease? No doubt, many of these blessed people failed to obey this command. The news spread like wildfire.

Why would Jesus tell these people not to tell about what He did for them? You would think He would want everyone to know. There were times when Jesus told 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 healings was told several times, the facts would be distorted. He wanted people to see for themselves. Because his primary mission was to preach the truth

Jesus healed because He truly cared about the sick (Mt 14:34), and to prove He was God (Acts 2:22). However, His primary goal was 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). As a result, many who needed the truth were not able to get close enough to hear.

- Because the increase in His popularity angered the scribes and Pharisees

The more popular Jesus became, the more the Pharisees hated Him and wanted Him put to death. God would not allow Jesus' arrest or death to come before the time was right (Jn 8:20). When the time was right, Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested (Jn 12:23; Jn 13:1).

- Because it wasn't the time for Him to become king

The more popular Jesus 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). 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. What He did fulfilled the 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 known the Messiah was coming in a meek and gentle spirit, not with political and military agendas.

Jesus came as a servant to his Father. His Father was well pleased with Him (Mt 3:17; 17:5).

The words, "shall shew judgment to the Gentiles," mean God will open the way of truth to the Gentiles.

God wanted to use Israel as a spiritual light around the world. Sadly, 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.

It has always been God's design to change the world through the preaching of the truth.

Efforts to change the politics of our nation may improve our circumstances, but they do nothing to change the spiritual corruption of an ungodly nation.

*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 did not 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 to 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 tender plant that could be bruised simply by someone walking by and brushing against it. Of course, the spot where it was bruised would become weak. Anyone walking by this bruised reed would think nothing of brushing it aside and breaking it the rest of the way. But, Jesus, caring for the reed, would be careful not to harm it further.

The illustration is saying Jesus understands the frail nature of man and cares for those who are weak.

*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 demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus. The demon had caused the man to be blind and dumb. 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. We can not be sure how many of the afflictions of today are demonic, but the devil 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 that 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", not by the Pharisees.

#### The sin of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit 12:24-37

Much ink has been spilled in an effort to explain Jesus' comments found here.

The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is dealt with in these verses.

Some believe this sin was simply rejecting Christ and refusing to get saved.

Some believe this sin is something as simple as a person telling the Holy Spirit to leave them alone. Entire sermons have been preached in an attempt to demonstrate this belief.

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 that, since Jesus is no longer on earth, this sin cannot be committed.

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 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 another word for the devil.

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).

The word blasphemy is defined as "defiant irreverence". It can apply to sins such as slandering, defaming, 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 did not deny the miracle, but they did deny that 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. They determined that Jesus cast out the demon by the power of Satan.

They came to this conclusion because they hated Jesus. They knew Jesus' miracles validated His ministry and proved He was the Messiah. They could not, and would not, accept that.

The phrase "this fellow" is a way of saying a nobody. They saw Jesus as nothing.

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 spoke to the crowd, but Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus responded to the Pharisees by saying their accusation was 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. If Jesus cast the demon out by the power of Satan, it would have been Satan fighting against Satan.

*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 continued His response to the accusation of the Pharisees in verse 24 by talking about the "children" of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees had disciples who learned their beliefs and practices. These disciples were called the "children" of the Pharisees. Interestingly, some of these disciples claimed to be able to cast out demons. The same Pharisees who said Jesus' work was by the power of Satan claimed their disciples did their works through the power of God. Jesus' point was, 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 the disciples of the Pharisees actually cast out demons. There are times when the devil will work as an angel of light. 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 gave another response to the Pharisee's accusation. If He cast the demon out by the power of God, it proved God was working through Him. It also proved He was who He claimed to be. The "kingdom of God" was before them; in other words, He was the Messiah who was to come.

*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 was saying, if you want to rob a house, you must first bind the owner, for the owner does his best 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, 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 are not 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 sinning (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 Holy Trinity.

The word blasphemy is defined as "defiant irreverence". Blasphemy is the sin of speaking against God or speaking about God in a derogatory manner. This verse tells us that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is speaking "against the Holy Ghost".

Jesus said "All manner of sin and blasphemy" can be forgiven. God is quick to forgive anyone who confesses and repents. He wants to forgive. That means those who drove the nails in Jesus' hands could have been forgiven. It means the drunkard, the murderer, the adulterer, the thief, and even the child molester can be forgiven.

And yet, 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.*

The title, "Son of man," was used for Jesus and expressed the fact that He was human.

Jesus said, if someone speaks against the Son, he can be forgiven. Jesus, being human, could be easily misunderstood. He looked like any other man. He was born in the lowly town of Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter, and He was meek and lowly. All these things would make it easy to speak derogatory things about the Son. Jesus said that the person who did so could be forgiven.

However, Jesus goes on to say that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could never be forgiven. This is true because the Holy Spirit was the means whereby the

miracles were accomplished. When someone saw a miracle that was obviously a work of the Holy Spirit and said Satan did it, 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; they said the Son did it by the power of Satan. Could I say it again? What else could God do?

There is no forgiveness for this type of person because they have 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 hearts are 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 was speaking about Himself. He was saying, if His works were good, it proved He was good. Anyone 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, and anyone else, should have recognized this.

Second, He was speaking about the Pharisees. They blasphemed because their hearts were evil. Their actions and their words revealed their sinful hearts.

Jesus was telling the Pharisees to make up their minds. If His works and words were good, that must mean He was good. If His works and words were evil, then He must be evil. They should allow His fruit to speak for itself.

*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.*

Some talk about wishing they could have heard Jesus preach. I'm convinced the average Christian of our day would not be able to handle the type of preaching Jesus did.

Jesus called the Pharisees a bunch of vipers because they had the characteristics of snakes. The type of viper Jesus spoke of, the kind that bit Paul (Acts 28:3), was a small poisonous snake that hid until their victim got close and then struck suddenly.

Jesus used this viper as an example of the Pharisees because they were dangerous and deadly. Their poisonous doctrine condemned people to an eternal hell.

The words of the Pharisees had proven what they were. The word "abundance" has the idea of being so full that it runs over. In other words, their hearts are so full of evil that it naturally runs over through their words. What is in the well comes up in the bucket.

*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.*

The word "treasure" has the idea of a storehouse. That which is in a person, whether good or bad, naturally comes out through what they say and do. Their actions are merely a revelation of what they are.

We are accountable for what we say

*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. If every idle word will be judged, how much more will the words of the Pharisees (v. 24)?

When we stand before the Lord, we will give an answer to our words, and not just our deeds. We may give little thought to what we say, but our Lord is listening.

David understood the importance of speech when he said, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Ps 34:13).

The word "account" carries with it the idea of "intent". We'll not only give an account of what we said, but why we said what we said. Our motives matter.

Our words prove what we are

*Mt 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

Our words prove what we really are. 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. Our words are the outlet of our hearts. What's inside will come out. James said the person who doesn't bridle their tongue is deceived, and their religion is vain (useless) (Jam 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 yourself when the heat is on, when someone steps in front of you at the grocery store, when the boss complains again, or when the waitress is slow, then you'll know how spiritual you are.

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).

It's a shame, but waitresses across the country say the Sunday church people are the most rude of all their customers.

*Mt 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.*

Like many who find themselves losing an argument, the Pharisees changed the subject. Their tactic would fail. No one wins when they try to outwit God.

Showing them a "sign" means performing a miracle. They weren't asking Jesus to heal someone, or even to raise someone from the dead. They were asking Him to do something astronomical. They wanted Him to speak a word and make a mountain disappear, or wave His hand and write His name in fire across the heavens. If He were the Messiah as He claimed, certainly He should be able to perform one miracle.

The sad thing was, 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. After all God has done for man, it's never enough.

They called him "Master", which means "teacher," but they hadn't learned much from Him because they refused to believe Him.

*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:*

Many today demand that God give them proof that He exists. In the process, they prove their ignorance for God is not intimidated by any mortal.

The word "evil" means "wicked". The word "adulterous" speaks of being unfaithful to a spouse. The relationship of the Jews to God is often referred to as a marriage. God called Israel adulterous because they had been unfaithful to His covenant with them. The Jews

forsook the Lord many times in the Old Testament and 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 remained faithful, but Israel did not.

God finally broke Israel of their idolatry when He sent them into the Babylonian captivity. However, even though they did not worship idols, they still walked away from the will of God and became an unfaithful spouse. They may not have worshiped false gods, but they did worship their man-made traditions. The Pharisees were a perfect example.

*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.*

Jesus had already given enough signs to convince the entire world. He told them the only sign would be the sign of the prophet Jonah.

The "Son of man" would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth, as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the whale.

If these scribes and Pharisees wanted a sign, Jesus would give them one they could not deny. What greater miracle could He point to than His own resurrection? And so it is today. If you are looking for a sign from God, look to the empty tomb (Mt 28:6). There is no greater sign.

Jesus was true to His word. From this point on, the Bible does not record Jesus doing any more miracles. He went to Calvary without performing any other supernatural work.

By the way, many scoff at the account of Jonah. But this tells us Jesus believed in Jonah and the details given in the Bible. If Jesus believed the Bible's account about Jonah, certainly we should.

*Mt 12:41 The men of Nineveh 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, and the preacher who spoke to them (Jonah) was half backslidden, but they listened, they believed, and they repented.

A "greater than Jonas" had come. If the people of Nineveh believed the message of a backslidden Jonah, surely the people of Israel should believe the message of Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus was greater than Jonah in many ways. Jesus was God, Jonah was a man. Jesus was without sin, Jonah was half backslidden. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and transformed lives. Jonah performed no miracles. Though these things be true, Nineveh received Jonah's message and repented (Jonah 3:5), and the scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus and refused His message (Jn 1:11).

*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 gave another illustration to make His point about accepting the truth.

The queen of Sheba was willing to travel a great distance through the desert to learn the truth about Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1-7).

This Gentile, pagan, idol-worshiping woman was willing to travel miles upon miles to find out the truth about Solomon. But the unbelieving Jews refused to turn to Jesus, who was standing in their very presence.

Reformation is useless 12:43-45

In verses 43-45, Jesus describes the futility of reformation.

The Pharisees were a perfect example of how reformation does not work. They depended on their morals and saw no need for Jesus, confession, repentance, or forgiveness.

It wasn't the drunks, harlots, thieves, and ungodly; it was the religious bunch who demanded the arrest, conviction, and execution of Jesus.

Therein lies the danger of trusting in our own morality. Morality gives a false sense of security.

The work of 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 that takes residence in a man. This word "unclean" speaks of its evil nature.

Remember, Jesus was giving this parable to show the condition of the Pharisees. No doubt, demons are involved in the horrible sin throughout our world. However, they are also very much involved with religion. Satan will use vile sin or empty religion to keep people from Jesus.

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 leaves the man, but we can't be certain whether he left on his own accord or 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 in 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 that 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. Maybe he simply 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 leaves the man and goes to the barren land of the desert. We aren't told why the demon chose to go into the desert, but the Jews believed evil spirits lived in the desolate areas of this world (Isa 13:21; Rev 18:2). The devil's temptation of Jesus began in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1).

The demon is "seeking rest," which tells us this evil spirit was restless. This may suggest that demons desire a body to dwell in. It's concerning to realize that what gave him rest was a place where he could do his work of evil.

The corrupt nature of the demon desired the pollution of an evil heart. He was not content to wander; he found no rest outside of a body. He did his best work for Satan when he had 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 the devil "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 returned to the body from which he had left. The fact that he called it "my" house tells us this demon had not left the body because the person had gotten saved. The

body did not belong to the Lord.

The fact that the body was "empty" tells us the person did not get saved. The Holy Spirit indwells the body of every believer (Rom 8:9). No matter how rich, successful, beautiful, or popular, the unsaved are empty.

It being "swept" tells us this person attempted to clean up his life. It doesn't matter what we get rid of; cleaning up our lives will not save us.

The word "garnished" means "decorated". This person not only stopped doing wrong things, but 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.*

Finding his house cleaned angered the demon. He got seven demons more wicked than himself, and they entered the man.

This seems to suggest there is a hierarchy in the demon world. The devil is called the Prince of demons. If there is a prince, it would be natural to assume there are subjects under him. The devil is a master mind when it comes to organization.

The final 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 is so hard as those who try to reform in an attempt to please God.

The demons enter in and "dwell" there. The word "dwell" means "to live in". It is the same word Paul used when talking about Christ dwelling in our hearts (Eph 3:17). In other words, these demons were at home, and they planned to stay.

What Jesus said about reformation applies to individuals or to nations. The person who reforms often returns to their old habits and ends up in worse condition. When they reject the only way of peace, what else should they expect?

Jesus knew what He was talking about when He said, "even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation". The condition of the nation of Israel continued to worsen. In 70 AD, Titus besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, which caused the sacrificial system to cease. Their lives were never the same.

Before we move on, I feel compelled to say something about the sinful condition of America. Immorality, like a cancer, is devouring us. Sadly, many are looking to politicians to bring about morality and turn our nation around. The answer to our dilemma is the gospel, not morality. We need regeneration, not reformation.

Self-reformation without the life-changing work of God will only make America worse. We need preachers who know the Spirit of God, families that live godly, and 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 yet 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 came, wanting to talk to him. He used this opportunity to show the difference between reformation and relationship. Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Those who believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary say Jesus had no earthly siblings. However, the Bible mentions Jesus' brothers (Mt 13:55; Mk 3:31; Lk 8:18-21; Jn 7:3-5), and sisters (Mk 6:3).

Joseph was most likely dead since he was 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 told Jesus that His mother and brethren were 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 stayed focused on the need at hand. He did not take his family lightly, but ministering to those He was speaking to was more important at the time.

Jesus was not rejecting His earthly family. He proved His love for His mother many times (Lk 2:51; Jn 19:25-27). 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 strongest relationship on earth is the relationship between Jesus and a believer. We truly are family. Many believers are closer to their Christian family than their 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.*

Those who do what God says are the true children. Obedience is the litmus test that reveals if we are genuine believers. 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. The servant of Christ should expect interruptions. The devil is a master at timing and knows just when to attack. The phone will ring just as you begin to pray, the baby cries just as the invitation is given, the friend walks up just as you are witnessing to the lost person.

We must learn how to deal with interruptions by determining what is most important. Some important matters will need to be neglected for the sake of the most important. We must set our priorities and stick to them.

We must 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 will not be able to control every circumstance of our lives. Interruptions will happen. But we should not allow our circumstances to control us.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **7. THE KING'S MYSTERY 13:1-58**

When we come to chapter 13, Jesus has been rejected as King by most of the Jews. As a result, they forfeit the kingdom they could have had. They had waited all their lives for the

Messiah and His kingdom. And when He came, they rejected Him and lost 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. A biblical "mystery" is something that had once been hidden, but now has been revealed. A mystery is 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 He would set Israel aside, and He would have the gospel preached to the Gentiles (cf. Rom 11:25; Eph 3:4-6).

As we have already mentioned, the "kingdom of heaven" is a term Matthew used when he spoke to the Jews. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same thing. In Luke's record of this same event, he used the term "kingdom of God" (Lk 8:10).

We must not forget that 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. 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 seashore, and sat down. Jesus seldom rested. He knew His enemy never took a break (Job 1:7; 1 Pet 5:8). Jesus didn't rest long. A multitude came, and His rest ended.

*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 Jesus that He was being pushed towards the seashore. He boarded one of the ships tied at the shore, 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 SPOKE IN PARABLES

Chapter 13 marks an important division of this book. Jesus had preached, healed, and helped multitudes, but the Jews had, for the most part, rejected Him. Here, we find Him turning toward the Gentiles like never before. Jesus began to speak in parables. Of all Jesus' recorded words, one-third are parables.

Chapter 13 contains parables about a sower (13:3-23), wheat and tares (13:24-30), a mustard seed (13:31-32), leaven (13:33), hidden treasure (13:44), and a pearl (13:45-46).

## SOME FACTS ABOUT PARABLES

- A parable is an allegorical story designed to teach a spiritual truth 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 compares a spiritual truth 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. This is one reason 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. We need to be careful not to try to squeeze truth from every word or detail of the story.

- 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 and make it real.

### WHY DID JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES ?

When His disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, Jesus 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 to CONCEAL truth

Many had heard and rejected what Jesus said (13:11b,13,15). Since they had refused to listen, Jesus spoke in a way that they could not understand. We need to listen when God speaks. When He speaks, He has something to say.

- He spoke in parables to REVEAL truth

Those who had heard Jesus' words and believed could understand the parables (13:11a). 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 cannot.

### THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER 13:3-9

Jesus gave the parable in verses 3-9, and interpreted it in verses 18-23.

#### THE SOWER

*Mt 13:3 ....Behold, 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:*

Some of the sower's seed fell on hard ground.

The fields scattered throughout the land had narrow paths, only 3 or 4 feet wide, that were used for travel. The traffic on these paths made the ground as hard as a rock. As the sower sowed the seed that fell on these paths, it could not penetrate the soil. The birds found this easy meal and consumed these seeds. Birds are the enemy of the farmer and can ruin a crop quickly.

We will 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 speaks of a sheet of bedrock that ran 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 for some of the seed to 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 shoot 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 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:*

Some of the sower's seed fell on thorny ground.

The field had been cleared, but there were spots where unseen roots and seeds of thorny bushes and weeds were left behind. Some of the 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 and 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 sower's seed fell on good ground.

The soil is called "good" because it had been prepared to receive seed. The only difference between this soil and the others is that it had been cultivated. It was open, it was deep, it was soft, and it was receptive to the seed.

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.*

The "hear" means to comprehend. Only believers could hear Jesus' message because the Holy Spirit opens the Word. An unbeliever does not have the Holy Spirit, so they cannot understand.

This answers the question about how so many can hear the Word and be untouched.

*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. They had rejected His word, so they would suffer the consequences. Jesus explained this to His disciples in verse 15, where He said, "their eyes have they closed".

*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. Those who had rejected the Word would have what little they heard taken away. Many have heard the Spirit speak, have begun to be convicted, but have resisted the Spirit's urging. In time, the conviction and the concern they had felt disappeared. Their carelessness in heeding the Word, and their care for earthly things, drowns what the Word was doing in their hearts.

*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 hearing the Son of God preach the Word of God and miss it entirely? What

could be worse than seeing the Son of God and not discerning who He was?

*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" which means, to "be thick, or calloused". It actually means to be stupid. They had become hard of hearing, and it was their fault. They had closed their eyes because they did not want to see. No one turns away from God and gets away with it.

Jesus tells us why they did it because 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. 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.*

Jesus said this same type of thing to Peter when He said, "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 16:17). Peter had not received his information through "flesh and blood", but from the Father.

Those who see and hear have truly been blessed. Nothing could be worse than not knowing what the Word of God is saying. The Word has the answer to every question and 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 EXPLAINED THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER 13:18-23

##### HE EXPLAINED THE SOWER v. 18

Jesus gave the spiritual meaning of this parable.

*Mt 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*

The sower, most likely, was referring to Jesus. Jesus said the sower is the "Son of man" in the other parable (v. 37). We would be safe to assume the sower is the same in both parables.

No matter what, the sower refers to someone who is sowing the seed of the Word of God. Whether Jesus Himself, the disciples, or a modern believer, anyone sharing the Word is sowing.

The sower labors exhaustively because he has a desire for a harvest. That's the reason he left the comfort of his house and went to his field.

We should realize that witnessing will not happen accidentally. We must do it on purpose. We must determine to be a sower.

##### HE EXPLAINED THE SEED v. 19

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).

The "word of the kingdom" is the message that tells people how they can get into the kingdom. The Word, like a seed, has life within itself. When the seed finds good ground, life bursts forth. So, it is with the Word of God. We are born again by the "incorruptible" Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23).

As the seed is the only means of life in the agricultural world, so the seed of the Word is the only means of spiritual life. Without seed, there is no harvest.

#### HE EXPLAINED THE SOIL v. 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. The condition of the soil makes the difference.

The soil is a picture of the heart of man. 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. 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. Sowing the true seed is all the sower can do. 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 whose heart is hard. They stubbornly reject the Word.

As described in verse 4, some of the seed fell on the paths where the soil was so hard the seed could not penetrate it. This speaks of the person who will not listen to the Word. Talking to some people is like talking to a brick wall. You can tell it isn't sinking in.

The wicked one" is the devil. He swoops in like a bird and devours the seed (cf. v.4). 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 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. v.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;*

The shallow soil on the large bedrock allowed the seed to germinate but not to send down roots.

This speaks of the person who hears the word and quickly makes a profession of faith. But the profession is false.

This person 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, and they don't count the cost. There was no conviction, no repentance, and no real conversion. 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.*

The nutrients from the soil caused the seed to spring upward quickly. However, since it could not sink deeply to obtain moisture and nutrients, it died quickly.

This person makes a profession that may look genuine to begin with. Remember, the sprout shoots up quickly. They show a great deal of emotion when they make their profession of faith. However, once they face 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 strengthen the true believer, but it will also reveal the false believer.

This parable lets us know that not all professions are genuine. At times, the ones who seem to be so real are the ones who 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 is the person whose heart is saturated with a love for the world. The thorns and weeds of worldliness consume them. This may be the person who loves to party, the businessman who strives for success, or the teenager who 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).

Weeds grow naturally in any soil. They will grow in places you would never dream possible. The lost person feels at home in the world. Sin and worldliness come naturally to them.

#### 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.*

The seed that fell into good ground that was ready to receive it 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.

One out of four who heard the Word accepted it. This does not mean that one out of every four people we witness to will get saved. It is saying that many who hear the Word will reject it. Thank the Lord, 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. Very few people accept the Lord the first time they hear the Word. God can still soften their heart.

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.

Some try to use this parable 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.

## POINTS 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. An experienced farmer, or a five-year-old boy, can sow seed. If you feel like you aren't equipped to witness, simply tell others what happened to you. Sow your seed. Study the Word and learn how to witness in a more productive manner.

- We should witness a lot

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 everyone. We were told to sow and let the Lord take care of the harvest.

- We should not force people

We must depend on the Lord to touch their hearts. I have seen so many well-meaning Christians almost force people to pray the sinner's prayer. 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 whom God has made ready. Their hearts may be made tender even while you are talking to them.

## THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES 13:24-30

Jesus gave His 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:*

Jesus talked about a man who sowed good seed in his field. He will explain this in verses 37-39.

Once again, Jesus gave 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 saved, and some are lost.

*Mt 13:25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

The tare 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.

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.

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 (Job 1:7; 1 Pet 5:8). He is still on the move.

The laborers were sleeping. This speaks 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.

*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 and his desire for a good harvest. They knew he would sow only the best of seed, so they knew he did not sow the tares. God never works 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' 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.*

Jesus rejected the servant's suggestion. If they tried to pull up the tares, they would pull up some wheat also. The two looked so much alike that no one could tell the difference. We cannot determine who is real and who is false because 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.*

Jesus said to let them both grow together until the time of harvest. 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 see the mercy of God in this parable. Judgment on the tares was withheld because of the presence 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 its sin, but also because there were not enough godly people (Gen 18:16-33).

Jesus will explain this in verses 39-42.

Some use verse 30 in an attempt to discourage church discipline. However, we must remember, in this parable, the field is the world, not the church. There are times when church discipline is needed (Mt 18:17; Ro 16:17; 1 Co 5:1-7, 9; Eph 5:11; 2 Ti 3:5, Titus 3:10).

The act of church discipline is done to bring the sinful person to repentance. It is not done just to get rid of the guilty person. When the guilty person repents, we should forgive them and accept them back into the church (2 Co 2:6-8; Gal 6:1).

## 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 there is a difference. This farmer was not in his field sowing seeds by the handful. He sowed only one seed.

This seed was not your ordinary seed. It took only one seed to accomplish what the farmer desired. This seed grew into something gigantic. This parable reveals how the kingdom will have a small beginning but grow to something gigantic.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed sown in a field. Mustard was a valuable crop because it had many purposes. The kingdom of believers is to affect this world for the good. Are you doing your part to make this world a better place?

*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.*

Jesus said the mustard seed was the "least", or smallest, of all seeds. Some have tried to discredit Jesus' words because there are seeds 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 He used for "seed" was the type of seed that was planted on purpose, with a harvest in mind. The mustard seed was the smallest seed used for a harvest at that time. So, Jesus, as always, was correct.

The mustard seed started small, but when it grew, it became a tree. Jesus was not suggesting 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. Imagine, from a seed so small it is difficult to pick up, comes a tree 25 feet high.

Jesus' kingdom started small. In fact, it started in a manger. Its king was raised in a carpenter's home and led a lowly life. His ministry started with eleven men. At the end of His life, His kingdom consisted of 120 disciples gathered in an upper room.

Yet, from that small beginning, billions have come. There were 3,000 (Acts 2:41), then 5,000 (Acts 4:4), and later multitudes (Acts 5:14), saved. 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.

How can anything so small, with so much opposition, have any hope of survival? 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" (Mt 16:18). The devil has fought this kingdom from its beginning, yet, like the mustard seed, the kingdom thrives.

The birds lodging in the plant remind 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 birds live in the tree because it provides safety and shelter. 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. The moral principles of

Christianity, the dignity of life, the judicial system, education, free enterprise, and the dignity of women are all benefits instilled by Christianity.

## 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.*

In this parable, Jesus likened the kingdom to a woman putting leaven into a lump of dough. When making bread, a lady would put a small piece of leaven into the dough. This leaven would permeate the loaf and cause it to rise.

As the mustard plant started from a small seed, this large loaf was filled from a small piece of leaven.

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 its meaning.

Some believe the leaven is the good influence of the gospel that spreads throughout the world. Others believe the leaven speaks of evil that spreads through the kingdom. I 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). The only exception is in Leviticus, where 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 was using this parable to warn 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).

Unfortunately, we are seeing the leaven spreading today.

We see leaven in the form of false doctrine. The devil loves to sow discord by introducing confusion in a church.

We see leaven in the form of easy believism. The teaching of salvation without repentance is rampant in our day. However, Jesus said, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Lk 13:3, 5).

We see leaven in the form of worldliness. Many modern churches have allowed worldliness to creep in. What used to be sin has become acceptable.

We see leaven in the form of "contemporary worship". Traditional music and songs are being replaced with Rock and Roll "Jesus" music.

Once the leaven is placed in the dough, it permeates the entire loaf and cannot be removed. I know of no church, having allowed compromise to get in, that has turned back to Biblical standards. We should, at all costs, avoid the evil influence of compromise and worldliness.

The "three measures of meal" would equal nine gallons. That is an extremely large lump, but it was common to bake large amounts (Gen 18:6; Judges 6:19; 1 Sam 1:24).

*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). This verse means, 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 fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy. The psalmist spoke of this (Ps 78:2-3).

#### JESUS EXPLAINED THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES 13:36-43

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, the seed represents people.

*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.*

Notice, Jesus did not explain the parable until He sent the multitudes away and was alone with His disciples. Once again, as Jesus explained in verse 15, these truths were for those who would receive them.

The disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable of the tares. The parables were for believers, but they needed divine insight to understand them. The truths of God are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10).

*Mt 13:37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;*

The sower who sowed good seed in his field (v. 24) represented 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).

*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".

In this parable, the good seed was "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 (cf. 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 devil sows the unbeliever, and the Lord sows the believer.

The enemy who sowed the tares was the devil. The devil plants his people where he wants them. Remember, these are those who profess to be saved but are not.

Just as tares hinder the growth of wheat, the devil sows his children where they can hinder the children of the kingdom. This may be that person is at work, on your street, or even in your own family.

The believer's first reaction is to somehow remove these people. The servants recommended this in verse 28. I'm afraid many Christians have this 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 from the world, we cut ourselves off from any opportunity to win them to Christ.

Notice, just as the devil sowed bad seed, the Son of man sowed good seed. God has placed His children exactly where He wants them. Your job, school, neighborhood, or family may be difficult, but God put you there so that you might be a light in the darkness.

Only God knows when the time of "harvest" will come. As in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:20), He mercifully waits for sinners to repent.

The "end of the world" speaks of the end of the age when God deals with sin and sinners. This happens when God says it is time. He will not move too soon.

The "reapers" are the angels. God has used His angels to minister to His children (Heb 1:14). He has also used angels 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. Without a doubt, this fire refers to the eternal fire of 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;*

Jesus identified the "Son of man" as Himself. Under His instructions, 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 tares are those who profess, but do not possess, salvation. Not all professors are possessors.

*Mt 13:42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

At the Great White Throne Judgment, Jesus will say, "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Mt 25:41). This is the final dwelling place 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 be 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, and we will be delivered from these sin-cursed bodies.

Our sin-cursed bodies will be replaced with bodies that are glorified. At His transformation, Jesus glowed so brilliantly that His clothing shone (Mk 9:2-3). It may be that the glorified bodies of the believers will radiate the glory of God in such a manner, both in Christ's kingdom and in heaven.

This glow is so brilliant that God compared it to the glow of the sun. The Archangel Michael said, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament" (Dan. 12:3).

All believers should listen because there are millions around us on their way to hell. All unbelievers should listen to escape this horrible judgment.

#### 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.*

Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a man who found a treasure in a field. Having no trustworthy banks, people would often bury their valuables in their fields. Some died without telling anyone about their buried treasure. At times of war, the landowner may be forced to flee his property and leave the treasure behind.

This man found a treasure in a field. He hid the treasure, went and sold everything he owned, and bought the field in order to get the treasure.

Some have suggested that what this man did was unethical. Actually, he went overboard to do the right thing, and his actions prove he was a man of character and an honest man.

To begin with, Jewish law stated, "If a man finds scattered fruit or money, it belongs to the finder". So, this man had the legal and moral right to keep this treasure. Had he been dishonest, he would have simply taken the treasure and not told anyone. Instead, he sold everything he owned and bought the entire field from its present owner.

This treasure did not belong to the person who presently owned the field. If it did, they 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.

Having dealt with the ethics of this man, let's look at the meaning of the parable. What was Jesus saying?

Some believe this parable 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 their reasoning, but I believe in this parable, the treasure is Israel, the man who found the treasure is Jesus, and the field is the world. We must remember that Matthew is writing primarily to the Jews.

Notice these facts about this parable.

- The man found the treasure

The Bible likens Israel to a treasure (Ex 19:5; Ps 135:4). She is special to God.

- The treasure was lying in the filth of the earth

Israel, like all mankind, is stuck in the filth of sin (2 Kgs 17:7-17; Isa 5:1-7; Amos 2:6-7).

- The man bought the entire field

The field is the world, and Jesus' sacrifice paid for the sin of the entire world (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus died for the entire world, but, in a specific way, He died for Israel (Isa 53:8).

- The man was willing to pay the price for the treasure

He sold everything he owned to purchase it. The God of heaven gave the best He had to purchase Israel, and us (Jn 3:16).

- The man made the purchase with "joy"

As far as Israel, He rejoiced because 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 rejoiced because 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.

This parable is quite similar to the one preceding it. 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, that He would set Israel aside, and that He would establish the church.

This parable speaks of a merchant man seeking pearls. A pearl was extremely valuable in Jesus' day and was viewed then like diamonds are in our day. The extremely rich would flaunt their riches by wearing pearls.

One of the reasons for their cost was the way they were harvested. Not having diving equipment as we do today, to reach the depths necessary, they would tie rocks on themselves and jump into the water. Many died attempting to get pearls.

Interestingly, the Jews did not see pearls as valuable.

The type of merchant man Jesus spoke about traveled great distances in search of his goods. The word "seeking" implies leaving one place and going to another. How true is that of our dear Savior?

God has been seeking man since He came to Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen 3:8-9). 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). I don't understand why He was willing to do such a thing, but I sure am glad He was.

*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 found a pearl like no other pearl he had ever seen. As in the parable of the hidden treasure (v. 44), this man was willing to sell all he had to buy the pearl.

I believe this parable is a picture of the church, the bride of Christ. I say that for the following reasons.

- This pearl was costly

This pearl cost Jesus His life (Eph 5:25-27)

- A pearl is a product of suffering

Pearls are not formed from a grain of sand, as has been previously believed. An oyster can expel most grains of sand. Pearls are formed when a parasitic intruder invades the oyster and causes irritation. Jesus suffered for us on the cross (Isa 53:5; Mk 10:34; Ro 5:6; Heb 12:2; 1 Pet 2:21, 24; 3:18).

- 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. The day will come when He will present His church, the bride of Christ, to His Son. At that time, she will be glorious, not having a spot, nor wrinkle, she will be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:27).

- A pearl is one part

A pearl cannot be cut without ruining its value and beauty.

Like the pearl, the church is one. The body of Christ has many members, but it is one body (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 4:4-6). When the body of Christ is divided, it loses its value, its beauty, and its usefulness.

Somehow, we have gotten used to the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sin. We take lightly the agony He endured. God became a man and experienced what we experience (Heb 4:15). He suffered the pain of living in a sinful world. He was misunderstood and mistreated. The perfect, holy, flawless Son of God took our sin upon Himself when He hung on the cross. 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 (2 Cor 5:21).

## 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 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 important to remember that Matthew is speaking primarily to the Jews. We must be careful not to 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. We will spend eternity, either in the joy of heaven or the torment of hell, so we should be concerned about more than just today.

This parable deals with judgment. The summary is found in verse 50. Jesus spoke often about hell. Jesus did not speak more about hell than He did about heaven, as some have said, but He did speak often about the judgment of hellfire.

Once again, we must remember that 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 was thrown into the sea. The word Jesus used for "net" was talking about a seine net.

A seine net was a very large net that could cover as much as a half-mile area. They would secure one end of the net to the shore and the other end to a boat. Then, the boat would make a large circle and come back to the shore. The top of the net would float on the surface, and the bottom, being weighted, would drag across the bottom. Everything within its 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.*

Once the boat reached the shore, the fishermen would pull the net to shore and separate the good fish from the bad. They would put the good fish in a vessel that contained water. This way, the fish would be kept alive. They would discard the bad. This task was done carefully.

*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 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 imagination.

Notice some things about this parable.

- The net is large

God's net is large enough to encircle everyone on earth. No one will escape.

- The net is moving

As the net was drawn towards the shore, so time is drawing all things to the end. Some people live as though they have plenty of time. But the end is coming. We should all prepare now, before it is too late. 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 being pulled towards the shore. It may bump the fish, but they don't even notice. They are not alarmed. They are prisoners and think they are free. The ungodly are the same. They think they are living as they please, when in reality, they are prisoners to sin and Satan.

- 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. Those who refuse His message are sealing their doom.

Despite 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 concluded the parables in this chapter. He asked the disciples if they understood 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 what they had heard? 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.

Jesus' question should cause every preacher and teacher 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. 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 gave one more parable before He departed to His own country.

The "householder", who was the one responsible for all the needs of an estate, had a storehouse where he stored the goods needed to run the estate. When a plow, or seed, or whatever, was needed, the householder got it from this storehouse.

As the householder had responsibilities, the "scribes" were to study, teach, protect, and preserve the Word of God. The storehouse God had given them was the New and Old Testaments. As Jesus said, some of the goods in the storehouse were old, and some were new, but all were needed.

Like the householder, the disciples and all believers were responsible for the distribution of the goods within that storehouse. 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. The devil

would love for us to water it down and make it something God never intended.

And so, Jesus gave this last parable to summarize all the parables in this chapter. In the parable about the sower (v. 3-9) He dealt with how people would respond to his message. In the parable of the wheat and tares (v. 24-30), He dealt with how the true and the false will live together. In the parable of the mustard seed (v. 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 (v. 45-46). And, in the parable of the householder (v. 52), Jesus warned his disciples that 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 moved on. The rejection continued. The time comes when God quits speaking and moves 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 hometown of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue. You would think, in His hometown, there would be people who would be excited to see Him and would be on His side. Sadly, the opposite was true. They rejected Him as the Son of God because they saw Him only as the hometown boy who used to live in their neighborhood.

They were astounded at Jesus' "wisdom" and "works".

*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 Jesus' words of wisdom.

They were amazed at Jesus' wisdom because they knew Him. This was his hometown. They knew He was a carpenter's son. They knew Joseph and Mary and had seen Him as He grew up. Some of them had children who had played with Jesus when He was a little boy. Some of them had played with His themselves. To them, He was an ordinary man.

The fact is, 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. The God who made this universe worked 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 indescribable wisdom. They wondered, where did He obtain this knowledge?

His brothers and sisters were still among them. Since Joseph is not mentioned here, there is a good chance that he had passed away. Contrary to what some teach, these verses make it clear that Mary had children other than Jesus (cf Mt. 12:46).

Much of the world does not recognize Jesus now.

*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 recognizing He was who He claimed to be.

*Mt 13:58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

He had done many mighty miracles in other places, but not here. The only reason is their lack of faith. 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.

Our faith moves God. Our lack of faith keeps Him from working.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST 14:1-12

These verses are a flashback to the events that led to the end of John's life.

*Mt 14:1 At that time Herod the Petrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,*

Jesus' reputation was growing. He was preaching, and His disciples were going out two by two, proclaiming the Word. Everyone was talking about Him. Herod heard about this man who was causing such an uproar.

This is Herod Antipas. He was the son of Herod the Great, who tried to put Jesus to death just after His birth (Mt. 2). When Herod the Great died, he left his kingdom to his three sons, of whom Herod Antipas was one.

He was called "tetrarch". The word "tetrarch" means 'the ruler of a fourth part'. It means he had been assigned by Rome to oversee a portion of Israel.

As we will discover, he was an ungodly man who was driven by fear.

*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 revealed the fear that controlled his life. He thought Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead.

This certainly honors John the Baptist. When Herod saw John, he reminded him of Jesus. Does your life remind others of Jesus?

*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.*

Herod was afraid that John the Baptist had come back from the dead. He had imprisoned and killed John.

Mark tells us that Herod feared John because he knew he was a godly man (Mk 6:20).

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 learn 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 seduced Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. Herod and Herodias divorced their spouses and married. Herod would regret this decision.

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. 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's first thought was to do away with John. He thought, Do away with the messenger, and you do away with the message.

His fear of the people caused him to rethink his desire to put John to death. He knew they considered him as a man of God, so putting him to death could cause a rebellion.

*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 spent her day trying to devise a plan to get rid of him. Herod's birthday offered her the perfect opportunity to do just that.

In that day, only pagans celebrated birthdays. The Romans celebrated birthdays with drunkenness, gluttony, and ungodliness. They would drink and eat as much as they could hold. Then, women would be brought out to dance in a lewd manner.

Herodias, knowing Herod would be drunk and easily manipulated, at his birthday party, made plans for her daughter to be one of the ones to dance.

How wretched a woman she must have been as to have her own daughter do such a vile act. The lewdness of her dance was not the only vile thing she did that day. As we are about to see, she played a vital part in the death of John.

*Mt 14:7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.*

Herod's greatest mistake of his life was marrying Herodias. His second greatest mistake was making her daughter this promise.

Herod had eaten until he could not eat another bite. He drank 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 promised her anything up to half his kingdom (Mk. 6:23). 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. To break a promise, any promise, was considered an act of weakness. No king could afford to be perceived as weak.

He was in a difficult situation. But, how much better if he had just told 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, and some of the people would have thought less of him. But it would have been the right thing to do.

Some people may have been displeased, but God would have been pleased. It is better to have the 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. Did this young girl have 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.*

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, that is 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, and the resurrection, are the only miracles of Jesus that are 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. Jesus feared no man. It simply was not the time for Jesus to confront. It was not the time for him to claim the kingdom. It was not the time to fight. It takes wisdom to know when not to fight.

Mark tells us that Jesus was seeking 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 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.

Jesus 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 "me" 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), so 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 Jesus only for healing. John tells us a great multitude followed Him, "because they saw his miracles" (Jn 6:1-2). They had no intention of giving themselves to Him. They would stay only as long as He did good things for them, and they would be gone. Amazingly, Jesus knew their hearts, still had compassion on them, and gave them food.

It is more than Him thinking He should do the right thing. He genuinely cared. He felt their need. I am glad He still does. We have a high priest who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Heb 4:15).

He needed rest, but the needs of the people were more important. 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 got concerned because the multitude was getting weak and hungry.

The disciples' solution to this problem was, "send the multitude away". Like us, they simply wanted the problem to go away.

John tells us a little more about this conversation. Jesus asked Philip (no doubt in the presence of the other disciples) where they could get bread for such a large crowd (Jn 6:5). Philip said: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little". Perhaps two hundred pennyworth was the amount in the bag the disciples had as a treasury. In essence, he was saying they did not have enough money to buy food for such a large crowd.

Jesus 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 had seen Him do the impossible so many times, they had no reason to doubt this time.

None of the disciples had a solution to this problem. Realizing we cannot fix our problems is the first step to finding the solution.

*Mt 14:16 But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.*

Jesus said this to make them realize they did not have what was needed, and they could not do what was required. They were about to learn the lesson of helplessness. It is a lesson we all need to learn. What we need 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 a lunch of five barley loaves, and two small fish (Jn 6:9). Barley was the cheapest grain available and 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 give 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.*

Jesus had them sit on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties (Mk 6:40). They were seated 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 have 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 to 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 handed out the food to a standing crowd, only those in front would have been able to see where it came from. His way, every person could see and would know their food came from Jesus. Every time they took a bite, they remembered, this came from God.

John tells us Jesus gave thanks before He broke the bread (Jn 6:11).

Jesus "brake" the bread. Had it not been broken, the crowd would not have been fed. God

uses broken things. In like fashion, God cannot use us until He has broken us.

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 (1 Kgs 17:13-16), the bread kept coming. The loaves and the fish did not diminish.

Jesus gave to the disciples, and they gave to the people. They gave that which had been given to them. Believers should be funnels, not buckets. A funnel doesn't hold anything for itself; it lets what comes into it pass through. What we get from God, we should pass on to others.

*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," which means they all ate all they wanted. Even though the supply was lacking, Jesus provided what was needed. Nothing is too big for God. The God who created the universe has no problem creating food.

That means the young lad who gave his lunch ended up eating more than he would have originally. He gave what he had, and he got more in return. We never lack when we give what God asks.

There were 12 baskets of leftovers. These were small baskets that individuals carried. We are not told what happened to these leftovers. Maybe Jesus gave them to the lad. Since there were twelve, maybe He gave one to each disciple.

Some have suggested that everyone brought their own lunch with them and decided to share when they saw the little boy sharing. To begin with, the Bible does not say this happened. Also, everyone sharing what little they had would not have been enough to fill everyone, let alone provide twelve baskets of leftovers. Also, had this happened, no one would have returned the next day seeking more food from Jesus (Jn 6:22-26).

*Mt 14:21 And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.*

There were 5,000 men, not counting the women and children. Considering it was the time of Passover, and entire families traveled together to Jerusalem, it is not unreasonable to assume there were 15 or 20 thousand gathered there. Matthew said it was a "great multitude".

What Jesus asked of His 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 the job is too big for you? Just remember, He still multiplies. He can make your little more than enough. Do not give up. Your God can make a way when there is no way.

## 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.*

The word "straightway" speaks of urgency and doing something quickly. Jesus put His disciples on a ship, sent the multitude away, and went to a mountain to pray alone.

John tells us Jesus did this because He knew they were going to try to make Him king (Jn 6:15). His miracle of feeding the 5,000 had stirred the crowd to a fever pitch. They believed Jesus was the Messiah, and they were ready to force Him to overthrow the Roman government.

Sadly, they were more concerned about their bondage to Rome than they were their

bondage to sin. Jesus preached "Repent" because their hearts were so far from God. He could not be their leader until they repented of their sin.

The word "constrained" means He had to compel them to get in the ship. Perhaps they were reluctant to board the ship because they, like the crowd, wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome and become their king.

The 20,000 or so He had just fed were ready for a kingdom. Humanly speaking, it would have been a great time to start a revolution. If now were this time, the disciple certainly did want to miss it. However, this was not the time for Jesus to revolt; it was time for Him to serve.

I believe Jesus was trying to teach the disciples at least two lessons by sending them ahead without Him.

One, He sent them ahead that He might have time to pray privately (v. 23).

Two, He wanted them to experience life without His presence. The time would come when He would return to heaven (Jn 7:34; 8:21; 13:33). They needed to get used to trusting God even though Jesus was not present.

Three, He wanted them to trust God even in the worst of circumstances. Jesus was sending them into one of the worst storms they had ever faced (v. 24-33).

*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 their desired direction. There are times when it seems like the circumstances of our lives are working against us in doing the Lord's will. Opposition should not surprise us; we have an enemy.

The ship being in the "midst" of the sea means it was as far to shore if they turned around, as if they continued forward.

Storms were common on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea lies around 700 feet below sea level and has mountains surrounding it. The cold air from these mountains swoops down across the warm, 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 fought the storm, no doubt they were wondering, where was Jesus, and why did He send them into this storm. We ask the same type of questions when the Lord allows

problems to come into 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 you.

*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 from 9 pm to 12 am, the third from 12 am to 3 am, and the fourth was from 3 am to 6 am. Jesus came somewhere between 3 and 6 am.

Neither the sea nor the storm was a problem for Jesus. I have often wondered what it would be like to see Him walking on the water. Were the waves calm immediately under his feet? Or, were they 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. It seems the disciples feared what they thought was a spirit more than they did the storm.

*Mt 14:27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

Jesus identified Himself and told them to stop being afraid. There is no need to fear when Jesus is present. We don't have to fear the bully at school if we have a big brother who will take care of him. The disciples were in a very dangerous situation, but they had someone who could protect them.

*Mt 14:28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

The best thing we can do when we are afraid is to get to Jesus as fast as we can. Peter made many mistakes during his life, but he recognized the importance of being close to Jesus. Also, Peter did not move until Jesus spoke. So many times we move before God 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.*

This is a perfect picture of walking by faith. Peter was doing the impossible, to begin with.

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, or will you take a step of faith?

*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 have stayed on the ship; others say getting out was right because Jesus told him to come.

We can make good points for both points of view. 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? Somehow, we think that if we obey the Lord, our problems should end. Have you ever thought, "Lord, I have done what you told me, why is my world still falling apart"?

There will be times when our problems will be at their worst 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, but it was worse after he stepped out. While on the ship, Peter had something to stand on. The ship did keep him above water. Once out of the ship, he had nothing to hold him up. While on the ship, Peter had something to hang on to. The waves tossed the ship around like a toy. Having something to hold 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 when 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 to walk alone.

No doubt as Peter began to sink, he thought, "oh no, not again". Peter was a man who had great successes, but he also had great blunders. No doubt, it broke his heart every time he failed the Lord. Here he was, going down again. However, he had enough sense to call on the Lord. We should never allow our failures to keep us from calling on God for help. Even when we fail, we should run to Jesus as fast as we can. Like Peter, we will find Him waiting, with open arms. 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 gauged not only by our successes but 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 "beginning" to sink? I learned to swim as a young boy by stepping into a hole in a lake. I was walking in waist-deep water and suddenly stepped into a hole. Instantly, I found myself in water over my head. It was either swim or drown, so I swam. I learned that day, you do not "begin" to sink. That means, 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 that he had 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 Greek language. That word means "little confidence". Little faith is better than no faith, but little faith is lacking faith. Little faith does not see all that God can do. Little faith does not please the Lord.

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.

Sadly, we doubt just as Peter did. 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. Our faith is based on the evidence we have been given.

If we are going to doubt God, we should also have evidence. 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". That means we have absolutely no good reason to ever doubt God.

There had been no reason for the disciples to fear. They had been safe all the time because they were doing what Jesus had told them. He had told them to get on 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 their 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 were 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.

I have no Scripture to prove it, but I believe the Lord wanted His disciples to trust Him through the storm and to reach the other side of the Lake. Of course, in mercy, He calmed the storm, but how much better would it have been for them to endure it? All too often, we beg God to take our storms away when He wants us to trust Him to help us endure them.

God sends storms in an attempt to teach us that 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.

### **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, said it was like a garden because of its fertility. It was so fertile that 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 Jesus' arrival spread like wildfire, and people came to be healed. They even 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 rewarded for their faith. Whatever disease afflicted them, Jesus healed them all.

Notice, there were no progressive healings. Those who were healed were healed instantly and completely. 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 anyone 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.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **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 Jesus 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 the last group. They should have stood with Jesus. They were supposed to be the spiritual ones; they were anything but spiritual.

They were not lovers of God nor spiritual men. They were spiritually blind and willingly ignorant. The message of Jesus and the message of the Pharisees could not have been more opposite.

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. Sadly, they had failed miserably.

The "Pharisees" were supposed to be the spiritual giants of the day, but they had become self-righteous hypocrites because they thought their good deeds gained them favor with God.

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 in 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.

*Mt 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

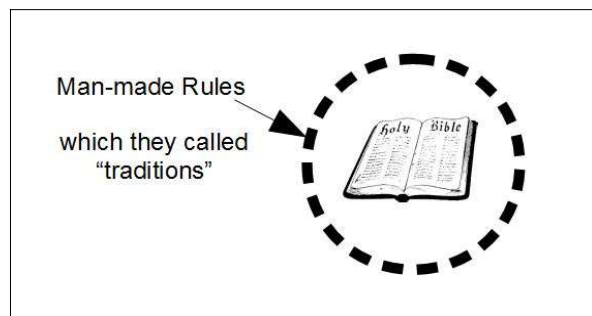
These men asked a question, but they were not asking that they might become more informed. They approached Jesus in public and confronted Him in an attempt to embarrass and discredit Him.

The "tradition" Jesus spoke of was referring to the man-made rules the scribes and Pharisees had devised.

As mentioned earlier, the scribes were supposed to protect the Old Testament. In an attempt to make sure no one violated the Scripture, they added their own rules. They put walls of rules around the Scripture 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 to the right shows, when they surrounded the Word of God with their rules and traditions, the Scripture became obscured by their traditions.

For further explanation, please refer to the information explained in Matthew 12:2.



They were so dedicated to their rules (traditions) that they disregarded the Word of God. By the time Jesus came on the scene, they considered their 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". They believed it would be better to disobey the Scripture than their traditions. Their motives may have been right to begin with, but they ended up perverting the Scripture.

Sadly, the modern church does the same thing. How much of what we do today is because we have always done it this way? How much of our spiritual routine is the result of our tradition and not because we are walking in the Spirit?

The washing of the hands was referring to one of the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. They believed that as they went through the day, their hands became defiled. If they touched a Gentile, a dead body, or a leper, they would be ceremonially unclean. They believed that 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". This means they believed this type of washing of the hands assured them of eternal life.

No doubt, they thought long and hard about the question they asked Jesus. They knew Jesus did not teach this ritual to His disciples. They were hoping this would cause those who were following Jesus to see Him as a transgressor of the Scripture and reject Him once and for all. Of course, their plan backfired. No one can corner God.

*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. We will see this in the next few verses.

Notice, Jesus did not deny breaking their traditions. The word "also" acknowledges the fact that He and His disciples had not kept the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus and His disciples may have broken their traditions, but the scribes and Pharisees 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 how the scribes and Pharisees had broken the Scripture (cf. Ex

20:12 and 21:7). He spoke of how the Old Testament commanded children to obey their parents and the consequences of disobeying.

*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.*

The command to honor parents included taking care of them when they reached the age where they could not take care of themselves.

However, the scribes and Pharisees had devised a way to side-step this commandment. The words, "It is a gift," speak of one of their traditions they used to avoid taking care of their parents.

The Jews distorted this practice by saying a person could dedicate their money to the Lord and not have 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 it even more distorted, they said a person could declare all his possessions to be a gift to God but still use them in any way he pleased.

This was just one of the many ways their traditions had violated the Word of God.

*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.*

This is the fourth of fourteen times Jesus uses the word "hypocrites" in the book of Matthew. This time, He is dealing with transgressing God's Word.

Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13. The word "hypocrites" speaks of an actor or 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, but our hearts tell 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, and 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 hearts are the real test. God is not interested in our ritualistic religion. He wants us to worship Him from a pure heart and 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:*

The scribes and Pharisees would not listen, so Jesus turned to the common people. He was about to rock their boat. He said, "hear, and understand" because what He was about to say would be opposite to everything they had believed. 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 the scribes and Pharisees

to accept because the Old Testament taught to abstain from certain types of foods (Lev. 11). Now, Jesus was saying that all foods could be consumed. Peter (Acts 10:9-17) and Paul (Rom 14:1-3) were taught this same lesson.

Jesus was not saying that nothing we consume is sinful. Certainly, drinking alcohol is a sin. Jesus was referring only to the intake of foods that had been considered unclean. He 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. Jesus refused to water down the truth in order to keep from offending anyone. If the truth offends, so be it.

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.*

The scribes and Pharisees were a "plant" God had not planted. Their doctrine would not survive.

Not 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 to their deception. Unfortunately, some people are beyond help. If they refuse the truth, they have no hope. There are times when God gives up (Rom 1:24 and 26). Those who reject the truth will suffer the consequences.

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. They saw themselves as the only ones who had the truth. Little did they realize that they were spiritually blind.

The sad thing about the blind leading the blind is that they both "fall into the ditch". When the Word of God is replaced with the teaching of man, the end will not be good for the teacher or the listener.

We should be extremely careful about who we are following and who we are leading. Everyone is following someone and, at the same time, leading someone. 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.

*Mt 15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

Peter should have been able to understand.

*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 of what we consume. Food enters the body through the mouth and passes through the body. Our physical intake has nothing to do with our spiritual condition. It has no effect on our nature, our conversation, or our conduct.

*Mt 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

Jesus adds to what He said in verse 11. That which comes out of our mouth reveals what is in our heart.

All sin begins in the heart of man.

*Mt 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

Jesus gave 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 refers to 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".

The word "murders" refers to taking the life of another (1 Jn 3:15), "adulteries" and "fornications" speak of sexual sins, "thefts" speak of stealing, "false witness" is making an untrue statement about a person, and "blasphemies" is 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. A person sins when he does what God has forbidden, not when he violates some man-made rule. 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, probably because they are so close to each other.

These cities were in a Gentile region called Phoenicia. 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. He had sent His disciples throughout the cities of Israel, and they had been rejected also. Now, the scribes and Pharisees were devising a way to kill Him.

Two, other Jews wanted 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 some 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). This seems to indicate that Jesus went there in an attempt to get some much-needed rest. He did not get the rest He so badly needed

because He was flocked by people wanting help. Mark tells us 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 (Mt 8:5-6) and the woman of Samaria were both Gentiles (Jn 4:9).

He had not yet turned completely from the Jews, and He had not yet turned totally 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 emphasis added). He was proving that He meant what He said.

*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 lady is a perfect picture of a lost sinner. As we will see, she realized her need. She had no right to access the Lord. She came, realizing her helplessness, and asked for mercy. And, she received what she so desperately needed.

This woman had at least three 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. She first addressed Jesus by His Jewish title, "Son of David". She had no claim to Jesus as the Son of David because she was not a Jew. The Jews viewed Gentiles as dogs. Since Jesus had come to the Jews (Jn 1:11), she had no reason to expect any help from Him. She was not just a Gentile, but verse 22 tells us she was a Canaanite. The Canaanites were the vile, ungodly idolaters who lived in the Promised Land before Israel possessed it. They were so wicked that God told His people to destroy them all (Dt 7:1-5).

Three, the devil was attacking her by possessing her daughter with a demon. We are not told, but it may have been her wicked lifestyle that influenced her daughter.

Despite 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.

She had a lot going against her, but she also had a lot going for her.

First, she had a burden. The word "cried" means to "clamor" or "shout". She came screaming for help. She was in such agony that she did not care who heard her or what they thought about her. There is no love like a mother's love.

Secondly, she recognized her helplessness. She knew she could not help her daughter.

Thirdly, she had faith. She called Jesus "Lord". Somehow, she had heard about him, and she believed what she heard. She believed He could help her daughter.

Like her, we need a burden. Without a burden, we will not pray. Like her, we need to recognize our helplessness. Until we recognize our helplessness, we will not ask God for help. And, like her, we need faith. Without faith, our prayers accomplish little, if anything.

*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.*

At first, Jesus did not even acknowledge her.

This was an indescribable scene. She was wailing loudly, possibly tugging at Jesus, begging Him to help her daughter, and He was acting as though she wasn't even there.

However, Jesus' silence did not silence her. She refused to give up. When she got no response from Jesus, she must have gone to His disciples. Undoubtedly, she asked them

to persuade Jesus to hear her request. She was doing everything she could to get the help she desired.

The disciples implored Jesus to "Send her away". The wording in the next verse tells us they were asking Jesus to do what she requested, heal her, just to get rid of her.

*Mt 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Jesus, understanding the request of the disciples, said He was sent only "unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel". In essence, He was saying, "You are not of Israel, so I can't help you".

This seems terribly harsh, considering the agony this woman was in. Why did He do this? I can think of three reasons.

One, in spite of their rejection, He is still committed to 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 turn to the Gentiles.

Two, this lady knew she had no right to expect Jesus to help her. We are all undeserving. Apart from Christ, none of us has any claim to God.

Three, He is testing her faith. Like Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14), Abraham when God told him to offer Isaac (Gen 22:2), and Mary and Martha when Jesus delayed two days (Jn. 11:6), the Lord was testing her faith. 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 a holy God.

How different was her great respect for Jesus compared to the casual 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 a disrespectful attitude about God.

Her worship of Jesus showed her faith. She realized, He wasn't just the Son of David, He was the Lord God of heaven. She knew she was coming to God.

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 who desperately needed help. She knew she did not deserve it and could not provide it, so she asked. She knew He was able, so she asked.

*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 His first. He refused because she was a Gentile. He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs".

He called her a dog, and 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 help from God.

There are two words in the Greek language for "dogs". One is the mangy, dirty, viscous type of dog. The other is a small pet dog that might sit at the table while the family is eating. This is the word Jesus used. Jesus meant no one would take food from their

children and give it to the dog. He meant that the children hadn't 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 this woman simply refused to give up. Like the dogs that grab the crumbs that drop from the table, she was willing to get whatever the Lord would 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.*

Jesus did heal her daughter. Her faith paid off. Her persistence was worth it. The children may eat first, but the dogs did get the crumbs. But, she got more than a few crumbs. Jesus 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.

Jesus rebuked His disciples for their "little" faith (Mt 8:26), but He commended this Gentile woman for her "great" faith. The disciples had heard and seen more than anyone on earth. She had not walked with the Lord for months and seen the thousands of miracles the disciples had. But what she had heard, she believed. 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 be enough?

Even though her knowledge of Jesus was limited, she believed He had power over the devil. 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.

You can have great faith in the wrong thing. I can believe I am 6' 3", good-looking and rich, but that does not make it so. 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 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 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. God had Matthew record this miracle, as we will see, to show He 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 on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. This is very important because this was also a Gentile area. 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 fed 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".

They brought people with all types of issues.

*Mt 15:31 Insomuch 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.*

There were so many being healed of so many types of sicknesses that it caused the multitude to wonder.

The word "maimed" means they had body parts missing. It is the same word Jesus used when He talked about cutting off a hand (Mt 18:8). Whether it was a lost arm, leg, or eye, Jesus replaced it. How astounding it must have been to see these body parts suddenly appear.

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. Mark tells us what the multitude had to say, "He hath done all things well" (Mk. 7:37).

Remember, these were Gentiles. They were amazed that Jesus would have such compassion on them. They "glorified the God of Israel". They knew who this God was. They had a background of idolatry. 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.*

Amazingly, this continued for three days. Maybe he healed during the day and taught them in the evening. When they got sleepy, they lay down and went to sleep. The second and the third day came. Just a note, with Jesus, things always seem to pick up on the third day.

Jesus had "compassion," which speaks of feeling someone's pain as though it is yours and having a desire to alleviate that pain. That is why Jesus healed them, and 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 in 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 had 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.*

Jesus forced them to acknowledge how much they had, or didn't have. The seven loaves and a few little fish were not enough to feed the crowd. God will force us to acknowledge our lack. Only when we realize how lacking we are will we 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. Please read the comments on Matthew 14:19.

*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. Jesus knew

His Father had provided the food they were about to eat. We may work and earn money to buy food, 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. We ought to thank Him.

Had the loaves and fish not been broken, the crowd would not have eaten. Until God breaks us, we will be of little use to Him.

Once again, Jesus used His disciples to assist in His work. He did not have to. He could make the food instantly appear in the laps of every person there. But he wanted His disciples involved. He wanted them to see the need firsthand. He wanted them to look into the eyes of those hungry people. He wanted them to care as he did.

As they distributed the food, the crowd suddenly became individuals. They no longer saw the vast multitude; they saw the young mother showing signs of hunger, the old man growing weak, and the young child 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 used at the feeding of the five thousand were small (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).

*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.

From this event, we should learn that there is no problem too big for God. He healed them all (v. 14).

From this event, we should learn that there is no problem too small for God. He fed them lunch (v. 20).

From this event, we should learn that God uses people to help people. Will you make yourself available today, just in case He wants to put a fish in your hand?

## **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 would not be there long before 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).

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES UNITE AGAINST CHRIST 16:1-12**

In this chapter, Jesus mentions the church (16:18) and His death (16:21) for the first time.

*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, and 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. 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 heartbreaking that the worst 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 from 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 as Joshua did (Josh. 10:13), or call fire from heaven as 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 (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. Their asking for 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.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were in darkness, and they wanted to stay there. These are those whom John spoke of when he said, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (Jn 1:5).

Jesus was the light of the world, but those 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?*

This is the fifth of fourteen times Jesus uses the word "hypocrites" in the book of Matthew. This time, He is dealing with their lack of discernment.

Jesus gave them a simple illustration to show their ignorance. Red skies at night meant good weather ahead; red skies in the morning meant stormy weather was coming. An old sailor's poem says, "Red sky at night, sailors' delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors' warning". They were able to discern the signs of the weather but not the signs of Jesus.

People can determine 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. 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 are 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 sighed before He responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mk 8:12). His human emotions were being seen. It was a sign of exhaustion. He had done everything possible to get through to them, and nothing had worked. It was also a sign of love. It grieved Him that they refused to repent.

They claimed to be godly, but Jesus said they were "wicked and adulterous".

When we think of "wicked," we usually think of some type of vile sin. But wickedness is anything that displeases God. Cain brought the best he had. However, God was not pleased with his offering. Neither was he pleased with the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

He called them "adulterous" because they had been unfaithful to God. In the Old Testament, Israel was referred to as the wife of Jehovah. They forsook the God who loved them. Like an unfaithful spouse, they had committed spiritual adultery against their God (Jer 3:20).

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, and their hearts were wicked.

Jesus did not give them a sign in the sky, but He did give them a sign in the Scriptures. 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 days and three nights. Jesus pointed to His own death and resurrection. If people reject that sign, there is no hope for them.

Jesus rejected their demand to give them a sign. 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 demonstrated His 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 that they paid the soldiers to lie after Jesus rose from the dead (Mt 28:12-13). If your heart is so hard that 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. 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. 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 preparing 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 are 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 took 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 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. 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 to take the everyday 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.

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 and 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?

By this time, they should have had great faith. And yet, their faith was "little". The word's "little faith" means "lacking confidence".

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 reminded the disciples of the details of the feeding of the 4,000. He wanted them to remember how He had provided in the time of need.

Why would they worry about bread when the One who multiplied bread was with them? If anyone on earth should have trusted him without reservation, it should have been these men. They had seen and heard more than anyone. Yet, they still struggled with faith.

*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.

Jesus was trying to get their minds off the physical and on the spiritual. The world has always focused on earthly things. They are preoccupied with fashion, styles, and the latest trends. But, unfortunately, the modern church has fallen into the same trap. If Jesus came to the average church today, He would have to teach us exactly what He had to teach His disciples. 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. God can 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 is about 25 miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee.

Philip, Herod's son, ruled in this area. Philip had rebuilt the city in honor of Tiberius Caesar. Caesarea means "Caesar's town". 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. He was withdrawing into a more obscure place that He might deal more directly with His disciples. Many Gentiles had believed on Him.

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 9:18). Afterward, Jesus asked His disciples a question.

The title, "Son of man," spoke of Jesus' humanity. He took upon Himself the infirmities and limitations of human nature (Phil 2:6-8). This title was used 88 times in the New Testament.

Jesus asked the most searching question of all time. What did the people think of Him? He 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. As He did many times, He asked questions of which He already knew the answers.

Some say Jesus never claimed to be God. The truth is, He claimed 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.*

Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist returned from the grave. Herod 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 the fiery messages of Jesus 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 for Elijah at their Passover feast. They are hoping He will come and sit in that chair, for that would mean the Messiah would be coming soon afterward.

Some thought Jesus was Jeremiah. This idea came from a legend that said 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 them in the Temple. Perhaps they believed Him to be Jeremiah because of His broken heart. 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 Jesus. They realized He was not an ordinary man. They could not deny His supernatural power. 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 they didn't say anything about those who were calling him Beelzebub (Mt 12:24). They didn't say anything about those calling Him an impostor, or a fraud, or a madman. The disciples understood Jesus' question. He wanted 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 godly man, but very few believed He was God.

Remember, Jesus asked this question in Caesarea Philippi, which was a place of much idolatry. 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 and asked them what they thought of Him. Every person on earth should ask themselves this question. What do you think of Jesus? What does He mean to you?

Jesus was testing the disciples. His first question had to do with what others thought of Him. His second question was directed towards them. 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 got this question wrong, it would have all been in vain.

The question was, 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 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 the God who is in control of this universe (Col 1:17)?

Our God is indescribable. The Psalmist said there is none like Him (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 are our God's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9).

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 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 100,000 light-years wide, and there are over 50 billion galaxies. The universe mankind is aware of measures over 10 billion light-years. 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 was the spokesman for the disciples. It seems like he often spoke without thinking, but he got this one right. He blundered often, but he did not this time.

The word "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah" and means "Anointed One". Peter believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah who would sit on David's throne.

Peter said He is the Son of the "living" God. The pagan beliefs of that day had many gods.

But all those gods were dead gods that could not see or hear (Dan 5:23). Their gods could not see their problems, nor hear their cries.

Jesus was the living "God". He was, and is, very God. Many were willing to say that he was a good man, but they refused to believe he was God. He was more than a good man. In fact, if he was not who he claimed to be, he was not a good man, and he was the worst 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 called Peter, "Simon Barjona". Barjona means "son of Jonah". No doubt Jesus used this name to emphasize the human nature of Peter.

Peter was "blessed". This is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12).

Peter was blessed because he did not receive this information through his intellect. He did not receive this truth by simply listening to Jesus speak. Many had heard the same words Peter heard, but did not understand what 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. 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". Jesus was saying Peter was a little rock, but the church would be built on the big rock, namely Himself. I believe Jesus pointed to Himself when He said the words, "upon this rock". I am not interested in a church that is built on a man like Peter, or on any other man.

Jesus saying, "I will" build my church indicates He had not yet done so at that time.

Jesus was not referring to a building with 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 a group of people who believe, as Peter said, Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of God" (Lk. 4:41). That is what brings us together. We aren't united because we have the same hobby or civil interest. We aren't like the local book club, hot rod club, garden club, Moose Lodge, or 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 those who have been birthed into the family of God by God's work of regeneration. All true believers throughout the world are a part of this church. Jesus is the head, and believers are the body (Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 1 Cor 12:25).

Jesus claims this church for His own. He said it is "my" church. The church does not

belong to us; it is HIS. He is the head (Eph. 5:23); therefore, He should be the one in control.

We can be confident because Jesus said He would protect His church. Like a house built on the rock (Mt 7:24-25), the church will stand firm because it was built on a strong foundation. The devil may fight, but he will never win.

Jesus said the "gates of hell" shall not prevail against His church. Lot sat at the gate of Sodom (Gen 19:1).

In Jesus' day, the gates were an important part of any city. Inside the gate was an open area where business affairs were handled, court was held, public announcements were made, and city officials met for business concerning the city. It was also a place of commerce where items were bought and sold. It was recognized as 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 the church is on the offense and waging war against the devil.

Also, the word "prevail" can mean the church is on the defense and will not be overcome by the devil's (gates of hell) attack.

Either way, the church wins, and Satan loses. The church is great because it is built on Jesus and indestructible because Jesus protects her. Jesus said He would make sure the church would not be defeated.

*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. Keys to a business are given only to the person who has authority over the business. Jesus gave Peter the authority to speak on His behalf.

Keys are used to unlock doors. Jesus gave Peter the keys to unlock the Kingdom of Heaven. 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 revealed to Peter that the gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles also (Acts 10:15). When he preached at Cornelius' house, they believed and were saved (Acts 10:44-45).

Keys are used to lock doors, also. Jesus was giving Peter the authority to tell those who refused the gospel that they would end up going to hell.

Peter did not assume this authority on his own; it was given to him by God.

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.

The sinner who believed the gospel and repented of their sin could be assured that their sin would be forgiven (loosed). However, the sinner who rejected the gospel could be assured their sins would not be forgiven (bound). 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 even gave them the Scripture and the Spirit to aid them in telling others. So why did Jesus tell His disciples not to tell anyone?

Jesus told them to stay quiet because Israel had rejected Him (Jn. 1:11). His Kingdom was to be a spiritual kingdom and more than just a political form of government. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). Jesus will eventually set up His kingdom, but He will not do it until Israel repents and accepts Him as their Savior (Zech. 12:10).

It was the time for the cross and not the crown. In the next verses, Jesus will begin to tell His disciples about His death and resurrection.

### **JESUS TOLD THE DISCIPLES ABOUT THE CROSS 16:21-28**

*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 began telling His disciples about the cross and the plan that had been determined before the foundation of the earth (Gen. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 13:8). The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to Jesus and the cross. 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), the disciples still had a difficult time accepting the fact that He was going to die.

Jesus plainly said He would "be killed", His death would be caused by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and it would happen near "Jerusalem". 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 to deny Him were not the wicked sinners in the gutter, but the self-proclaimed religious giants of that day.

Jesus death would not be the end. He would be arrested, tried unjustly, and "be killed", but He would "be raised again the third day". Thank the Lord, the story has a happy ending.

Neither the devil nor death would prevail against His church. 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. Hearing of Jesus' death was so foreign to what Peter and the disciples expected of Him.

It is easy for us to condemn Peter, but we have little concept of what the Messiah meant to a Jew. Since their birth, they had been taught that the Messiah would come with power and set up His kingdom.

Peter spoke in ignorance, but he rebuked the Lord because He loved Him and did not want Him to die.

Also, Peter rebuked the Lord because he saw his dreams falling apart. He, like all the disciples, expected to be a part of this kingdom. If Jesus died, there would be no deliverance, no peace, and no authority for Peter or the disciples.

*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.*

Since crucifixion was common during Jesus' day, the disciples could not comprehend their Lord dying in such a horrible manner.

Jesus' comment means Peter had given his mind over to the devil's influence, not that Satan had entered Peter. He was letting the devil control his thoughts and speech. I wonder how many times we have done the same thing. We should guard our thoughts and resist the devil's lies (Gen. 3:4).

The word "offence" means "snare" or "stumbling block". It gives the idea of walking a path where a boulder is hindering your progress. It refers to something that hinders us from doing what is right.

How could one man go from one extreme to another? A mere six verses earlier, Jesus had commended Peter for his unbelievable insight. Now, he is rebuked for allowing Satan to speak through him. We, like our brother Peter, also rise to lofty heights only to fall to the pit in utter failure.

When Jesus 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 describes a true disciple.

- One, a true disciple is one who follows Jesus

Jesus spoke about those who would "come after me".

A true disciple does what Jesus would do. Coming after Jesus implies that we leave the world behind and follow Jesus' path. We go where He would go, speak what He would speak, and react as He would react.

Following Jesus should become a way of life (1 Jn. 2:6).

- Two, 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 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 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 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, your goals aren't important, and 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 God's will, you know a little about dying to self. When you are content with what God gives you, and 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, a true disciple is the one who is willing to "take up his cross"

We are often told that we must bear our cross. But what does that mean? Some believe it means your mother-in-law just moved in. Others 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 worst possible manner. A cross had one purpose: to bring about a slow, agonizing death. It was for the worst of criminals who had broken the law in the worst of ways.

A person going to a cross went in shame and reproach because they were getting what they deserved. Death on a cross included condemnation, shame, and reproach. And so it is with the true disciple of Christ. They will suffer reproach from the world because the

world does not understand the person who follows Christ. The world thinks we are crazy to live the Christian life.

*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 about how the life of a true disciple could be difficult. But in verse 25, He tells us it will be worth it. The words "shall find it" mean those who give themselves totally to the Lord will find what real living is all about. The suffering we experience is not worthy to be compared to the glory we shall gain (Rom. 8:18), and what we gain is so much greater than what we lose.

Our lives are like bank accounts of time. As with our 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.

To "save" our lives means we hold on to our lives and selfishly live for ourselves with little regard for what God wants.

To "lose" our lives means we give our lives for God and live for Him and not for ourselves. What he wants is more important than what we want.

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 that we get by giving and we win by losing.

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.

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.

*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?*

The person who lives for now, gains the entire world, but loses his soul and goes to hell, has not profited. What good will everything in this world be when that person is suffering hopelessly in the eternal Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15)?

The word "exchange" has the idea of "equivalent". What is there in this world that is as valuable as our eternal soul? This life is temporary, and heaven is forever. I would rather have the glory of heaven forever than the riches of the world for now.

The things of the world never satisfy, leave you empty, and always leave a desire for more. What we give up for Christ is always replaced by something far better. Are you willing to give the cotton candy fun this world offers to gain the joy that comes from Christ?

*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 verses 25 and 26. The reason we should "lose" our lives for the Lord is that, as John says in this verse, he will "reward" everyone according to their works. What a person gives now will be worth it then.

The Son of man "shall come" speaks not of the Rapture but of Jesus' second coming when He returns to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:11-12).

At Jesus' second coming, he will come in the "glory of his Father". The "glory" of the Father speaks of the full manifestation of who He is. 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.

This world has yet to see Jesus as He is, for the real "Him" was hidden behind flesh. But the day is coming when we shall see him in his glory (1 Jn. 3:2).

At Jesus' second coming, "his angels" will come with him. God will use His angels to accomplish much of His mission when His Son returns. They will gather the unbelievers

(Mt. 13:41; Mt. 13:49; 2 Th. 1:7-10). Imagine the innumerable host of angels surrounding Jesus and giving him honor. What a sight it will be.

The word "reward" means "to give away". Jesus will give to each person that which they deserve "according to his works". To the believer, he will give mercy; to the unbeliever, he will give judgment.

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 if we belong to Christ or not. Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Mt. 7:16, 20).

Jesus will send the unbeliever to hell and the believer into the Kingdom on earth (Lk. 19:17-19; Mt. 19:28).

Considering these facts, it is no wonder that 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 and assured them that 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".

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 determining what Jesus was talking about is not as simple to discern. There are various ideas about what Jesus meant in this verse. Each of these views has 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 that 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 that Jesus did not actually appear in 70 AD when Titus destroyed Jerusalem.

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 problem with this view is that Jesus said "some" in verse 28, which means he was speaking of more than one person. Yet, only John saw the kingdom in The Revelation.

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 seeing Jesus transfigured before them. They got a glimpse of Jesus as he would be when he came into 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 our Lord. (2 Pet. 1:16-18). He said they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' glory.

Jesus had already begun to prepare his disciples for his death. Now, he was about to show them his glory. He was about to let them see just a little about who he really was.