

LESSONS FROM MATTHEW A NEW DAY HAS COME

Getting and Giving from Matthew

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life, and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "Studies in the Four Gospels," by G. Campbell Morgan
- "What the Bible Teaches, Matthew," by J. Heading
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan

Introduction

Matthew 7:24. "Therefore whosoever heareth these saying of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded on a rock."

(What I think might have happened when the Gospel of Matthew was first written)

A Jewish Christian had heard the preaching of Paul and Barnabas and had repented of his sins to God, and put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. He had relief and joy that is common to most people when the Lord saves them. But every day as he opened his store for business, he was being challenged by Jews who were committed to Judaism to show some written proof on which his faith was based. They would quote the Talmud and the writings of the Old Testament, as their authority for what they professed to do as religious Jews. He could do that too because he had been brought up in the same way they had. Then they would say, "How can you believe in someone just because an articulate stranger told you about him? All you have is their word, and for all you know, they are false teachers."

He would likely have been challenged day after day as to the authority of the apostles and their teaching. It was not a question to him because he knew "in whom he believed," and was experiencing the blessings of faith in his own life. But to be challenged all the time about what you believe and have no written authority behind it, is hard: and sometimes it can lead to doubts.

Then a copy of the Gospel of Matthew came to the local assembly of believers in Christ, of which he was a part, and was read and studied. Perhaps one morning as he opened up his store for business, the same ones came again to challenge his faith in Christ. They kept coming back to his store because since he became a Christian, his prices were more reasonable. His weights on the scale were fair. He didn't try to cheat people like he once did. He had become an honest businessman since he became a Christian. He was doing well in business but it was because he was honest and people knew it. He was just a good man to do business with except he went to worship with those "Christians" instead of taking his place as a leader in the synagogue. He was a Jew, but he wasn't doing the things Jews always did.

He was putting his money into the assembly offering without anyone knowing how much he gave. He started praying in private instead of at the front door where everyone could see him.

Actually, he became a better man in every way, except he didn't do Jewish things according to the Talmud. Those people who did business with him would ask him, "How do you know all that stuff about Jesus, and think He is God who came here as a man when you never saw Him or heard Him speak?"

The written Gospel of Matthew gave clarity to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in a way that was very important to all believers, but especially to Jewish Christians. It began with clearly defining the kingly line of Jesus and establishing His right to be the Messiah/King; by giving His genealogy. That is chapter one that opens the Gospel message as a new day in which Light has come into the dark world of sin and religious formalism that doesn't change anyone inside.

That businessman could say to his friend the customer, "The account of the miracle birth of Jesus we read in the Gospel of Matthew at the assembly meeting, also talks about wise men, foreigners from a far country, who came to worship the One "born King of the Jews." The Person of promise written in chapter two is identified as the One who fulfilled prophecies that were believed by Jews. At the birth of Christ, prophecies began to be fulfilled and continued through the years of His life and ministry.

The skeptical customer likely became interested in spite of himself, when the Christian Jew talked about the preaching and baptizing work of John the Baptist that was written about in Matthew's Gospel. He would have heard from Matthew chapter three that the voice of John was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. The scribes had taught the Jews that Elias would first come, and Matthew's Gospel made it clear that John was the one who came in the spirit and power of Elias. John was the fulfillment of that very thing. He was the "Elijah" that was prophesied to be the forerunner of the Messiah. John said that Jesus was the Son of God. He saw the Spirit sit upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a dove. He heard the voice of God say "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" John knew Jesus was the Lamb of God who would bear away the sin of the world. John knew and testified to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah.

These things would have been able to be read at the assembly and likely the customer would have realized, "This Jesus really is the Messiah of us Jews." The businessman who was a Christian Jew would think, "Yes! All that we have been taught by word of mouth is verified by the written words of Matthew who was a Jew and he was there when all the things we have been taught actually happened. He was an eyewitness for over three years as he followed Jesus!"

That scenario would have happened wherever the Gospel of Matthew was read. Likely after an assembly meeting in some distant place in the Roman empire, a couple of Jewish Christians were talking outside the door of the meeting place, and they had just heard read what we call, Matthew chapter four. The testing time in the wilderness, and how the Lord Jesus answered Satan with scripture would have resonated with them. One of them might have said, "I know what challenges like that are like. There are people at work who poke at me all the time because I am saved. They keep testing me by saying, 'Do a miracle if you have faith in Jesus who did miracles. Why don't you just turn stones into bread or dirt into vegetables? If your Jesus is so important to you, tell Him what you want Him to do?'"

By hearing about the testing time of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, how Jesus was tested like we are – only a whole lot more and a whole lot harder, their confidence in Him would be strengthened. He was tested physically and emotionally. He was tested as to His calling and His future. In each case, he answered with passages from the scriptures of the Old Testament that answered the test very plainly. In my mind, I can see those two brothers in Christ finding strength and courage for the days ahead from what they heard read from the Gospel of Matthew.

Yes, they were Jews by birth and nationality. So was Jesus. They were tested and tormented because they were Jews. So was Jesus. The more they did what was right and even helpful to others; the more religious leaders criticized them. They did the same thing to Jesus when He was here. He knew what it was like to have your own family and friends reject you because of your faith. He knew what it was like to help people, and then they put a whole different spin on that event to make them look good and you look bad. He knew what it was like to be watched like a hawk by people who want to see you do something wrong. He knew what it was like to have people accuse you of something and it is an absolute lie without a grain of truth in it.

How good it was of God to have chosen men to write the New Testament scriptures the same as “holy men of old” wrote the Old Testament. The written words of the Bible give form, clarity, and substance to the oral teaching and doctrinal practices that are so important to a life of faith and testimony. When the canon of scripture was established, God had arranged an order so that it would best meet the needs of His people and strengthen their faith. Matthew’s Gospel comes first in that order because our Lord came to “His own” first. His first disciples were Jews. The apostles were Jews. The history of redemption is in the context of Jewish history. The first people in the church were Jews from many different places.

To consolidate the teaching of the Lord Jesus that follows in the book of Matthew, the Person of Jesus and His right of Kingship were identified and authenticated. When the first chapters were read and understood, then the privileges, principles, and practices of the kingdom of heaven were taught. No longer was God dealing in a special way with the Jews. Now “any man” or “whosoever;” can be a follower of the Lord. “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden...” includes everyone.

It is from this viewpoint of practical living and how we can use what we learn to positively affect others, is how I want to look at this journey through the Bible this time. The word of God is not just to be studied and understood. It is to be practiced and we are to live by its teaching. We hear His word and we are to be doers of His word in our daily lives.

MATTHEW 1

In our day of “up with man,” and down with biblical Christianity; we need to be convinced and convicted about who our Lord and Master is. We can become so accustomed to what we have learned and practiced as believers, that we lose the “awe” of being in the presence of the One who “is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Our access to God is because of the Lord Jesus Christ who came and suffered for us to bring us to God.

The Old Testament scriptures tell us the history, poetry, and prophecies of Israel. It is in this framework of Jewish history that the whole teaching of redemption of sinful man from the

consequences of sin is unfolded to us. Jesus is the One who fulfilled the requirements of being the Savior who would save us from our sins. He could do that and He did that as a Man among men, and yet He never stopped being “God with us.”

Matthew 1:1-17. A Collection of Facts: Genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The message of the Gospel is not based on vain speculations of men but on facts revealed by the Holy Spirit of God. Truth is the corresponding of a statement with a fact, and throughout the Gospel of Matthew, he writes of proof of Jesus Christ being the King of the Jews. This would be an assurance to the Jewish believers in the local assemblies throughout the Roman empire. Those who had put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and had turned from the forms and traditions of the Jews religion to Christianity; needed to be assured that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah the children of Israel had been longing for since the time of the promise to Abraham. People have in their minds how they expect things to happen, so when a different scenario takes place, they may wonder if it is really what they have been looking for.

Jewish believers in the New Testament churches, needed to have their faith in Christ confirmed and solidly established in such a way that they would be motivated to pass on what they had been taught. Our Lord Jesus Christ had ascended to heaven, and many of those who believed in Him would have never seen or heard Him. Some were inclined to return to Judaist practices like those addressed in the book of Hebrews and even some in the Galatian assemblies. Matthew was a collector. He had been that way as a tax collector, so was probably a man who kept records as to all that was pertinent to the events of his time of which he had been a part. At least the record would have been in his head and heart; so, the Holy Spirit could bring into his mind in a way suited to his personality, the things to which Jewish believers could relate.

The character of the Gospel of Matthew is Jewish and is in keeping with the person the Holy Spirit used to write down this account of the years of our Lord’s ministry here on earth and among Jewish people. There are differences in the four Gospels, but there are no contradictions. Those differences are appropriate to the objective the Holy Spirit had in giving us different views of the Lord Jesus Christ’s life and service during His years here. By doing it through four different writers, with four different views of the same events, or each identifying events other writers did not address; we are given a four-dimensional look at the height, depth, length, and breadth of the most significant time in human history. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit in moving holy men to write the scriptures is evident both in what it includes and what it excludes.

“To the Jew first,” would indicate that Matthew’s account of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, would be to establish in the minds and hearts of the Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the fact that He was indeed the Messiah, the King of the Jews. Well-to-do city-dwelling, Greek-speaking Jews throughout the empire had responded to the Gospel in Israel, Asia Minor, and then further to Egypt and the whole Mediterranean area. Likely, as time passed, Christian Jews would have been excluded from participating in the local synagogue and began meeting in the homes of fellow believers. Separations would have been taking place in families and friendships by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel account. Christian Jews and Gentiles would have been gathering together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with those of all

nationalities and social standing, among whom would have been some who had been strict in their practice of Judaism.

With the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension; everything had changed in their lives. By putting their faith in Him, they were coming out from “among them” and being separated unto the Lord and His word, instead of Judaism, the Talmud teaching, the rabbinical leadership, and the law. Social pressures and likely economic pressures would have been put on believers to remain faithful to the teaching of the rabbis in local synagogues rather than the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth which would have been passed on orally by itinerate preachers. Their Jewishness might have been challenged, because a Jew is considered one, both in nationality and religion. New believers might have wondered, “Who am I, now that I am a Christian? I am definitely not a Gentile. But my Jewishness is being challenged by my Jewish family. Where in the world do I fit?”

Matthew’s Gospel went right back to the foundation of the church. “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord!” The church is built on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. His words are our charter of faith. He gave the true meaning of the law in His teaching. Love and righteousness toward God and those around us are the fundamentals of the law. That was made plain in the Old Testament but was not being practiced. The fact of our inability to keep the law brought the knowledge of sin. That was not how the legalists practiced the law. Extreme legalism on the one hand and an undisciplined life on the other were condemned by the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. His teaching was the “spirit of the law” that is intended to be practiced from the heart. That would have been evident in the lives of those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a most reasonable and sensible way to begin convincing believers who only had the Old Testament scriptures; Matthew begins with a genealogy as the way to define the authenticity of Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew starts with Jesus Christ as the Son of David, the Heir to the throne of David, and then as the Son of Abraham. He was the Fulfiller of the Promises of God to the Jews. Beginning with Abraham was purposeful, because not only was He the father of the faithful; he was considered by the Jews to be the father of all Jews. It was with him the first covenant was made that through him, “all the nations of the earth” would be blessed.

Then, telescoped into three groups of fourteen generations each; names are given of Jewish forbearers. However, in this list is a deliberate inference that Gentiles too are blessed, and the fact that divine interests are not limited to males; are the names of four women besides Mary the mother of Jesus. Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth were Gentiles, and Bathsheba was the wife of a Gentile soldier in the army of David. Right at the beginning of the book; Matthew shows how God’s grace can deal with the darkest of sins, and can reach beyond the boundaries of any nation and religion, to the whole world. God can lift people up from the darkest “path of sin,” and bring them into a place of blessing, royalty, and holiness.

Not only can God save all who will come to Christ by faith and receive Him as personal Savior; He can use them to fulfill His purposes of grace. He uses them to further His Gospel and bring others the blessing of personal salvation as the word of God is preached. This would have been new to the Jewish believers. Joseph was not the father of Jesus but “the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” Any uncertainty Jewish believers might have had,

was cleared up right at the beginning of the New Testament. Jewish believers who may have questioned the right of Jesus to be the Messiah would have had that answered in the genealogy right at the beginning of this book. His genealogy is the first of seven witnesses to His right of kingship over the children of Israel. These first seventeen verses trace His lineage through the line of the kings.

Matthew 1:18-25. A Statement of Truth: God was here

Son of David, v.1. He was from the Hebrew line of kings. Solomon had failed in his life in spite of his God-given wisdom and privilege. This Son of David never failed in any way. There were never any disappointments in Him. He lived in perfection, taught in truth, acted in grace, spoke in wisdom, and rules in love. He is the only one who has ever been born a king. Of all the names in the genealogy, Jesus was the only one who was always obedient to God. Solomon built a beautiful temple that has been destroyed. The temple Jesus is building cannot be destroyed. Peace and prosperity did not last when David's sons in the flesh lived. Everlasting peace and spiritual prosperity flourish under the reign of David's spiritual Son. He is the King who is truly, and always will be, "The Man after God's own heart." This King entered the world with all power and authority in heaven and on earth. Of His kingdom, there shall be no end.

Son of Abraham, v.1. He was from the Hebrew racial line. He was the promised Son who was to come and bring blessing, typified by Isaac, the promised son of Abraham. Isaac was promised twenty-five years before he was born. Isaac was a promised son but was a disappointment in physical weakness and in character. Jesus, the Son of Abraham, will fulfill perfectly, the promises of God to the nations through the seed of Abraham. He was always obedient to the principles and practices of faith. He was truly, the unfailing "Friend of God." He is "The Author and Finisher of our faith."

Jesus the Christ, v.16. Jesus is the Messiah (Hebrew), the Christ (Greek). His genealogy established Jesus as a legal descendant of David through his adoptive father, Joseph. The "Anointed One," was the long-expected "King of the Jews" of whom Matthew was writing to affirm the faith of the believing Jews. "Christ" is a title, not a name, so when we say, "Lord Jesus Christ;" we are surrounding His name, "Jesus;" with the titles that identify Him as the Supreme Ruler first, and then the One who fulfilled God's commission to "save His people from their sins." The uniqueness of His Person and His ability to fulfill all righteousness; to save His people from their sins; to bring us to God and to deliver us from the wrath to come, has accomplished the purposes of God in sending Him.

Begotten of the Holy Spirit, v.18. The virgin-born Son of Mary was Deity because he was the Eternal Son of the Eternal God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending. He was always God and never stopped being God. He was God who chose to be found in fashion as a man, and to become obedient unto death. Human nature is not obedient unto death. We die whether we want to or not, or whether we are afraid of it or not. His divine nature gave death no claim on Him. He could be obedient to death because He has the keys to life and death and can use those as He chooses. His deity in no way affected His humanity. He chose to become the Captain of our salvation. He chose to learn obedience through the things He suffered. His virgin

birth set Him apart from all other humans, but did not mean He was not human. Rather, He was human without any in-born trace of human sin

Savior of His people, v.21. He came to save His people who cannot save themselves from sin and its consequences. It is impossible for any person to be able to rid themselves of the sinful nature with which we have been born. The Lord Jesus didn't come to help us save ourselves. Even the meaning of His name, "Jesus," means "The Lord is Salvation." The name Joshua (Jehovah Salvation) was an ordinary name among the Jews and still is today a name commonly given to sons. This is one of the ways our Lord Jesus identified Himself with His people. He lived and worked with them. He ate with them and suffered with them. As Lord Jesus Christ, He was sent to deal with the fundamental problem of sin that every person has, not the peripheral issues of comfortable or uncomfortable living; success or failure; not even sickness or health. His healing powers were to give authority to His power to save people from their sins.

When our Lord Jesus Christ was here as the Savior of His people, He came to deal with sin at its core; not the side issues that sin brings into the lives of sinful people. He came in the likeness of men and for mankind He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It is "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord."

God with us (Immanuel), v.23. This fulfilled prophecy of Isaiah, meant that God was literally and physically among His people. He was "with us." God had revealed Himself in the history of Israel and was still at work among His earthly people when "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." God protected His people in the past when Isaiah wrote the prophecy, and Matthew now writes that God had fulfilled that prophecy when the Lord Jesus Christ came. This assurance of the presence of God with His people would have given understanding, enlightenment, confidence, and strength to the scattered believers who need to be reminded that God is still with His people even in the far parts of the empire. Israel will be Immanuel's land in the future because Immanuel will be there and will rule. He is the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity, and the Prince of Peace.

MATTHEW 2

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel, and He will reign as King of the Jews in the future. However, by the grace of God; Gentiles are also included in the kingdom of heaven when they put their personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Because of who our Lord Jesus is; He is worthy of worship, honor, glory, and praise from every wise person who comes to Him by faith. Wise men came to worship Him then, and wise people do the same now. The worship of our Lord was emphasized at His birth. He was worshipped in His life and after His resurrection. Worship is to be given to Him who is God, and will always be to us whom He saved by His grace, "God, our Savior."

Matthew 2:1-23. A Person of Promise: The King of the Jews

Fulfilled prophecies:

- **Place:** Bethlehem [Micah 5:2]. This town would have been small and relatively insignificant in the time of David and likely still in the time of our Lord Jesus Christ's birth. This was where David was born and raised to be a shepherd of sheep. This is where

our Lord Jesus was born to be the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd of Psalm 22-24. He is still the Chief Shepherd of His people in local assemblies across the whole world. Under-shepherds are guided by His words and learn from His works and ways when He was here among us. The questioning Hebrew believers would have had, or at least heard, those written prophecies that would have been read and so clearly referred to the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here. Bethlehem was also where David was anointed king of Israel. It was the royal birthplace of Jesus, who was born a king; where the prophet prophesied “Governor, that shall rule my people Israel,” was born.

- **Person:** “His star” was arranged for by the One “who made the stars also” for the benefit of those who read the scriptures. Even though they were far away, those who looked at the stars and at the word of God were enlightened as to the fact “the King of the Jews” would be coming in God’s time. For those wise men to know a Star would come out of Jacob, and a Scepter arise out of Israel [Nu.24:17], indicates the Holy Spirit was working in their hearts. Their minds were able to piece the word of God together and move them to travel a long time to Jerusalem; which would have seemed to be the logical place for the King of the Jews to be born. Herod considered himself the king of the Jews because the Romans called him that, but he was not even a Jew. He was an Idumean. A further prophecy by Hosea [11:1] was fulfilled historically as “Out of Egypt I have called My Son,” which also identified the Person in whom the hope of Israel’s future lay. Israel had been an idolatrous nation and still is as a “people,” but a glorious future is ahead.
- **Persecution:** Rachel was considered the mother of Israel, so bitter weeping was to be expected when the boy babies two years old and under were killed by the jealous and cruel King Herod, the Great; who felt his position was jeopardized by a child “born King of the Jews. Jeremiah 31:15 prophesied that would happen. “Rachel” wept when many children of Israel were killed by the Babylonians, and taken into captivity, and the small village of Bethlehem wept again when those children were slain after the birth of Jesus. The first Joseph was taken into Egypt and as a child of history: brought weeping, doom, and sadness. Again, because of persecution, this second Joseph was told in a dream to take the child Jesus into Egypt. As a child of hope: He brought comfort, joy, and assurance of a glorious future. Herod the Great had built or rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and consequently, he had been admired by Jewish leaders even though he was a jealous man given to having violent temper rages. He died in AD. 4, but his three sons didn’t have the confidence of the Romans like their father, so the Romans divided the land with his three sons each having a much smaller jurisdiction. Philip had the north part called Tracontis. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea, and Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. But Archelaus was such a brutal evil man, that he was soon deposed by Rome. Procurators of Rome took over the rule of his jurisdiction. No wonder Joseph didn’t go to Bethlehem when they came back from Egypt with such a man as Archelaus ruling the area. Instead, he went to the obscure and despised village called Nazareth where Mary, Jesus, and his family could be safe.
- **Plan:** Unless people were familiar with the scriptures, they would have thought like the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Jeremiah’s prophecy and Isaiah 11:1, are about the only ways we could know that Jesus would be called, “the Nazarene” [Separated One]. That likely is a reference to the fact that a “branch” sounds like the word Nazarene. A branch is part of a green tree that has been cut down. Nazareth was a place of contempt to most people of that area and time. Among

them in that community of plain people, God was living in the flesh for thirty years. His humanity was established in its perfection in a community that was populated with normal living people who had no pretensions of greatness. They must have seen the difference in Jesus as He grew and matured among them because He had “favor with God and man.” He had a Spirit-birth that was unique. He was Spirit-clothed in His life. He had Spirit glory in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Faithful foreigners:

- **Students of the scriptures:** A conscious awareness of the scriptures being the word of God is in every believer who has been born again by the Spirit and by the word of God. Those who are students of the scriptures have a positive attitude toward them and let it “dwell in them richly.” Those magi must have been used to searching the scriptures “daily,” and hiding in their hearts the word of God. Those who receive the word of God with meekness, delight in them and love the word, teach it to their children, and read it faithfully. They know that it is the word of God, the word of truth, the holy scriptures, the oracles of God. They experience it as the sword of the Spirit and apply the scriptures of the prophets to themselves. Matthew’s Gospel would move those who read it to recognize that what he wrote was truly the scriptures of truth the same as the Old Testament scriptures.
- **Studiers of the sky:** Looking into the stellar heavens, has been an important activity of people in the past. Seafaring men found their way across the trackless seas to specific harbors by studying the stars. People have been locating their position in dark nights by seeing where Orion and the Pleiades are, and where the north star or the southern cross are positioned in the night sky. A star prepared by God to guide honest searchers moved them to cross the desert to Jerusalem. When they left the king’s palace, the star was there to guide them to a specific house where Joseph and Mary lived and where the “young child was.” They first searched the scriptures. Then they saw “His star in the east.” Then both the scriptures and the star led them to the Son of God whom they recognized and worshipped in humility and thankfulness expressed by the gifts they brought as evidence of what was in their hearts. There is great joy when those who seek the Lord with all their hearts, finally find Him.
- **Searchers for the Sovereign:** In God-given understanding; those faithful foreigners knew who the King of the Jews was. They bowed before Him and worshipped Him. Worship of God is to be in spirit and in truth. It is commanded. We worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, and bow down before Him in our hearts as well as our body position. “Ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart,” is a principle we follow when seeking Christ for salvation as well as seeking further knowledge and understanding of Him.

Fearful foes:

- **Herod:** Herod was an Idumean who had no right to be king of the Jews. He was just called that by the Romans, and given that man-made position as long as he pleased the Romans – and he knew that. His means of controlling the people was fear. Cruelty and brutal punishments were his way of keeping people in line with the demands the Romans laid on him. It was no wonder he was disturbed when wise men from afar and different countries showed up asking for the King of the Jews. But it was more than just that; they

wanted to find the one who was “born King of the Jews.” They had seen evidence of Him being born, by a heavenly sign in a distant country, and Herod didn’t know a thing about it. Even more than that: they had come to worship the newborn King, not Herod who considered himself the king of the Jews. Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne of David; he was hated by the Jews who considered him a usurper and he knew that. If Jesus was the real heir, he was in trouble. A ruthless man, who knew he had many enemies, he would have been concerned that even a child king would rally all the Jews and overthrow him. Added to that was the fact that the wise men wanted to worship the King. That would also make Him a religious leader the Jews would unite around, and the balance of power could swing against Rome if the Parthians owned Jesus as King.

- **All Jerusalem:** Everyone in Jerusalem was disturbed when they heard about “The King of the Jews” being born. After four hundred years of “doing their own thing,” they settled into a lifestyle they did not want to be upset. The deceitful leaders had control of the minds of the population. People knew who they were and didn’t want to face up to their own spiritual darkness. A true King would change everything. Some were fearful. Others would have been made insecure about their positions. Others would have to face the guilt of counterfeit religion. Others of their guilt of ripping off the people with their taxation, demands for temple money and all the other things they knew were not right. It is possible to just ignore the truth and rationalize sin. The people of Jerusalem were doing that.

MATTHEW 3

A new day has come and those who will be blessed in this day of grace will acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit testified to that fact in the silent witness of a dove. The Father in heaven testified to that fact in a loud audible voice. Those who heard John, the forerunner, preach; heard clearly that repentance of sin is the first essential response to the preaching of the Gospel. Warnings of wrath to come are associated with any true message of the Gospel we preach today. People are saved from sin and hell, and they are saved for heaven.

Matthew 3:1-17. The Voice in the Wilderness: John the Baptist

Crying in the wilderness, v.1-4. God again visited His people.

Thirty years or more had passed since John was born into a family of the priesthood. John, however, did not follow the ministry of a priest but after spending time in the wilderness became the long-awaited prophet who would prepare the way of the Lord. This was not an obscure man who walked out of the wilderness with the warning words of a prophet. John was a man of prophecy, doing the work of a prophet; declaring the message of a prophet. After four hundred years of silence from the voice of God to the nation; John, the man as he appeared looked like a prophet, spoke like a prophet, and dressed as a prophet similar to Elijah. That attracted a lot of people to travel to the Jordan River because his preaching was like Elijah, he acted like Elijah and he came out of the wilderness like an ascetic who had a message burning in his heart. He was burdened with the sins of his times and he spoke with authority to how people were to live in those times. The message of the man was open and frank. He was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. He had faith in God’s message. He was a voice of hope in dark days; daring to say what needed to be said.

Josephus, a secular historian who lived at the time of Christ, and who was not a believer in Christ as the Messiah; had submitted himself to his patron Vespasian. He had committed himself at least in words, to the foolish, self-serving statement that Vespasian was the Jewish Messiah. However, he wrote these words regarding John the Baptist:

“John, who was surnamed Baptist... a good man, and one who bade the Jews in the exercise of virtue, and in the practice of righteousness towards one another and piety towards God, to come to baptism, for that so would the baptism also appear acceptable to him if they used it, not for the forgiveness of certain sins, but for the purification of the body, it being supposed that the soul had also been cleansed by righteousness.”

Repentance is not some casual act of feeling sorry for what one has done that is wrong. Rather, repentance is a radical change of mind, will, emotions, and actions. The change of mind has to do with what we think of God and the sacrifice of Christ for our sake. The change of the will is when we are willing to admit “I am wrong.” Wrong in thoughts, wrong in words, and wrong in deeds. Wrong about what I think about myself, and wrong in my attitude toward God. True repentance brings real sorrow for sins and a sense of guilt that cannot be alleviated by any actions I take or penance I am either inclined to or am told by others to do. Repentance in actions will bring about a 180-degree turn from sin and my own way, to the Savior and God’s way of salvation. Repentance is the admission of guilt in every way.

The kingdom of heaven was another part of John’s prophetic message. After centuries of silence, the kingdom of heaven started with the first advent of Christ and will come to completion when He appears here on earth again. The new birth is required to be a part of this kingdom. That kingdom involves the establishment of God’s rule in the hearts and minds of His people. That will overcome the powers of evil and the consequences of sin. It even overcomes a wasted life and death as a result of sin. John’s message was, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand (almost here),” and then into the life of the nation of Israel, Jesus stepped into the open. Following the voice of inspiration of the Holy Spirit and repentance towards God, came John’s message of conviction, of challenge, and of change. Matthew’s Gospel mentions the kingdom fifty times, so it would have been a strong influence on those who read it the first time. They would be able to identify where they were themselves in the plans of God when they were born again, and what was going to follow in the kingdom of God.

Crying in the Wilderness, v.5-10. Produce fruits suitable to repentance.

People traveled miles to hear John the Baptist preach because he had every evidence of being an Old Testament prophet, who they would have read about, or heard about in the Old Testament. It struck a chord in their national conscience because they knew they deserved to hear some stern words from a prophet because of what was going on in their country. The first response seemed to be what they thought they should do as a people. Then some came to recognize the fact that repentance begins with us as individuals. Repentance only has meaning and is effective when it is a testimony of an inward change of attitude that leads to a changed life. Baptism is an outward sign of that inward change and is only meaningful when true commitment to God is evident in a changed and consistent life for God.

John’s preaching challenged their sincerity by changing inwardly and personally. Then they could testify to their repentance openly. In His preaching, he touched the moral nerve of the

people, when he told them a new day had arrived. The kingdom of heaven was almost here. The reality was about to expose the vague religious formalism they had all become used to. Imagine a man dressed in a camel's skin, with a loud voice calling upon people to prepare for the coming Messiah and make straight the way of the Lord. Make sure the way of the Lord is without the curves of human opinion and convenience. John was a man who practiced what he preached and he was very different from the smug complacency of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to check him out.

There was no question John was a very different kind of religious leader, and those who followed him like Andrew and John could see that. He lived what he preached. He wanted the praise of the Lord not the praise of men. He spoke openly about the prevalent sins of those who came to hear him preach. Pharisees and Sadducees were like a bunch of snakes crawling out from under rocks and spreading their poison to others. With the coming kingdom of heaven, that kind of shame would result in a similar way to an unproductive fruit tree. It would be cut down by the owner who was expecting fruit from the tree. In other words, God has kept you alive but has got nothing from you all these years. Now you are coming down. Good fruit is doing God's will and God's work in God's way and in God's time.

Describing the Messiah, v.11-12. The harvest Baptizer.

John was like a mind-reader who could almost certainly know those religious national representatives would have been thinking, "Who does he think he is? Doesn't he know we are the children of Abraham? We are the chosen people! God wouldn't cut us down." To expose their thoughts, he told them God could make Jews out of stones in the river if He wanted to, so they were not special to God in that way. Being a descendant of Abraham wasn't what was important. It was the kind of faith Abraham had that made him special to God. Those who remain unchanged in their sins will be brought into judgment like a fruitless tree or the chaff left over after the wheat is beaten out. His description of the One who was coming was that of a harvester who is coming to separate the chaff from the wheat. John wouldn't accept the flattery of the people, and neither would the coming Messiah. John was limited in his authority to basically declare the message he had received from God.

The Messiah described as one with a winnowing fork in His hand, would be the One who could and would judge what is wheat and what is chaff. Chaff is useless and is to be discarded, cast out, and burned. The listeners would have been aware at least to a degree of the work of the Holy Spirit who came upon people in Old Testament times to empower them to do specified work. The baptism of the Holy Spirit happens as believers in the Messiah as Savior and Lord are given life from God and are immersed into the body of Christ. The baptism of fire is the baptism of death and eternal judgment. The Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the One who is the Judge of all the earth. The Father has given all judgment to the Son.

John's description of the Messiah would have answered all the questions his hearers would have had regarding the Coming One. He described the might of the Messiah and the authority of the Messiah. He also referred to the justice of the Messiah in judging and the hope that is in the Messiah who will come to reign and make just judgments. There was no question to the readers of the book of Matthew in the past day nor is there today. Jesus is Supreme in His Person, and Jesus is Supreme in His work.

Baptizing Jesus, v.13-17. The Testimony of the Trinity.

John had been looking for Jesus to come and surely would have been glad to see Him. When Jesus asked to be baptized and John saw the dove light upon Him, He knew for sure He was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb of God. There was nothing in the Lord Jesus that responded in any way to sin, so His baptism had nothing to do with sin or any sinful matters. It was His way of identifying with the nation of which He was the King. His baptism would have shown the rightness of John's message, and it opened the door to His own public ministry. He also was able to identify Himself with those who had sincerely repented. It indicated His consecration to the work set before Him by God to be His chosen God-Man on earth who would bear away the sin of the world.

John announced Him as the Messiah whom they had been longing for as a nation of suffering people. Jesus identified Himself with His humanity and also as a Jewish man who could represent the nation. "He came to His own." God then declared His approval of Him as His "Well Beloved Son!" God's audible voice authenticated Jesus as God's Son. It also identified Him as the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah had written. His voice gave the divine support of the Father for Jesus in His work here on earth. The vision of the dove was not that of mighty power being poured out but of the gentle appealing work by the Lord Jesus Christ that was evident when He was here ministering to the people and fulfilling the plans of God for our benefit. The voice of the Father, the vision of the dove, and the visibility of the Son were all there as public declarations that "the fullness of the time" had come to which the unity of the trinity bore witness. They were all there in testimony that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." God's Beloved Son began His public work that day restoring fallen and straying people to God.

MATTHEW 4

Our Lord Jesus Christ was faithful to God and His word in spite of the temptations that Satan put before Him. People in the kingdom of God will be tested as to the reality of their faith in Christ. It is in those times, our allegiance and loyalty to our Lord demonstrates the power of God in the lives of faithful believers.

Salvation has been paid for and offered to both Jews and Gentiles. The Lord Jesus Christ preached the message of salvation and the kingdom of heaven. He called others to join in this work, and that call to loyal service to Him applies to us today. Fishing for men begins with obeying His call ourselves, and then giving our unreserved effort to reach others by joining in fellowship with other "fishers of men" to reach as many people as possible with the Gospel message.

Matthew 4:1-25. Proofs of Jesus' Deity: Testing, Teaching, Preaching, Healing

Temptation, v.1-10. When equal Persons are submissive to each other, it is a wonderful example to us to submit to another in the fear of God. The grace, power, and glory of the Lord are exemplified in the early part of Matthew and were certainly stabilizing influences to the early believers in this church age as the New Testament book of Matthew was circulated among God's people. The Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry on earth with the voice of the Father affirming

His pleasure in His Son. The silent but visible evidence of the Holy Spirit as a dove further identified the Lord Jesus as the Messiah to those who saw it. The Holy Spirit then went before the Lord Jesus Christ into the wilderness where proofs of His deity were given. None of those tests were seen by people, so the Spirit of God recorded them through Matthew for the assurance of all believers that our Lord Jesus was fully tested as to His physical need for food. Can God meet our daily needs? In difficult physical circumstances, can we trust God while we are going through them? He could create wine out of water instantly without any need for a sense of history, He could create bread enough to feed five thousand men, besides women and children. But the test of His character, His personhood, and as a Perfect Man; He suffered hunger for the full forty days of testing time without responding to the temptation of the devil's word. In this first temptation relating to material necessities such as food and shelter, things that are temporal but essential as a man; the Lord Jesus responded with an appropriate passage of scripture from Deuteronomy 8:3. The King of the Jews is a Perfect Man!

Satan will always oppose the work of God and the people of God. In the wilderness, the children of Israel were tempted and failed the test. The second test was a test of His emotional need. It was a spiritual test as to His consciousness of the abiding and supreme, will and word of God. Can God be trusted to be true to His word? Satan tried the same tactic that had worked in the garden of Eden of casting doubt on what God said. It didn't work with the Lord. God is for us. To doubt that in any situation, would show a lack of faith in God's word. The Lord again used words from the book of Deuteronomy 6:16 to refute the words Satan misquoted and misapplied from Psalm 91:11-12. The King was tested by the devil to produce what was not wrong to have but was not in the will of God. The King was also tested as to whether faith is real and personal. The One who was the Mighty Creator had power over gravity but refused to respond by doing some spectacular or heroic act. The King of the Jews is a Trusted Man!

The third test of our Lord Jesus by Satan had to do with His purpose of coming to earth. He was born a king, yet He was born to serve, and equipped to serve. He was found in fashion as a man. The devil was lying about his power, although he is called the god of this world who blinds the minds of those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. All power in heaven and on earth belongs to the Lord Jesus. It seems that Satan was trying to misdirect the Lord by getting Him to focus on power rather than on the purpose of His coming. He came to save His people from their sins by bearing their sins in His own body on the tree, and suffering for our sins to bring us to God. His kingdom reign is yet in the future. His answer to the test was again from the book of Deuteronomy 6:13. God alone is the One whom we worship and serve. This test was the victory of a Man with God; a Man for men; a Man with God and for men over the devil. The King of the Jews is a Victorious Man!

Angels, v.11. Angels are heavenly beings created by God, who serve Him. In power and intelligence, they are higher than humans. In their service to God, they minister to believers as guides, protectors, providers, and comforters. For unbelievers, they bring destruction, a curse, pestilence, and death. In the life of Christ, we read about angels announcing His conception, heralding His birth, and sustaining Him in the wilderness as we read of them doing here. What they did we are not told, but perhaps they provided for Him that which was needed as a man – food and water. God ministered to His obedient Servant/Son. He takes care of His own!

Later in His ministry, an angel strengthened Him in the garden, and legions of angels were ready to obey His command. Angels witnessed His resurrection and accompanied Him when He ascended into heaven. They shouted for joy at creation. They were at Mt. Sinai and will bind Satan in time to come. When Christ comes for His church and His return in glory, they will accompany Him. On occasions, people saw them and talked with them. They speak the language of those to whom they are sent to give messages. Angels appeared to people in both the Old and New Testament times to give messages from God before we had the written word of God.

The written words of Matthew even in a short statement like we have in verse eleven, would have resonated in the minds and hearts of Jewish believers. They would have known about the ministry of angels from the Old Testament scriptures, and now they would be assured of God's continuing preservation of His own. "He cared for Jesus, and He will care for us in the persecution and rejection we are going through," they would have been able to say.

Capernaum, v.12-14. When the Lord Jesus had stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth to read the scriptures; He then gave the interpretation in which He identified Himself as the One to whom the passage from Isaiah 61 was referred. The opposition in the village in which He had lived and worked for over twenty years, must have been under the surface because they were furious at Him. In fact, they tried to murder Him. That may have been part of the reason He moved to Capernaum. To reject the message of the Lord Jesus Christ is to reject Him. Capernaum was the largest center in the region of Galilee, so He would have more people to bring the Gospel to and He would have an opportunity to connect with Andrew and Peter, John and James who had become His personal disciples. They were fishermen and were likely well-known to many in Capernaum.

Besides the more suitable location and more access to a larger population who would listen to His teaching; was the spiritual darkness of the area. There were not only Jews there but also Gentiles who would have connections to areas beyond Galilee. Jesus had waited until John's ministry was fulfilled before He took open and purposeful actions to reach all "His own." This new start was approximately a year after His baptism and the temptation in the wilderness. During that time some of John's disciples came to Jesus and followed Him in a personal way. It was in those months He turned the water into wine at Cana. He also cleansed the temple for the first time when He presented Himself to His own people. Likely it was during that time Nicodemus came to Him at night, and His disciples baptized people under His authority at a different location than John.

When John was imprisoned, Jesus began His ministry officially. His forerunner had finished his work. His work as the King proclaiming His kingdom was to begin. It was then He came to Capernaum and established residence there after His own brothers and kindred rejected Him.

Prophecy, v.15-16. The move to Capernaum was the fulfillment of another prophecy of Isaiah 9. The spiritual, moral, and political darkness of that area under the leadership of Herod, had the Light of the world move right into their area. Geographically it was an important part of that area of Israel with the road to the Mediterranean Sea, to Syria on the north, and the Jordan River going south along which roads would be followed going around Samaria. Gentiles were on the east of the Sea of Galilee. These specific words in the book Matthew wrote, would have added

further emphasis to the written words of the New Testament to the early church believers and strengthened their faith. The fulfillment of prophecies like this shows the seriousness of God's word as well as the unifying effect it has on God's people through the different dispensations.

Kingdom of Heaven, v.17. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ were the same as those of John the Baptist, as Jesus stepped out into the public and began to preach. This is one of the fundamental themes of the Gospel of Matthew. The King of the Jews had come, and he was the long-looked-for Messiah. The kingdom began when He was here but it will not be a full kingdom until He returns in glory and rules on David's throne in Jerusalem. Those who believed in Him when He was here in the body; saw Him, heard His words, and saw Him perform miracles. Some of them watched Him die on the cross and hundreds saw Him after He rose from among the dead. But those people are no more in the kingdom, than any person who is born again today by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trusting in Him to save us from our sins and make us a new creature in Christ, places us in that kingdom. Our work and service for Him doesn't save us. Our faith doesn't save us. It is God Himself who saves us and welcomes us into His kingdom. Our response to that blessing of salvation and forgiveness of sins is to walk in the light as He is in the light, and we will find there are many more in the kingdom beside us. We yield ourselves, our ambitions, and our hearts to Him to use us as He chooses.

Call to service, v.18-22. Walking by the seashore where fishermen gather and bring their catch of fish to sell; is a good place to find people to talk to. There were men of Capernaum who Jesus already knew from way down south where John had been baptizing, and where Jesus was baptized. Andrew and Peter knew Him personally and believed in Him. James and John also would have known Him and had been with Him when He had done miracles, taught people, and preached the message of the kingdom. They were disciples who had heard his personal call before. Fishing was still their business and occupation. Peter and Andrew were offshore fishing when the Lord Jesus called out to them to follow Him, and He would make them "fishers of men." That was it. They left their nets and responded to His call to a new service for Him.

James and John were in the fishing business with their father Zebedee, when He called the two young men, but He didn't call their father. To leave their father and their work immediately was not a small act, but the impact was great on the whole family. Their mother also was a follower of Jesus and was there at Calvary watching from a distance when Christ died for the ungodly. Fishing for men was new to them but they learned over the next years they spent with the Lord, what it really meant. The main thing was at that time; their only motivation to leave their work and follow the Lord Jesus Christ was Him. He was their motivation. What He said, those true disciples were willing to do. Where He went, they followed Him. "Christ is our life." They didn't have excuses as to why it wasn't a good time just then. They just dropped everything and followed Him, putting their faith in Him. That is the same faith He expects in us today.

Jesus' ministry, v.23-25. "From that time..." the words verse seventeen begins with, opens up a whole new line of truth in the Gospel of Matthew. Some of John's disciples followed Jesus without hesitation and others stayed connected with John even when he was in prison. The news was out now. Jesus was openly teaching the scriptures and explaining what the Old Testament was all about and how His coming was foretold. His preaching would have been for people to face themselves before Him and make a commitment as to whether they believed in Him as

Christ or not. The healing of disease was not just to make people well but was to lead to their spiritual wholeness. “That ye may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, He saith to the sick of the palsy, ‘Rise, take up thy bed and go into thy house.’” That was an awakening of interest that could not be ignored.

The miracles of healing gave authenticity to the teaching and preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, which couldn't be considered counterfeit. The words He spoke and the things He did, were proof that He was the Son of God. Matthew summarizes the ministry of Jesus, before giving the characteristic of kingdom living in the sermon on the mount. Before getting specific about what He taught and preached, He made plain who He was without a doubt. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the Messiah and He is Lord. When all of that would have been made clear to those who read this Gospel account; the impact of the teaching would have reason to take deep root in those who had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They could commit themselves to living for Him and dying for Him when they were absolutely sure that there was much more to gain than to lose by suffering and dying for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5

The beginning of the sermon on the mount declares blessings on those whose lives are consistent with the lifestyle expected of those who are in the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, it indicates the fulfillment of those blessings will be realized in the future. Those who follow the Lord and to whom those blessings will come in fullness in the future, are to be salt and light in the world in this present time. A covenant has been formed with our Lord, and through that union with Him, we are able to “walk in the light, as He is in the light.” He is “the Light of the world,” and He told those who followed Him that they too are “the light of the world.”

The Lord Jesus explained the law as to what it really means when it is lived out in spirit, not just in the “letter of the law.” Fidelity to the covenant of grace we are a part of his terms of faithfulness and love for God and others. The values expressed by the law when carried out as intended, are exemplified by loving the Lord supremely and loving others in an honest and true manner.

Matthew 5:1-16. Disciples going public in Testimony and Service: Blessings, Salt and Light.

Characteristics of public servants, v.1-11.

- The King and the multitudes: The multitudes were not ready for the beatitudes. There comes a time when those who follow Christ in service for Him must pull out of the mixed multitude. People in general were living in darkness and were neither salt nor light. The multitude does not appreciate the law. God's social order means that we live under God's government. Counter-culture values are not popular with most people. To reverse what is common practice makes people resistant and angry.
- The King and His disciples: The first connection people have with Jesus, is a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, as happened with the disciples a year before the time of this sermon being preached. That relationship goes beyond the Lord Jesus being known as *the King*. He will become real as *our King*, to all those believers in Him who want to please Him in their lives. When the time comes that an individual submits to His authority as *my King*; then we are ready to follow where He leads us or directs us. Each

one had to come to Him personally. Each one had to respond to His call personally. Each one had to be willing to serve Him personally.

- The King and characteristics of the kingdom: The called disciples, had to know the characteristics that identified them as members of the kingdom who were loyal to the King. Those who are loyal to the King, are obedient to the King. Those who are obedient to the King, represent the King. Disciples of the King gather to the King and follow Him; they learn from the King and then they go out to speak for the King and represent Him wherever they are found. God's high ideal for those who serve Him was met in our Lord Jesus.
- The King and principles of the kingdom: Kingdom principles of living are very different from worldly living. The principles taught in the sermon on the mount, describe the working of grace that is opened up to those who surrender their lives as children of the kingdom to God's authority and rule. Those who are in the kingdom of heaven, are more conscious of who they are in relation to the King; than where they are or what they do in the kingdom. Those principles begin in us as individuals. Greatness is in people, not in the military power of a nation, not in the success of a nation, or not in the human leadership of a nation. Greatness begins in the character of the people of a nation. The Lord taught on the mountain what He had always taught.
- The Beatitudes: "Blessed," is a condition of contentment, joy, restfulness, and security. Blessings and responsibilities go together. The results of each blessing are given as the person is described. [1] There is a "poor in spirit" consciousness of being in the kingdom of God. A person is happy because he or she is in the kingdom, not necessarily in the environment in which they are found or in which they are called to serve. A person who is "poor in spirit," is one who is subject to the King; has their heart, mind, and life all submitted to the King. They know their spiritual need and acknowledge it. How blessed is the assurance that one with that characteristic is in the kingdom of heaven!

[2] There are many causes for "mourning." We mourn over the loss of loved ones and over the loss of health. We may mourn over our inability, our failures, our unworthiness, and the sin that so easily beset us. We know our spiritual poverty and grieve over evil that happens around us and in us. The Spirit of God comforts us now and gives us a sense of relief over the fact of God's grace that is sufficient for our needs. In the future, there will be the blessed comfort of being in the presence of the Lord and with Him forever.

[3] A "meek" person who is submissive to the King, is one who has their personal power under the control of His divine sovereignty. There is gentleness and yet true humility when personal strengths are under the control of the King. Such people experience the blessing of God, allowing them to be useful for the Lord in the world now; as well as in the future when the full extent of His kingdom is known worldwide.

[4] An earnest desire for what is right and will please God in my own life, is what it is to "hunger and thirst after righteousness." The effect of our own desire may also have a positive effect on others that may prevail and be a benefit to many. Such people will be discontented with everything that displeases God and is unlike God. By His grace, God will satisfy that longing desire to where we can be satisfied, even though nothing around us may change as far as we can see. These first four beatitudes are positive. The next ones are more active.

[5] The “merciful” person gives and serves with kindness and forgiveness when it is not deserved. Christ is merciful to us and that Christ-like attitude and way in us, is a way God shows His mercy to the undeserving. When we show mercy, He shows us more of His mercy by withholding from us that which we deserve and blessing us instead.

[6] “Pure in heart” is characteristic of one who has experienced divine cleansing that is not superficial. God’s cleansing brings a wholeness and a loyalty that is fixed on God. When that is real, there will be holiness, integrity, honesty and trust, that will be evident by consistency in life. There will be an openness before God and people showing there are no hidden agendas or secret schemes, we do not want others to know about. There will be spiritual eyesight to see the Lord by faith in all we do now in our daily lives, as well as when we are face to face with Christ our Savior.

[7] “Peacemakers” are not agitators in themselves. They are people who promote peace, pray for peace, and when possible; make peace between those who need to be reconciled. In some way, they seek to arrange for reconciliation between alienated people. God is like that, and our Lord Jesus Christ arranged for peace between us and God through the blood of His cross. Making peace may have a significant personal cost to the peacemaker.

[8] Those who suffer for doing what is right, are often “persecuted” by those who prefer things to remain as they are, in a compromised or sinful condition. Suffering for the sake of our Lord can be for our good now, and it is rewarded in heaven. When we take our eyes off of things on earth that consume the minds of most people, there is no longer a superficial casual attitude toward divine things. Persecution has a way of strengthening faith and it also gives an example to others as to what is really important.

Characteristics of salt and light, v.13-16.

- Salt: The exchange of salt was used as a form of affirming covenants. God had made a salt covenant with Israel which we read in the book of Leviticus. That was symbolic in the meaning of a lasting covenant that was to be preserved. A characteristic of salt is first preserving that which can spoil if left to itself. It also enhances the flavor that is in the food we eat so that it is more palatable and enjoyable. Salt purifies some of those things that are contaminated in themselves or are contaminated by things around them. Adding salt removes potentially poisoning elements. Salt also has the characteristic of being able to reflect and refocus light so it can allow the sunlight to melt ice quicker than it would normally.

It is possible for a Christian to lose their influence and testimony, by allowing sinful and contaminating things to enter our minds and then into our lives. When we do not live up to our calling in Christ, our lives can quickly become useless as far as Christian testimony is concerned.

- Light: The light of spiritual life in a believer in Christ, is a reflection of His Light. Christ is the Source of all light, and in Christian testimony, His Light in the world shines through those He has saved by His grace. We participate with our Lord Jesus in the work

of the kingdom of heaven by the light of our testimony in small things as well as the big things. His truth shines like light through His people who know the truth and are made free by the truth.

The accumulation of a lot of small lights, can make the light of a city to be seen from a long way off and can give light to those who live in darkness. The light of a city is not made up of one light but of many small lights seen from a distance and can be seen from the heavens.

Perhaps the most important light is our own personal light as individuals. “Let your light so shine before men,” means that we are responsible to let the work of God’s grace in us produce spiritual light; glorify God when it becomes obvious to those who know us. When our faith is demonstrated openly by the light that is in us, then people will know it is God who is working in us differently than in them. Believers together, give light that has an impact that can be experienced and observed by those who are living for nothing lasting. When the light of life is seen; people can see the way to God for themselves in dark times.

Don’t be quiet when you should speak. Don’t compromise with the sinful practices of unbelievers. Don’t deny who you are or that you belong to Christ and are in the kingdom of heaven. Don’t let anything come into your life that would dim your spiritual light. Don’t keep quiet about the light of life God has lit up in your life. Don’t ignore the fact that people who are in darkness need the light you can give.

Matthew 5:17-48. The King explains the Meaning of the Law: God’s kind of Righteousness.

The King and the Law, v.17-20

The kind of people who enter the kingdom of heaven are those who know they need God because they are unable in themselves to keep any of the laws of God, let alone all of them. The beatitudes resonate with them as they seek first the kingdom of God. The motives of people and the principles of the law, reveal what a person is really like, and what they think of the Lord. An honest seeker for righteousness will soon find the way into the kingdom of God is to know the King personally.

The King of the Jews swept aside the traditions and interpretations people had become used to who professed to be “law-keepers.” The ethical code of the law has not changed. “The law and the prophets” were to govern the lives of the people, but they had changed that purpose to religion. The Lord established again the law in its real purpose. He fulfilled the law personally and perfectly as to its meaning. Righteousness is to be from the heart. Righteousness outward was intended to testify to righteousness inwardly. The value of the law is to reveal true righteousness and to reveal our inability to earn our way to God by our own efforts. It is our “schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ.

Control of the heart and body begins with control of our eyes. Laws are given to help us love God with our hearts and minds but they had been misapplied and misquoted so much by religious leaders, that they turned the laws of God into confusion. That in turn led to them

making the laws a set of rules that couldn't be really understood because of their own additions, and it ended up in people missing the whole point of the law. The *ceremonial law* of the Old Testament was specifically related to the worship of the children of Israel. The principles behind the sacrifices and offerings were all good in that they opened the way for those who put their faith in God, to love and worship Him in spirit and in truth. The ceremonial laws that pointed to Christ, were fulfilled when Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. The ceremonial laws had no more real purpose to fulfill.

Civil laws in Israel were to guide the daily conduct of life in an orderly society. The fundamentals of those civil laws were given to human beings by nature, so that those who do not have written laws, "are a law unto themselves." People know what is right and wrong inherently. It is implanted in everyone by God. All people have the choice as to whether they obey those implanted guidelines or not. By nature, we all sin and have come "short of the glory of God." So written laws in a society were given to put consequences to misdeeds. Mosaic laws were the basis of "English common law." English common law was the basis of the laws of this country when it was founded. Those fundamental laws when obeyed, result in human decency and a society that can function in an orderly fashion so people can live in peace. When those laws are kept, life is normal. But a new problem has arisen in late years. Those who lead in this country have changed some of the most fundamental laws to suit the depraved nature of people. Now it is legal to murder unwanted children before they are born. Manslayers are given sentences instead of following the original law. Society is becoming more chaotic and unsafe and the law God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai is being abandoned.

Moral law reveals the nature and will of God which is unchanging. We don't obey laws because they are laws, but we obey the Person who established those moral laws that are consistent with His nature. Because He gave us freedom of the will, mankind has sinned and failed to keep those moral laws, and death has "passed upon all men, for all have sinned." God, in grace, has made it possible for us to be saved from the condemnation and consequences of breaking the laws laid on us. Those who put their faith and trust in Him who paid those consequences for us on the cross; obey Him and those laws of love, because we love Him. We have a heartfelt desire to please Him who loved us so much that He has made it possible for us to come to God as our Father because of the love of the Son of God who gave Himself for me.

Pharisees and scribes were outwardly righteous people in that they followed the laws, but they were far from the kingdom of God because there was no love or allegiance for God, – only for the law. To observe the law by righteous living but rejecting God's will is not what is needed for true righteousness. Love and obedience go beyond compliance with laws. When we have a love for God, seek His will; reverence Him and do the works of the law from the heart; we will not be pressured to keep the law or struggle for assurance of acceptance by the Lord. Evidence of our new life in Christ is the principle of the law being written on "the fleshly tables of the heart."

The law and human relationships, v.21-32

- The first illustration, v.21-26: The act of murder being a criminal offense is in every culture; although what composes taking the life of another person as a crime, is being disputed all over the world. The illustration, the Lord Jesus Christ gave deals with the deeper meaning of the law. The act of murder is forbidden, but anger that is allowed to go

unchecked in the first place is forbidden. Courts punish crimes. God judges hidden sins that lead to crimes; whether the crime has been committed or not. To say to a person, “Raca (empty-headed),” was an expression of contempt of character. It was cause for court work in those times.

The Lord Jesus was not doing away with the law when He said, “But I say unto you...” He was giving understanding as to why the law was given in the first place. Pharisees read the law, knew the law, and taught the law, but harbored anger in their hearts against those who didn’t agree with them. They were angry against the Roman government. They were angry against John for seeing through their hypocrisy and with Jesus for telling them right out, who they were and what they were like.

To keep a law but to be closed to the purpose of that law, and even hold anger against what that law says; is to miss the point of it altogether. Reconciliation is the first step to take when conflicts arise that cause anger. Get right with a wronged person before you get taken to court. Get right with God first before coming judgment makes any attempt you might make to repent, too late. Before going before God and seeking to worship or serve Him; be reconciled to those who have sinned against you, or you have sinned against.

- The second illustration, v.27-30: This illustration as it relates to human relationships, was regarding adultery and conflict in marriage. There is no question as to the fact that adultery is a sin. The mixing of seeds has always been forbidden. The Lord Jesus made the point that most people today find hard to accept, and that is that inner lust is sin. The temptation to commit adultery comes from an undisciplined desire to carry out an act, even though the outcome may never take place. To look upon another person with lustful desire, may lead to deeds of shame that come from fantasies of shame. This sin begins in the eye which is a doorway to the soul.

Such sinful desires cause people to sin in their minds and that may fester as a putrefying sore. Allowing it to go on without confession and forsaking of such sin, can create fantasies that can destroy marriages. If allowed to remain, the desire may lead to acting out that desire. Sinful desire is unrighteousness that turns a person away from fellowship with God. Any illegal access into another person’s body is fornication, and all forms of such sexual activity are totally forbidden.

- The third illustration, v.31-32: The seriousness of fornication in human relationships is exemplified and clarified in the illustration of divorce. When one person in a marriage commits adultery, and divorce is the result; it can lead others to fall into the same condemnation. Often in bitterness of soul, a person who may have been innocent of the sin of adultery abandons the restrictions of marriage and goes into sin themselves.

The law and social relationships, v. 33-42

- The fourth illustration, v.33-37: This illustration emphasizes the responsibility to tell the truth. People will often take their oath about a matter without even thinking about what they are saying. It is God’s intention that our word – our “Yes” or “No,” should be

enough to affirm that we are truthful. We should be people “who are as good as their word.” But that is not always the case. Some people will say, “God is my witness,” or “On my mother’s grave,” or some such kind of false affirmation to impress people with their sincerity. To say such things and then not fulfill the intent of those words, is to commit perjury. In a court of law, that would be a crime. Legal oaths may be called for by governments, but our honesty should make any oath that we make, unnecessary. The Lord Jesus meant that we never make casual comments about our commitments and that our speech should be the truth at all times. He gave no loopholes when He said, “Swear not at all.”

- The fifth illustration, v.38-42: This explanation is to guide and guard people against excessive retaliation and to avoid personal revenge without due consideration. Personal revenge against a person who has hurt or offended another, can get out of hand and go way too far in punishment. The “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” rule, was to put a limit on vengeance. Such a rule also keeps punishments from being too lenient or too harsh. It balances the punishment with the crime.

People still use this phrase to justify, “Getting back at him.” “I’m just doing to him what he did to me!” or “I’m just giving back to her as good as she gave to me!” is the mindset of people without a sense of law and order. The Lord Jesus Christ when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously.” When we are wronged, rather than a “get even” attitude; the Lord gave instructions to do good, not keep score. Loving others in this way is not natural, but it is right. God gives the grace and strength to do what is beyond natural.

If a person is determined to deprive you of what is your right to have and what you need; give him more than he asked for. Give him extra – like the shirt off your back after you gave him your coat. Roman soldiers had a legal right to make Jews their porters for a certain distance. Jesus said that in Christian love, go twice as far. To demand interest on money loaned to a relative or friend puts material gain above the human need of the poor person. Our response to personal injury or unreasonable demands, fulfills the intent of the law of love for God and our neighbors.

The Law and a new attitude toward others, v.43-48

- The sixth illustration, v.43-48: To love enemies was a new concept of love that was not usual to the Jews in Jesus’ day. They seemed to think that if they loved God and their neighbors like the law said, that gave them license to hate their enemies. The Old Testament didn’t command them to hate their enemies even though they were enemies. Legalists tried to make the point that if we love our neighbors, that implies permission to hate Romans, publicans, and Gentiles who are perceived enemies. The Lord Jesus called His own followers to love as God loves; with an all-inclusive love that includes enemies

Then He went even further than just our feelings, to taking actions that would demonstrate love. Doing what is in the best interest of others is one of those actions. Praying to God for them, as intercessors; brings the whole area of humanness into divine perspective in our own minds. God is able to give us the ability to do, what to us is

personally impossible. When these practices become real to us, we will not only be nice people; we will be the kind of Christ-like people God wants us to be. Hopefully, there be some Christ-like characteristics of our heavenly Father, seen on earth in His born-again children. That is a result of loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

MATTHEW 6

Loyalty to the Lord and fulfilling what our faith in God really means is that we live our lives before Him; not to be praised or seen by people so they will praise us. When we model what we believe, we don't have to advertise it. Even when we pray, it is to be consistent with what God wants and with His will to be done, not our wants and wishes.

Those who belong to the Lord and follow Him, owe our allegiance to His kingdom; not to getting ahead in this life with wealth, success and fame. It is when we live life in that way, we don't worry about things that happen to us or around us. We leave our cares in His hand, knowing that He cares for us as a Father cares for His children.

Matthew 6:1-34. Kingdom Attitudes: Living out our values.

Religious Practices, v.1-18: For new believers in the local assemblies of saints across the Roman empire, the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He was on that mountain in Galilee, was very different from what was practiced in Judaism and the various religions of the Gentiles. Bringing the Lord's people together in an assembly of people gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, brought a whole new understanding of the scriptures and the purposes of God for His people. He was building a kingdom the gates of hell would not be able to prevail against, and He had left the responsibility to do this to those who followed Him. God's expectations of us are that our character, holiness of life, spiritual maturity, and love for Christ and each other, be Christ-like.

In chapter five, the emphasis is on the attitudes of "man to man." In chapter six, it is emphasizing the attitudes of "man to God." It is incumbent on us to practice publicly our allegiance to God rather than seek honor from people. God's people are representatives of His coming kingdom when His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The righteousness of life and genuine love covers all the teaching of the law. It is His command for us to seek first the kingdom of God.

Giving of what we have received from God to benefit others, v. 1-4

The Lord Jesus did not exhort those disciples to give. It was an expected action, so when He spoke of it, He didn't say, "If ye give," but "When ye give." Giving to others, and giving back to God from all the benefits we have received from Him, is a normal response to God's grace to us. It is natural to want to reciprocate when good has been done for us. But it was being done by law-keepers as an onerous duty, so the motive behind alms-giving was to call attention to the givers, rather than for the benefit of those who were in need. Those who gave openly wanted to be seen as righteous, holy, giving, and religious people.

Calling attention to charitable giving of any kind of generosity is hypocrisy. Whether it is done as a church offering or a civic act of generosity, all that such giving will result in, is human

recognition. Nothing further will come from God. Giving in secret to the Lord and not to be seen by people, results in honor given to God. When we do what we do for others, “as unto the Lord,” that too will create grateful hearts to the Lord in those who have been in need. Fatherless and widows have a special place in the heart of God.

Persistent praying is not a lot of repetitious words to God, v.5-15

Persistent prayer is sincere and heartfelt in contrast to the babbling words made by the Pharisees who made a public show of prayer. Righteousness in public prayer is not to focus attention on the one praying, but on God who is able to answer our united prayers. Saying the same things over and over does not coerce God in any way, to do what we want. Our Father knows our needs already. The purpose of public prayer is to give expression to our sincerity and personal concern for others. Directness, simplicity, sincerity, and persistence are involved when the Lord’s people pray together.

Righteousness in private prayer is seen and heard by God when we are in personal communication with Him alone. It is then the guidelines in the pattern of prayer our Lord gave to His disciples, give us guidance in our approach to God. There is an intimacy of a child to our heavenly Father that is expected, and yet the attitude of respect and reverence of a supplicant to the Supplier of every good and perfect gift is also expected. These two things are not inconsistent with each other. In our prayer, we affirm our confidence in our Father’s ability and our inability to meet needs. The awesomeness of God’s presence and power and the reverence and obedience we owe Him; are set by our tone of voice and attitude, both inwardly and outwardly.

God’s name, God’s will, and God’s kingdom are all focused on when we pray. When we petition in prayer, we are aware of what God can do, so the structure of prayer is worship, requests, confession, and repentance. We pray regarding God’s kingdom being in focus, knowing that in time yet to come there will be order maintained in the kingdom of God. *Created order* will be followed by people and nations being *conformed to the will of God*. Then there will be the *correct functioning of everything* on earth in that “kingdom come.”

Then requests for bread and necessities for physical existence are addressed because we know that only God can provide for all of humanity the daily necessities of life. We need bread for today to keep us alive physically and we need bread forever, for our present and future nourishment of soul and spirit. In this example of prayer, there are six petitions; three are about God and three about us in that order. We are conscious of our moral debts of sin and trespass that we owe. Forgiveness comes when debts are satisfied in one way or another, and it can be granted, but forgiveness is never earned. It is easy to say forgiveness is granted, but if we don’t really forgive, we are denying our common ground as sinners.

Temptation and testing times always come. It is not too difficult to be led astray by temptation and lose faith when we are in trials. We need God’s help to avoid this and not succumb to temptation. Satan is always wanting to take advantage of the difficulties we face. A suitable and respectful conclusion to any prayer gives evidence of genuine and spiritual reality when we are speaking to God. He knows everything about us and knows whether as disciples we forgive trespasses made against us because our trespasses are real and many.

Focus on fasting is for specific purposes, v.16-18

Fasting is a way of practicing loyalty to God by stopping for a time, anything that would interfere with my fellowship with God. It is more than just not eating. It may include suffering in some way that good may come as a result. The reality, sincerity, and reverence in fasting are noble but difficult. It takes time and deliberate rejection of other claims about us during the time of fasting. Time and discipline are necessary. Also, sacrifice and sincerity take fasting from a mere physical action to a spiritual service and experience with God.

Abstaining from physical nourishment often accompanies prayers, confession of sin, mourning for losses, and times of humiliation. Public disasters, approaching dangers, and national sins were accompanied by fasting in Bible times. Holy ordinations, private afflictions, personal griefs, and bad news were occasions of private fasting.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave a new perspective to fasting that made it much different than the common practices of public display and attention-grabbing actions on the part of “religious practitioners” of His day. He taught that fasting was to focus our attention and our hearts on God; not to get the attention of people on us. God is the only One who can deal with issues in life that are beyond our ability to do anything about. He is the One who Judges and corrects or punishes that which makes us fast in the first place.

Loyalty in the kingdom goes far beyond wealth, v.19-24

There are many things that can affect our devotion to the Lord and our commitment to the affairs of the kingdom of heaven. We have a tendency to worry over trivial material things and overlook those things that are eternal. It is a big concern to the natural man to take care of our future. But material things do not last, nor do they satisfy our cravings for “treasures on earth.” Money never satisfies. We need to put our right treasures in the right place. Treasure has controlling power over people. Treasures in heaven have eternal worth. We work hard for that which we set our hearts on.

It is important that we see God’s view of things rather than the worldview. We need the “lamp” and “eye” of our intentions and choices on God, not money; on heavenly values, not earthly values. When our “good eye” is focused on God and His kingdom, that produces loyalty that goes through hard times and temptations without being turned aside. A bad eye turns us away from the light to darkness where nothing is really clear, but where we think evil and disloyalty to God are hidden. Laying up treasure is an act of obedience.

To serve a master in the sense the Lord Jesus gave in this message means to be a slave; the property of a master who owns another person. Competing allegiances are not possible. One master or the other is going to be served. God or riches are the choices before us. Allegiance will be to one or the other – not both.

Anxiety in the kingdom is the opposite of faith, v.25-34

True trust without reservation is not very common among people. Trust in God for all of our needs takes away useless worry that is never satisfied whether it be for physical needs or peace of mind. Confidence in looking ahead testifies to the fact that God has always been faithful to us even though He may provide in ways that we had never anticipated. Worry is never satisfied. It

is a real disability. The goal of life is not found in the physical things we might want. We do not have any real reason to worry because the same God who cares for birds and grass and gives them life; cares for us to whom He gave us life.

Worry controls thoughts, affections, relationships, health and, our faith. The length of our life depends on Him who gave it to us. Short or long – it is His choice. We can rest our souls on Him who had control of the material things as well as the spiritual things. Spiritual vision is a clear vision of what God wants. Our little faith is in Him and by faith we put heavenly values and our allegiance on the kingdom of God, and the God of the kingdom. Seeking first the kingdom of God summarizes the whole thing. When we do that, we will avoid worry; give God total loyalty; trust Him without reservation; rest in faith. Those are the important things and seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness is at the heart of everything we do. Planning for tomorrow is good. Worrying about tomorrow is bad. Holiness in life and righteousness that testifies to Christ living in us, is what is important. Put God first by choice; submit to God's plan by actions; and follow God's guidance by faith.

MATTHEW 7

To pass critical judgments on other people is not right. We do not know what is behind their motives or what is going on in their lives. But this does not mean we are to be devoid of the judgment of discernment and let everything go that is wrong legally and morally. There are divine standards that are given to guide the lives of every person. Carrying out justice is not critical judgment. It is upholding righteousness. There is room for grace and forgiveness when corrections are needed.

God does hear and answer prayer. That is part of what it means to be linked to Him through Christ. We can be confident when we pray that God will hear and answer in the best possible way because He is our Father. When we obey His words and respond with actions of faith to His directions, we are wise. What the Lord taught the Jews in that sermon on the mount, are for our learning and practice as Christians today. His teaching has all authority over all Christians and assemblies of His gathered people.

Matthew 7:1-24. Kingdom relationships: With other people; our Father; our Lord; our Teacher

Hypocritical judging, v.1-6

It is definitely wrong to level unfavorable criticism at the motives of others, and that is what our Lord was teaching His disciples. We don't close our eyes to what is wrong, but we do need to judge ourselves and offenders of the moral teaching of scripture. A critical fault-finding spirit toward others is wrong. People usually respond to criticism with criticism, and to kindness with kindness. Before we criticize others, let us be sure we have no faults of our own. Instead of being critical, be discerning. We do have to warn others of the consequences when they do wrong, but that is pointing out to them what should have been obvious. If they will not accept sincere counsel and repent of what is sinful and wrong; leave them alone. There is no further benefit when all that counsel does, is create more antagonism. In fact, to continue to seek to bring correction may move them to attack you.

Persistent praying, v. 7-12

When we pray, we should pray in confidence, knowing that God will answer our prayer in a suitable way because He is our good and gracious Father. To ask simply means to express in words exactly what our request is. To seek is to not just make a casual comment at the throne of grace, but that our attitude is that of one who is sincere and real. Knocking indicates the importance we have regarding the requests we make. Persistence in prayer is not trying to coerce God in any way but is evidence of how real we are regarding the value and power of prayer. God will not give us that which seems like an answer but is really a counterfeit. He wants to bless His children, but we do not always want what is best for us to have. If He withholds giving what we wanted, it is for our good, not because He is tantalizing us. He is the example of one who loves his neighbor as himself. Grace gives what is right and best, not what is necessarily wanted. Real love is the fulfillment of the law.

Personal responding, v.13-14

The exhortation to enter the kingdom of God was not a casual suggestion to enter the narrow gate to the kingdom of heaven. The differences between the two gates and the two ways are very distinct. Those who enter the wide gate onto the broad way, live for self-interest and for themselves and what they can get. Living and dying on the broad way leads to hell. The narrow gate opens into the kingdom of heaven which is narrow and confined. The way of obedience and persecution for the kingdom of God's sake is difficult, but it leads to eternal life. Only a few people want to enter that narrow gate which is our Lord Jesus Christ and walk that narrow way. Those who are willing to enter through that gate are saved when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The narrow way is not popular but it is right. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the only way to the Father.

Careful discerning, v. 15-20

Sometimes we are not quite sure what to expect when we hear unknown preachers and teachers pass on to hearers their opinions and statements regarding Christianity. False prophets were quite common in the Old Testament times when Israelites were settled into the promised land. Kings wanted prophets around them who would tell them what they wanted to hear. In contrast to those false prophets were those faithful prophets who were true to God and passed on His word to the people. Often their messages were words of urgent warnings of the consequences of sin and idolatry that had become appealing to them. Associated with idolatry was the rejection of God and the covenant He had made with His earthly people. False prophets may look as innocent as sheep. The only way to deal with false teaching is to have nothing to do with it. We need to cut it down like a farmer would cut down a tree that bears poisonous fruit.

Counterfeit professing, v. 21-23

To call Jesus Lord is far different from doing His will as Lord. God's will being done gladly is evidence of a person who knows Jesus as Lord, and they have a personal relationship with Him as an obedient servant. The Lord Jesus said some would use religious words and sound spiritual when they say, "Lord, Lord," but they do not bear "good fruit." Obedience to what the Lord taught is good fruit, but false guides who explain away what the Bible says, lead people astray. The reality of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior is testified to in life now. It will certainly be evident in "that day" yet to come. Unreality will be evident when counterfeit professors stand before the One who is Lord, Judge, and King and hear the words, "I never knew you."

Wise building, v. 24-27

The two builders seemed to be doing the same things to those who would look on. The right foundation is absolutely essential even though it is not seen outwardly. One who is wise has heard and responded to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their testimony and life are not superficial and phony like that of the foolish man. There are only two ways and two endings to life. Two gates are where we begin. Two kinds of fruit reveal what we have to show for the years of living on earth, and the two foundations show what the end is like. We either accept or reject the Lord Jesus Christ. What we do with Him affects our destiny. It is the work of disciples who are learners and followers of Christ, to point people to the narrow gate and warn them of the consequences of going down the broad way.

Attentive listening, v. 28-29

The people who heard the sermon on the mount had listened attentively and with amazement at the clarity of thought and the understanding of the law seen and heard through the eyes of God. The words of the Lord Jesus were not merely suggestions or speculation. There were no quotations from others. He is the Originator of the Word of God because He is the Word that was at the beginning. He spoke with direct authority; “I say unto you.” If they were going to obey God, they would obey Him and declare their loyalty to Him as Lord, Judge, and King.

MATTHEW 8

In Matthew chapter eight, the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus indicated the kingdom of God was here. The point of healing diseases was to get those who were blessed by being healed or observing those who were healed; to put their personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins – the healing of their soul, and life to their spirit. New spiritual life was offered to the Gentiles as well as to Jews.

The authority of the Lord Jesus is not only over diseases that no one else has but is also over the power of nature and the forces of evil. When we put wholehearted trust in Him, we are yielding to His authority and we willingly give Him our loyalty. We are committed to the kingdom of God above all other people, values, or earthly desires.

Matthew 8: 1 – 9:36. Kingdom authority: The highest possible authority in the universe

Compassion, and authority over human need, v. 1-17

- Healing the leper: The leper who worshipped the Lord knew whom he had come to. He had full confidence in the Lord’s ability to cleanse him completely but wasn’t sure it was God’s will. His faith brought Him to the right person and the touch of the Lord would have testified to him the fact that his cleansing was total. The Lord was true to His own laws, and the cleansing was instant and complete. To be faithful to the law, he was instructed to show himself to the priest. The reason he was to “tell no one,” was so that people wouldn’t misunderstand the mission of the Lord who came to seek and save the lost. Healing was a testimony to His saving grace and power to forgive sins, which was of far more importance than healing from disease.
- Healing the centurion’s servant: Faith crosses cultural, racial, social and religious barriers. For a Jew to enter a Gentile’s house was more than the centurion could grasp,

because Jews would have been ceremonially unclean according to their tradition. The centurion also understood authority because he was both under the authority of others and over the authority of his soldiers. He knew Jesus had authority over disease and took Jesus at His word by faith. He had no question as to Jesus' power and that it was not limited to time or space. Such trust is vital to taking God at His word. For Gentiles to be included in the blessings of God at that time would have been quite astounding to the Jews who had believed in Jesus. For them to be included at the feast of the Messiah in the future kingdom of heaven, would have been beyond their imagination. They had thought the Jewish place in the plans of God had eliminated all other people from the place of privilege. They learned that God's grace is unlimited as far as who is included when they come by faith and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. They also learned that Jews who refuse to trust in the Lord Jesus, will be cast out from the presence of God just like any other unbelievers. All those who are forever cut off from God of whatever nation or people; have made their own choice to reject the Savior testified to in the universal Gospel message.

- Healing at Peter's house: His mother-in-law and many others were healed at Capernaum. The response to his wife's mother's instantaneous healing was to meet the need of others immediately. That is an expected response of one who is grateful to the Lord for His grace. Our Lord Jesus showed His compassion with a touch; His authority with a word and then His power by casting out the powers of darkness.

Cost, and authority over human desire, v.18-22

- Scribe: He had a good desire, but there was weakness in his will to yield to authority. There are costs to commitment. Discipleship calls for vigor, vitality, and venture. The value of discipleship is higher than ambition, popularity, friendships, pleasures, and personal choices.
- Disciple: His normal and natural desire to care for his aged parent until they die, is common to everyone. To put off following Christ until it is convenient to us is to choose to not follow Him. To think we have a more important claim in our life is not an excuse for not following Christ. There will always be other things that compete for our loyalty and allegiance. To live for, and follow Christ as our Lord, is our supreme obligation as a disciple. It has a superior claim over even family obligations.

Creation, and Jesus' authority over the forces of nature, v.23-27

- Fear: To follow Jesus is to trust Him over our greatest fears. The storm that struck the boat on the Sea of Galilee, was beyond what those fishermen/disciples had normally experienced. They were afraid they were going to drown. Opposition from Satan and the powers of darkness are to be expected when we go into areas of Satan's domain with the good news of the Gospel. Positive thinking and human ingenuity cannot conquer the kind of fear that threatens to overwhelm the soul.
- Faith: It is a fundamental lesson to be learned by disciples of the Lord that faith in ourselves and our ability to control circumstances will fail. Our faith must be put in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone has authority over every power that would seek to conquer us because all power in heaven and in earth is under His sovereign power.

Conqueror, and authority over the powers of darkness, v.28-34

- Gentiles: God’s grace and authority go beyond the chosen Jews to the Gentiles. Each individual person is of great value to the One who gives life and breath to every person and all things that we need to survive, and even enjoy life. His authority is supreme over every nation, people, and individual.
- Demon-possessed people: Evil spirits need host bodies to carry out their nefarious deeds. Some are open and blatantly evil. Others are sly, subtle, and deceptive. Fallen angels/demons are under the control of Satan and can tempt people and seek to destroy the lives of those who yield to their power.
- Demons: Demons are fallen angels which “kept not their first estate,” and joined in Lucifer’s rebellion. They have been cast out and chained to satanic authority. However, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater, and they must do what He commands. God has allowed people to choose to follow either the authority of the Lord or the powers of darkness. We cannot really discern whether the immoral, unrestrained wicked sinfulness of people is the work of the world, the flesh, or the devil. What we do know is that such beings will be cast into the lake of fire along with the fallen angels they yielded to, and the devil. The destructive intent of demons was clearly demonstrated when they killed all the pigs into which they had entered.

The miracles and signs of divine authority are plainly seen in this chapter and the next one. Those believers who read or heard read the Gospel of Matthew, would have easily learned that the teachers and preachers they knew, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. The Messiah of the Jews was also the head of the church of which they were a part. In each local assembly where those new believers gathered, they learned that both Jews and Gentiles, no matter what their background was; were placed in the kingdom of God when they repented and believed the Gospel and put their faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. They would have been made confident that God was not only with them but in them, and they were in Him. His authority gave them the needed motivation and courage to step out in faith and follow the Lord Jesus Christ as His disciples.

MATTHEW 9

The Lord Jesus Christ is no “respector of persons.” And deliberately made connections with marginalized people who are despised by others. There is grace and mercy demonstrated in the kingdom of heaven. It is our privilege to meet needs and communicate with those who know their need and want more understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Our Lord had compassion on the needy and spiritually hungry people and expects us to labor in His harvest field and bring people to Him. We are to follow His steps with faith and boldness in spite of opposition. He will not ask us to go anyplace where He would not go with us, and He will give us the needed strength and courage.

Authority over the power of sin, 9:1-8

Returning to the place where God has used us is important; not just because of what was done previously, but because of what remains to do. Four men who knew who Jesus was and what He could do, brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. For some reason, they hadn’t brought him the first time Jesus was preaching and healing in Capernaum, but the second time He was there, they took action in faith and brought him to Jesus. The Lord Jesus saw the reality of their faith and

because of that, forgave his sins which was the basis of his problem. His spiritual condition had to be dealt with first and then came the proof of Jesus' authority by the act of physical healing.

To the Pharisees, to consider He had authority over sin was blasphemy. It is easy to say, "Thy sins be forgiven." Anyone can say that, and many do today, but that doesn't make it true. The healing miracle was obvious to all. Still, in spite of that, the people of Capernaum as well as the Pharisees only saw Jesus as a man, not God. They knew He was a man of authority, but didn't acknowledge Jesus as God. Consequently, at a later time, woe was pronounced upon the people of Capernaum [Mat. 11:23].

Authority over the power of success, v.9-13

The call of Matthew to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ would have caused a real stir in Capernaum. He was a tax collector; likely a despised customs officer of Rome, who would collect duties on goods being shipped from the Mediterranean Sea to places east on the road that passed through Capernaum. As Jesus passed by on the road, all He said was "Follow Me." That was enough for Matthew/Levi to make a complete break from his sinful past as a tax collector. There was no going back for disciples of Christ then or now. Another person would take his place and he would not likely be able to get another job in that whole area. A higher calling supersedes any other consideration. To be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ is the highest calling one can have.

Matthew seemed to understand that privilege when he made the feast for the publicans and sinners, along with the Lord Jesus and his disciples. Not only did the Lord eat with publicans and sinners which brought criticism from the Pharisees, but they would hear His words of teaching. By eating with them didn't mean that He condoned their sin, but He was extending His welcome into the kingdom of heaven to those who knew they didn't deserve it. Those who consider themselves righteous and good enough the way they are, are made to face themselves and the fact that He doesn't help them. He came to save sinners who know their need. The Lord quoted a verse from Hosea as an answer to the objections of the Pharisees. Mercy shown to the needy is more valuable than sacrifices and religious formalities that have no answer or concern for others.

Authority over the power of society, v.14-17

A discussion with the disciples of John the Baptist may have happened because of the feast at Matthew's house. The Pharisees made it a point of making it known that they fasted often. Jesus' reply to them was to remind them of John's message concerning the coming of the bridegroom. The "friend of the bridegroom" rejoices when the bridegroom's voice is heard. Fasting is done when the bridegroom is not there. Fasting is linked with sorrow and need; not ritual and self-righteousness. The message of the Lord was not a makeover of Judaism, but a new and fresh view of the kingdom of heaven. Something new had come and there was no reason to seek to put kingdom blessings into the framework of the old rigid system of seeking to keep the law to please God. A new spiritual rebirth is necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

Authority over the power of suffering, v.18-26

There are three more miracles that testify to the power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jewish and Gentile believers who read Matthew's account of these events and acts of the Lord Jesus; would have been strengthened and made bolder in their testimony in the areas where

the assemblies of God's people were being gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He could raise the dead, give sight to the blind and make a mute speak who had been kept silent by a demon. This gave a powerful background to the power He would give to the disciples and the message John's disciples would take back to him.

The healing of the woman with an issue of blood and the raising of Jarius' daughter, are both testimonies of faith and how it is seen in different people. Jarius was a ruler of the Jews but powerless to do what was needed for his daughter. It is a wise person who knows their limitations and whom to go to for help. Jarius had faith in the Lord Jesus' authority over sickness and death, to heal his daughter who was at death's door. His faith was in the touch of Jesus more than in His word. His faith was different from that of the centurion whose faith was stronger than the Lord had found in all of Israel. But even though it was different, and maybe less; Jarius' faith was in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The woman who touched the hem of His garment had faith in Him but felt the need of doing something herself to make her healing happen. She had endured her desperate condition for the same length of time Jarius' daughter had been alive. Both needed the help that only faith in Christ can give. The Lord Jesus made it plain to her that it was her faith in Him, not her touch, that made her well. The mourners that gathered at Jarius' house for the funeral didn't have faith in Him at all. When He made it plain what He was going to do, they laughed and mocked Him. Touching a dead body was ceremonially forbidden, but by taking her hand and giving her life, He superseded the law by His authority. The Lord was concerned about the message of the kingdom to which people must respond by faith, rather than healing which was under His authority alone. The choice of faith is up to each individual. God can do what is impossible with man. He can bring change where it seems impossible and can give hope to the hopeless.

Authority over the power of sightlessness, v.27-31

The two blind men knew who Jesus was. "Thou Son of David," was their statement of faith testifying publicly that He was the promised Messiah. But the Lord waited to see the real evidence of their spoken words of faith. So, He took them into the house before responding to the title that would have a political impact if He acknowledged that title publicly. The two men knew the Lord could heal them and testified to their faith in spoken words. He healed them in private and told them explicitly not to make it known that He was the Messiah, but in their excitement and gratitude, they didn't keep silent.

Authority over the power of Satan, v.32-34

He healed the blind men in private because it was not yet time for Him to take the public place as the Messiah of Israel. Just outside the door of the house was a mute man who was possessed by a demon. There is very little said about this miracle; except Matthew made it plain that the multitudes knew the demon had been cast out of the man by the authority of the Lord Jesus. The charge against Him by the Pharisees was not made to Him personally, and He waited until a later time in Matthew's account to deal with that charge publicly.

The casting out of the demon in public, was because it was in public the Pharisees accused Him of blasphemy, of associating with sinners, of impiety, and of being a servant of Satan. The Pharisees saw their religious control over the people being bypassed, and they knew their control

over people was weakened. Their ritual beliefs and practices were being challenged and their insincerity, was put right out in the open in public display.

Delegated authority to responsive disciples, v.35-38

The harvest of souls in the world then as well as today; is waiting for those who will respond to the need of lost men and women. Compassion for the lost was always evident in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to seek and to save the lost. He cares for people, no matter how far astray they may have gone. His call to the lost is real, but the response is up to the ones who hear the call of the Gospel and choose. Laborers in the harvest are called for, but we do not know who is willing to go. We are to pray that the Lord will send out those He calls to take the Gospel message and preach it under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who hear the Gospel, are urged to come to Christ now, because the harvest of souls is being gathered in now. When the harvest is past, and the summer is ended, all opportunity for salvation will be gone.

MATTHEW 10

We have received the responsibility to carry out a mission for the Lord, similar to the one the apostles were given. There will be opposition to us because the Gospel message is contradictory to the wicked practices of those who do not believe in Christ. Instead of carelessness and licentiousness; there is dignity, integrity, and purity in the kingdom message. Instead of “do your own thing,” there is “seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” But do not be afraid. Our first priority is to love and obey our Lord Jesus. We must trust Him to do what we cannot do, even though our losses may be great and personal. People who respond to those who speak for God, are considered by Him to be welcoming Jesus Himself.

Matthew 10. The King gives instructions as to how to perform a mission.

Authorizing the disciples to be apostles, v.1-4

Disciples are learners, and the learning process goes on for the lifetime of a believer, in the sense of them being learners/followers. There are other ways discipleship is evident. “Disciples indeed,” love one another and their love extends to reaching out in their concern to the lost. It is also evident in their desire to do the will of God in their own lives even though the cost may be high.

Apostles were delegated representatives of the higher authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who were sent out to represent Him and His interests. The twelve apostles were chosen by the Lord Jesus to represent Him personally to “the house of Israel.” They were also, witnesses to His life, His “signs and wonders,” and His teaching. They also were witnesses of his suffering on the cross. Perhaps they were most importantly; witnesses to His resurrection and the forty days of seeing and learning from Him, before they witnessed His ascension into heaven. The commission to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel,” came after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The house of Israel had rejected the Lord and made it plain they didn’t want “this Man to reign over us.” After the Lord was raised from among the dead, Jewish apostles began to preach the Gospel because they were witnesses of all that had happened to the Lord during His years of ministry. These facts were important for the new believers in those early churches, to know and be assured of because they were scattered all over the Roman empire.

Those men had followed Him as disciples when He moved from place to place in Galilee. Now the time had come for them to be sent out to the house of Israel and proclaim the “kingdom heaven is near.” This is the first mention of the disciples being “apostles,” which designated them as responsible to represent the Lord Jesus to the “Jews first.” They were being given authority by His higher power to act on His behalf. As this list of the disciples/apostles is given, Simon Peter is mentioned first. But this order doesn’t mean anything more than that he was first among equals. He is not the head of the church, nor was he designated as the head of the other apostles. There is no other indication of supremacy as Peter being “the leader.”

Instructions for the immediate mission, v.5-15

The first mission of the apostles was to “the Jew first.” This was not due to prejudice or a permanent condition but was a message to the Jews concerning the kingdom that was promised them many generations before. They knew, and expected, a Messiah to come and rule over the “house of Israel.” Authority was given to those apostles which included the power to perform miracles of healing and demonstrate authority over the powers of darkness, that would give weight to their message. That had been done by the Lord and they had seen it themselves. Now He was giving them the power to accomplish this first mission through acts of mercy and benevolence. These wonders were to be done freely because they had been given freely. “Freely received... freely give.”

Everything about the apostles and that first mission was specific and simple. There were specific people they were to go to and specific practices they were to adhere to. There were specific principles they were to follow and specific preaching they were to give. The people they were to go to, were Jews and the message they were to preach was “The kingdom of God is near.” They were to follow the same practices the Lord did, to demonstrate authority when miracles were performed. The principles they were to follow were to keep their own lives limited to basic needs. There was to be nothing to distract them. No money was to be involved in any way. They were to live for the moment because of the urgency of the message. There was to be nothing that would encumber their movements or slow them down in their journey from place to place. They were not to linger if they were not received in some places. When there was hostility against them, they were not to face it but were to just leave. The consequences of rejection were God’s work, not theirs. By shaking off the dust of that place and leaving; they were free from the guilt and coming judgment on that place, and their consciences were clear. Wisdom provides the balance that is needed to accomplish a mission God gives.

Warnings of future persecution, v.16-23

There didn’t seem to be much open opposition to that first mission the apostles were sent on. They were being taught in this training session, as to how they were to respond in the times of opposition that were coming in the future. Future dangers beyond that first mission were going to involve vicious opposition and open antagonism. In spite of what comes from governments, courts of law, and religions; that was to be met with wisdom and avoiding unnecessary exposure to danger, without retaliation as a serpent avoids danger when possible, and as a dove is harmless.

Opposition from friends and family will come along with rejection. Living for God has costs but gives opportunities to tell the message of God's great salvation to them and others with a view to their future blessing. We need to be prepared for what might happen but do not need to worry that we will be abandoned by the One who gave us the mission.

Some of the references in this passage indicate what it was going to be like when Titus and his Rome army besieged Jerusalem about forty years after the Lord spoke these words to the apostles. There is also an application that can be made regarding the tribulation and the second coming of Christ. Similar opposition has been experienced down through the last twenty centuries by those who follow Christ and carry out the "great commission" He gave after His resurrection and just before He ascended into heaven.

Encouragement for all believers, v.24-42

There are general encouragements given in this part of the Lord's discourse to His disciples that relate to all believers. We are the disciples and He is the Teacher. We are the servants and He is the Lord. He is the Master of the house and we are members of his household. It is reasonable to expect that what happened to Him, will happen to us in one way or another. If the Teacher, Lord, and Master received bad treatment from those He wanted to bless; we should not expect to be treated any better. Some things that happen to those who follow our Lord, do not surprise us. We are expected to commit ourselves to boldly proclaim the Gospel without fear. Human persecutors are limited to doing what they do, to our bodies. They cannot touch our souls and spirits. Our respect, reverence, and obedience to God are what is really important. God knows the smallest detail about everything.

God knows everything that happens to us and will deal with those matters and/or persecutors in His own way. Don't hesitate to get on with the mission you have received. Tell the message of the Gospel openly, publicly, and often. There will be dangers, but do not fear those who come against you. They are mere men. Carrying a cross is evidence of one who is about to die. For those who follow the Lord and have received our mission mandate from Him; we die to self-will, ambitions, and anything that would only advance temporary success. We are to die to all interests that would take priority over seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. To seek to preserve our physical ambitions in life, means we lose all that makes living worthwhile.

Our calling and commission will mean our public identification with our Lord Jesus Christ will bring conflicts that may come close to us in the family unit, by those who do not know or want to have anything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Divisions among people over the Person of Christ can be heart-breaking, but may not be able to be avoided. We belong to Him, and what is His will is our priority. A fulfilled life is one that is lived for the Lord and the kingdom of God. In eternity the blessings from that choice will make it worth it all.

To receive and welcome representatives of the Lord is to receive Him. For us to receive others do not only refer to important people or religious leaders. It also means, that when we show acts of kindness toward ordinary people and children; that is of great value to the Lord. He reckons that, as done to Himself, kindness represents Him. A just recompense will be given by God that

lasts forever. What we do for the Lord, is as if He did it to bring blessing to others. A welcome to us is welcome to Him. To receive our message of salvation is to receive the Savior's message. The smallest act of service and kindness to one of the Lord's servants is the same as if it were done for Him personally.

MATTHEW 11

The Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. All He did and said made it plain who He is. People have a right to expect those who represent our Lord Jesus, to be like Him. Wisdom is able to be demonstrated, and so is our faith in Christ. When we have got good news to tell and pass on, it can often be seen by the expressions on our faces and even the changing tones of our voices. People who do not know Christ, need to be able to see through us, that real faith in a real Person, makes real living a joy; even in times of difficulty and opposition.

Matthew 11. The King's answer to His forerunner.

Message to John the Baptist, v.1-6

The Lord Jesus Christ was going to go to other places, and had finished giving instructions to those apostles who would spread out over the country with the message, "The kingdom is near." The Lord went to other cities and followed the same practice of teaching and preaching publicly. The "heralding" of the Gospel follows the same pattern when we are told to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." That means publicly heralding the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The news of His preaching reached John who had been imprisoned by Herod. John had condemned Herod for his blatant and open sin with his brother's wife.

There were disciples of John in other parts of the empire who knew what repentance was but had never put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So perhaps some early assembly believers who were Jews and were in different countries had some of the same questions about the kingdom of God that John and his disciples had. John's disciples were loyal to him and were able to maintain contact with him in his imprisonment and could speak for him to Jesus. He knew that Messiah would come and do wonders, but he thought that Jesus would also bring judgment on the wicked, and bring in the kingdom the Jews were waiting for. He didn't understand or know, about the second coming of Christ when He would rule and bring judgment on sinners.

The ministry of Jesus was very different from that which John, and the Jewish people, thought would happen when the Messiah came to earth. The message Jesus gave to the disciples of John was to tell him what they would "hear and see." Prophecies were being fulfilled. The Gospel was being preached. Miracles of healing were taking place, and then to crown the message in a way that John would recognize without a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, He said, "The dead are raised up." John knew that was something only God can do. The forerunner would be assured that his work was right and was truly done. John had fulfilled the prophecies regarding himself and the Lord Jesus Christ, and even more; the evidence was all right out in the open for the nation to see. The identity of Jesus as the Messiah was obvious, so John was encouraged to not doubt what he did was right and that what Jesus was doing, was in the plans of God.

The encouragement to John's faith is an encouragement to the faith of all believers. We are limited as to knowing all God is doing, but we don't reject the fact of who the Lord Jesus is because He doesn't do things the way we thought He would. We are spiritually blessed with life now and forever. It is impossible for us with our human limitations to understand all God does, but we are able to put our unreserved trust in Him for who He is.

Tribute to John the Baptist, v.7-19

The Lord made it plain to the people that John was not a wavering person because he asked those questions. He was a man who was solid in his faith and strong in his convictions. He was not a religious politician nor was he a huckster of religion but was a man with a mission to fulfill. He was not only a prophet but was a fulfillment of prophecy as the forerunner of the Messiah.

The three questions Jesus asked the multitudes of people who were there, were easily answered. The first two are obviously answered with a resounding "No!" That would be a reflection on the contrast of John with those who were "religious advisers," who claimed authority over the people. The answer to the third question is a resounding, "Yes!" He was a prophet, but more was the forerunner of the Messiah. No one was greater than John the Baptist in his personhood and calling, but he was still outside the coming church which is the body of Christ and the Messianic kingdom of the future. Those who would follow the Lord Jesus Christ were given the privilege of being immersed into the Body of Christ, the church. John was the friend of the bridegroom. Those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ would be part of the Bride.

In the kingdom, everyone has more spiritual privileges than John, because they know the Lord Jesus personally as their own Savior. They have experienced the blessing of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for them personally and, even though He was buried, they know Him personally as the risen Lord who has ascended into heaven and is there as our Mediator at this very moment. Those who oppose the kingdom of God do so violently with real opposition, and those who seize the opportunity to enter the kingdom, do so with enthusiasm, like the publicans, sinners, and harlots.

Violence is sometimes real open opposition against the Gospel, and it can also mean that a great movement has begun bringing people to God that began with John's preaching. Some people expected the Lord to overthrow the domination of Rome by violence. To enter the kingdom of God by faith takes more courage, faith, and determination than to fight. John was the last Old Testament prophet and is referred to as Elias bringing in the day of the Lord. John did not fulfill all that was written about Elijah. That won't be fulfilled until the future kingdom comes.

The contrast between the reaction of the people toward John and Jesus is that of children playing the games of weddings and funerals. Like peevish children, they didn't know what game to play, so they wouldn't play at all. They thought John had a demon in him, and because Jesus didn't do what their social customs dictated, they considered Him to be an out-of-control person. The wisdom of both of them was demonstrated by the results of the ministry and preaching of them both. Those cynical religious leaders were challenged by the Lord for their self-centered complacency. They were inconsistent regarding God and His truth because of the way they wanted to live. Therefore, they have no excuse for their guilt.

Condemnation of favored cities, v.20-24

The whole area of Galilee had been favored by all the mighty works the Lord Jesus Christ did there. The miracles and the healing of the sick and diseased people, made it obvious to everyone, that He was no ordinary man. His preaching was so impacting that they finally could understand the whole purpose of the law and why it was so significant to the Jews. His teaching gave an understanding of what is expected of those who know God and obey His word. Those places were certainly favored. And yet, even for all that was done there and what most of the people had participated in, one way or another; they still only considered Him to be a “wonder-working” man. They didn’t accept all of those blessings as a ‘time of visitation’ by God.

Tyre and Sidon were laid waste by Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander because of their wickedness and open sinfulness. God’s judgments were allowed to come on them by His own sovereign will. Capernaum, the city where Jesus lived, had the greatest opportunity of all and would have the greatest judgment because they would not recognize that God was dwelling among them “found in fashion as a man.” One wrote in poetic form, “Never soul in hell shall burn, who has not had a chance to turn. Whether it be a pagan wild or born a Christian’s favored child; God will not suffer them to go, unwarned to everlasting woe. For nothing but rejected light, shall doom a soul to endless night.”

An open invitation of Grace, v.25-30

In His open prayer to His Father, the Lord Jesus gave an explanation of the attitude of those who ignore the fact that God is in Christ, “reconciling the world unto Himself.” Intellect and deliberate spiritual ignorance, keep people from accepting and recognizing that which faith in Christ gives. The Gospel can be understood by everyone who is willing to listen. To the degree of their capability, the Spirit of God reveals divine truth to little children as well as educated adults. It is on the basis of their acceptance of the truth He gives, that He saves them. God doesn’t reveal His truth to the worldly-wise people who think their way is right. They are arrogant in their professed knowledge of how God works and saves souls. To accept God’s salvation by simple faith is to humbly receive what God says, and trust Him. God reveals Himself to us through His Son who was sent to save us from our sins.

God’s good pleasure is the reason why faith is exercised by those who hear His word. The Lord Jesus Christ is identified as unique from everyone else because He is the Son of the Father in heaven. His authority to do all He did was a testimony to the unique fellowship between them. Others can come into the knowledge of God when the Son reveals that to them by His grace. Spiritual understanding is dependent upon the grace of God.

That knowledge and understanding of God are offered to all who believe in verse twenty-eight. All are invited to come to Him. The burden of sin, the demands of a godless-Christless religion, opposition to all who seek the Lord, and the weariness of the soul, are taken; when one comes to Christ. His authority is open to those who are weary and burdened. The opportunity to have rest of soul and the lifting of man-made obligations brings the relief that only He can give. He goes further and offers His yoke that links us to Him in a positive way. The life of a believer may not be what we want naturally, but when we are connected to our Lord, we are participating in life with Him. His strength makes the burdens light. We can even have joy in times of sorrow.

Choose a discipline and the life of discipleship, and the instructions in that commitment will bring rest and assurance that a burdened soul wants. The Teacher Himself is meek and lowly in heart. His is the strength of character and wisdom; the graciousness of humility and practical experience that we need. He does not pass on unfelt truth and He expects us to pass it on to others. There are obligations followers of Christ have, but the yoke of faithfulness and fellowship, and the burdens of preaching the Gospel, are not hard to bear. "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." We can surely rejoice in the Lord!

MATTHEW 12

Jesus kept the law both in letter and spirit. The accusations against Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes were based on their own interpretations of the law and opinions. The Lord Jesus was the True Teacher of the law and practiced what it actually said and meant. He did not submit to the opinions of professed law-keepers who were concerned only with the outward forms of their religion. When the Lord came, His authority was over the Sabbath because He was the Lord of the Sabbath as well as the Sovereign over everything in heaven and earth.

As the Servant of God prophesied in Isaiah; He fulfilled the ministry for which He was sent. Israel and the nations of the earth are blessed because of all He did. Both mercy and justice were carried out in the life and ministry of Jesus when He was here. Usually, mercy and justice are quite separated; but not when He fulfilled the law and dealt with the fundamental problem of sin on our behalf.

The Lord Jesus brought the kingdom of God to earth by the Holy Spirit as an invasion of righteousness, holiness, and light into this place of wickedness, spiritual decay, and darkness. The challenge today is for people to recognize Jesus as Lord, and to come to Him in repentance and faith. Loyalty to Him by those who have trusted in Him as their own Savior brings us into spiritual relationships that are as binding as family and physical relationships.

Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath, v.1-14

Pharisees had close to forty different categories of things that were forbidden to be engaged in on the sabbath, which was based on their own customs and interpretations of the law. To desecrate the sabbath was a flagrant act of disobedience to the law of Moses, and the Lord Jesus Christ did not do that, nor did his disciples. The Pharisees tried to make Jesus out to be a law-breaker so they could accuse Him of wrongdoing. The reply of the Lord was to give the scriptural and spiritual understanding of the law. Human needs and responsible occupation, as in the case of priests; are more important than how things look, opinions, or even the temple itself. The important part of the law is whose law it is. The Pharisees were not seeking truth. They were heartless critics who were jealous of the Lord and were determined to stop people from paying heed to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ pointed out to them and to everyone, how important it is to keep our values straight. Right thinking, guides to right actions. It was a legal privilege to pick heads of grain and eat it when passing by. That did not constitute work no matter what the Pharisees thought. What is right or wrong to eat was not up to interpretation but was clarified in the situation in which the need was found and how it was able to be met. The showbread was for the

priests to eat, but extreme need overrules regulation so the priests gave David bread to eat that had been on the table of showbread. Service for God continued on the sabbath as priests went about their daily work duties. Sacrifices were to be made daily.

The work of Christ is the reality to which sacrifices only pointed, and the Lord of the sabbath was here. The Pharisees were challenged as to which is more important: the form of worship by the people, or the people who worshipped; the attitude of the worshippers, or the actions. Pharisees didn't understand the laws they kept. Proper hearts are more valuable than external formalities.

It is our responsibility to meet the needs of a person who has been in need for a long time. Human need is well above the confines of the law. The Lord made it clear that He, the Son of Man (the only other person who used that title was Stephen), is the Master of the Sabbath. His disciples were using the sabbath properly by following Him. On a different sabbath day, the Lord Jesus healed the man with the withered arm, demonstrating that to do good in healing, is of more value than carrying out religious forms. His obligation was to meet needs when mercy was needed. That principle is consistent with all we do in our lives. People are of more value than sheep. To not do good when we can, is to do harm. The understanding the Lord gave of the purpose of the law, filled the Pharisees with bitter rage, which the Lord had said was the same as murder. In fact, even on the sabbath, they began plans to murder Him.

Opposition is to be expected when we hold the word of God to be of more importance than what people say about it. There will be opposition to the biblical practices of an assembly when they are not what religionists think suits their plans and opinions, and the way they do things in the various churches around.

Jesus is God's Perfect Servant, v.15-21

The Lord Jesus didn't come as a military Messiah to conquer empires of men, but as a humble gentle Servant as was prophesied by Isaiah. He avoided conflict because He had a lot more to do before the time came for Him to go to Calvary and die for our sins. He healed all the people in that place. He did not want publicity as the Messiah, because He came to save His people from their sins. He came to suffer for us that He might bring us to God. The time will come in the future when He returns to set up His kingdom. Then the might of the Messiah will be felt worldwide. There is an appropriate way for us to serve the Lord, which includes not only what we do for Him and how we carry out the commission; but timing is important in divine service.

Our pattern for service in this present day is to follow the way our Lord Jesus went about His Father's business. He served as Jehovah's perfect Servant with the quiet dignity of a perfect and holy Man among men. He identified Himself with us as the One who was able and willing to take our place. When we serve others, there is dignity and integrity that is expected of those who represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus overcame the forces of darkness by the Spirit of God, v.22-37.

The casting out of demons pointed forward to the casting of Satan into the lake of fire. The act of casting out demons was proof that the kingdom of God was here. The accusations against the Lord Jesus exposed the foolishness of those who accused Him. The Lord knows the thoughts of

the mind and the intentions of our emotions. We cannot hide anything from Him. The side effects of demon possession in the case written about in this passage, were blindness and muteness. All three were dealt with at one time by the Lord Jesus Christ when He healed this man. Satan's power and control over men have no power over the authority and power of Jesus.

Strangely, there was a negative connotation in the question that was asked, that showed unbelief was in the people in spite of what they saw with their own eyes. The charge of satanic power was refuted publicly in a way that no one could answer or deny. Dividing leads to self-destruction, and it was obvious to those who were watching, that the Lord was frustrating the works of Satan. Some associates of the Pharisees apparently practiced exorcism, reminding us that God can use whoever He wants, to do whatever He wants. The ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ was proof that the kingdom of God had come into Satan's domain. Jesus was victorious over Satan in the wilderness and He is superior in every way.

There is no neutral place; no neutral ground, regarding our Lord Jesus. Neutrality is impossible. One is either for Christ or against Him. He is either accepted or rejected by people. To turn one's back on the striving of the Holy Spirit; to refuse to repent of one's sins; to refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – is to make it impossible for one to be forgiven of their sins. That is what blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is. To state the work of the Holy Spirit through the Lord Jesus Christ is a work of the devil, is to commit an unpardonable sin. The atonement provided by the Lord Jesus is the power that takes away the guilt of sin. There is no inadequacy in the atonement. Conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come, is the work of the Holy Spirit in every sinner. To reject that work of the Spirit leaves no way for a person to be forgiven. We are not able to read the hearts of other people, so we cannot say when a person has gone too far in rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, determined unbelief cannot be ignored. What we say is usually what is in our hearts. The Holy Spirit gives a new nature with new attitudes and new motives that are expressed by our speech.

Attitudes, actions, and words are to be consistently good when one is in the kingdom of God. Wicked words and sinful actions come from wicked hearts. Holy words and righteous actions come from the hearts of those who love God and their neighbors, and they are filled with the Spirit to serve the Lord. The Righteous Judge is capable of knowing what is behind every "idle word." He evaluates and makes a verdict from what He knows.

Jesus rejected the demand to give further signs, v.38-50

Some words and questions made by the Pharisees were absurd. Not all questions people ask deserve an answer. People like those Pharisees that demanded a sign, were deliberately blind. They refused to believe what they had actually seen. They had discounted all the miracles Jesus did as if they were some works of a mere man. They wanted a sign that didn't require faith. They only wanted something that they could see. To reject the proofs of who Jesus is that we already have; makes any other proofs of no value either. We have plenty of evidence in the scriptures of who our Lord Jesus Christ is. The three days and three nights in the tomb, are all the evidence that is needed; because He rose from among the dead and is alive forevermore.

As a nation, the Jews were an adulterous generation that was spiritually unfaithful to the Lord. They just didn't want Him. Nineveh repented when Jonah in a sense, rose from the dead when he

was in the fish's belly. The actions of Israel were worse because they were unrepentant before the evidence of His power and authority over sickness, the powers of darkness, and death. He has raised from the dead Himself, but they wouldn't believe in Him, even though He was greater than Jonah. The queen of Sheba simply saw and believed. Her interest in divine wisdom was in contrast to the unbelief of the Jews. Our response by faith is what is expected of us, as we see the evidence of the One in whom we have believed.

Israel was in a dangerous condition. They had rejected John and Jesus but also had rejected idolatry. They were "empty, swept and garnished." Cleaning up one's life without God gives Satan an open invitation to enter and deceive the unfulfilled and compliant person. The Lord came to deliver from evil, but when he is rejected, an empty soul is more open to evil than before.

When someone has a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, that is a binding relationship. In fact, it is as binding as family and physical relationships. The earthly family of the Lord Jesus was concerned about Him, and when He asked that question about who are His mother and brothers; the question startled people. It was unexpected and it awakened in them a new understanding of what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To do the will of our heavenly Father is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW 13

By the eyes of faith, we can see beyond the present to the end result of the kingdom of heaven. We can see today that both the wheat and the weeds growing together, as counterfeit Christianity is rampant worldwide. Those who claim to be Christians don't have evidence of Christ-likeness in their lives and consequently, people reject what is real as well as what is false. The expectations of unbelievers are that Christians should be different than they are, but for some unfortunate reason, professing Christians seem to think we have to be living like the world, "in order to win them to Christ." Christ was different from those around Him, and it was that uniqueness that drew needy people to come to Him.

A mustard seed is so small it seems insignificant, but the results will be seen and are unmistakable. The same is true of yeast. The impact of a little bit of leaven may take a while to be seen, but it will become obvious when the time of judgment comes. Justice will be rightly served and judgment will be carried out.

The value of the kingdom of heaven is hidden from most people, but to the Lord, it was worth much. "Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor; that ye through His poverty might be made rich." The kingdom of heaven had much that is hidden presently, but that will be clarified at the end of the age. Then the Righteous Judge will pass His judgment on everyone and everything. Hidden things will be made plain. Motives and actions will be exposed for what they were. Authentic faith will be evident, compared to that which was only forms and formalism.

The kingdom of heaven seems quite insignificant to most people at this time. But the value of efforts put forth to promote kingdom work; is worth more than all we could ever accumulate or

ever hope to be. To admit to our limitations of knowledge about all that is at stake in the kingdom of heaven is as important, and maybe more important than what we do know about it.

Descriptions of separation between the righteous and the wicked are very important and impacting. Sometimes we may not realize the seriousness and lasting effects of what we do as we serve the Lord. Those who are saved will be forever with the Lord and will be useful and happy in that service for eternal ages. There is no evidence that the wicked simply cease to exist when they die. Rather, there are brief descriptions of torment and anguish that are human experiences and emotions, and these last forever. People in this day and age are offended by such teaching, in a way similar to those who knew Jesus from a child in His hometown of Nazareth.

The message of the kingdom of heaven, and the response, v.1-23

A parable is a comparison or an illustration of something else. The word “parable,” means placing beside. There are thirty parables in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These are stories drawn from natural or familiar happenings, to teach spiritual truths about God and His kingdom. Usually, the Lord only taught one truth at a time when using a parable, and usually, the point is quite obvious. The parable of a rich farmer who said to himself, “I have many goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;” points out the value of the kingdom of God, and the foolishness of depending on material wealth instead of trusting God.

The first parable in this group of seven has the purpose of both revealing and concealing the truth. The purpose of hiding the truth was because of unbelief. This happened in a similar way when Isaiah was prophesying in Isaiah 6:9-10. This parable, which is called by many, the parable of the sower; has quite a lot of symbolism. The seed is the word of God. The different ground represents different kinds of hearers. This is actually the parable of different hearers instead of the sower. The context of the parable indicates when details are important.

Parables are meant to be understood within the main message the Lord Jesus was giving. Its intent is to make hearers understand in a clearer way the truth He was teaching. On some occasions, the parables were given so that those who had rejected the Lord, couldn't understand because they were “outside” the place of sincerely wanting to know the truth. They had already made up their minds to reject Him and didn't want to be confused by the truth. They would not understand the plainest message by their own choice, because they refused to accept the truth no matter what it was. Those who have “ears to hear,” believe and understand the point of a parable. When a person is open to the truth, they will see it clearly and respond to the message the Lord gave.

The “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” had begun to be unfolded when the Lord Jesus Christ came. Many in the past, including the prophets, wanted to know what they prophesied about. Even when it came to salvation, which they could have by faith, they could only “see through a glass darkly.” In this parable, the seed that fell by the wayside relates to the unresponsive hearers who had no interest in the word of God. The stony ground hearers were emotionally affected and enthusiastic when they first heard the word of God presented and explained. But they could not accept the spiritual values contained in the Gospel message. Those who had thorn roots in the ground were people who had divided allegiance. They wanted to mix the world and the kingdom

of God together but there is no way they mix. Those who are called good ground hearers are those with prepared hearts and who will receive the word of God to the capacity they have,

The point of this parable has to do with the soil in which the seed is planted. Even though the parable is called the parable of the sower; it really has to do with the seed of the word of God, and what it produces in the hearers. This is why this parable is so important. This parable encourages those who sow the seed of the word of God to keep at the work. We cannot make people believe the word of God, but the Holy Spirit does bring life to those who sincerely seek the truth. We are responsible to give the word of God to the people. They are responsible for what they do with it.

Characteristics of the kingdom of heaven, and their effects, v.24-46

The teaching regarding the kingdom of heaven in the parable of **the tares** in the wheat field is not teaching that the farmer is negligent. Rather, a warning is given that there are enemies of the Gospel who will seek to ruin the harvest of souls in the kingdom. When we know that is happening, and we certainly do know that fact; what are we to do? At first, the response to the preaching of the word of God seems to be quite widespread and we are greatly encouraged. As time passes, there doesn't seem to be anything of a spiritual nature in some who make professions of salvation. They stay with the believers and seem to want to participate in the social aspects of assembly life, and they want to associate with the Lord's people, but there is no evidence of growth and fruitfulness. There are some things that are beyond our capacity to discern, and so it is our place to leave the dealing with others who don't really show lasting signs of a fruitful Christian life, to the Lord to deal with in His own time.

The day of reckoning is yet in the future. First impressions are not the criteria for discernment. It is by their fruits we know who is real and who is not. But the challenges we might make to people who claim to be children of God can be way off base. So, we need to leave the final results to the Lord who knows the thoughts and intents of each heart. If negative effects come from "fruitless" people that divide the Lord's people, we do have scriptural precedents to follow to deal with that problem. Determining reality is different from dealing with effects on the Lord's people that can seriously hurt them and the testimony of an assembly.

Human discernment is limited as to the reality of true saving faith. God allows unbelievers to live side by side with believers. They may look alike in lifestyle, religion, morality, and righteous living, but there is no real spiritual life and fruit. Many people look and act like Christians, and they think they are. Man looks at the outward appearance; God looks at the heart.

The kingdom of heaven may seem small, but small beginnings produce great results when God gives life to the seed. The **mustard seed** was deliberately planted in the world, and though it is so insignificant as to seem valueless, it does produce what the original intention was. Israel as a people is spread among the nations and in a sense is unknown at present. But the day will come when it is known worldwide. Small groups of believers throughout the world are surrounded by those who seek to claim what belongs to God. Agents of evil will take advantage of the kingdom of heaven to promote their own interests, and what may appear to be the kingdom of heaven may not be so even though the crowds may be large and the growth is very rapid.

The **leaven** of false doctrine may be introduced into that which represents the kingdom of heaven. The impact of sin may be hidden for some time but it has a way of permeating into everything. Sin has permeated society and can ruin a nation as well as an assembly of believers. The whole world suffers from the pervasive insertion of sin into the world. We need to be aware of the fact that evil can come into the very house of God. It was only to the disciples, not the multitude, that the Lord explained the symbolic parables that answer the quotation from Psalm 78.

Interpretations were given to the disciples regarding the major points of the parable of the tares. The devil will promote counterfeit believers to hinder the work of God, He gives real abundant life that is fruitful to those who have grown from good seed. When the time of judgment comes, everything will be revealed for what it really is.

The children of Israel for the most part, are hidden at this time in the world. They chose to reject our Lord Jesus Christ when He was here, and so Israel has not had a prominent place as far as the nations of the world are concerned. That has changed to a degree in recent times, but they still have times of suffering ahead. When Christ returns again at His second coming, that **hidden treasure** will be brought out for the world and will be displayed as the peculiar treasure our Lord has had His eye on through all of the centuries.

Similar to the hidden treasure, is the **pearl of great price** that is the church composed of men and women God has saved all over the world, and made a people for His name. That pearl has been being formed for the last two thousand years and will soon be brought to full size and the One who bought it at such a great price, “the precious blood of Christ,” will claim it for His own purchased possession and make that pearl His bride. No sacrifice was too great for Him to gain that which is of incomparable worth.

A review of the kingdom of heaven and the consequences, v.47-58

The concluding section of this chapter is almost like a review of the fundamental truths the Lord Jesus Christ was teaching. The parable of **the net** went over again the fact that some actions have to be done at a later time, rather than taking hasty actions and making quick decisions that could bring unfortunate results. It takes more time to act with discernment than the pressures of a very busy time allow. The Lord knows who belongs to Him by faith in Christ and will deal with those who profess to be children of God but have never been “made alive in Christ.”

Even though we may think we understand all we are taught or read; the truth is not really learned well until we can pass it on in a way that is consistent with what the word of God says. It has to be applied in a way that is appropriate to the need and the occasion. Any application we make cannot be contradictory to the interpretation of the word of God as it has been given to us.

Familiarity can bring contempt, or at least has a tendency to put down the words and actions of one who is well-known to us. Even if that person has been faithful to God and to His word; people who know us well are inclined to not pay much attention to what we say. Community members of Nazareth, and even family members of the Lord Jesus, would not accept what He taught, even though it was the absolute truth. They knew Him merely as one of them, rather than the One who came into the world to save them.

The people of His hometown had previously attempted to murder Him by throwing Him over a cliff, and again when He came back, they rejected Him. They had heard His clear teaching and had seen His power in healing, but it didn't fit their preconceived notion of who the Messiah would be and what actions He would take.

To reject and disrespect the Lord Jesus Christ is to be left alone by God to face the consequences of the choices we make. The people of Nazareth chose to ignore and reject the Lord, so He did not do many miracles there when faith in Him was missing. Those who do not have faith in the Lord Jesus, and reject the truth He gives, will live and die without hope. Unbelief is a soul-damning sin. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God."

MATTHEW 14

Three significant incidents are recorded in this chapter that show how unique our Lord Jesus Christ is as a perfect real Man, and also how authoritative He is as the Almighty God. The first twelve verses contain the recounting of the death of John the Baptist and how it affected different persons. The feeding of the five thousand men plus women and children reminds us of the compassion of the Lord Jesus. The storm on the Sea of Galilee gives the response of the disciples as Jesus walked on the water.

In a practical way, the reading of this passage in the new assemblies of the early church would have awakened in them a sense of the importance of the One to whom they were gathered, and the importance of their work for God in the place where He called them to represent Him. We will be wise if we take this same attitude toward the reading of this chapter and ask ourselves: what is the appropriate attitude to take toward the death of a beloved brother or sister? How can I best serve the Lord in what seems like an impossible situation without an answer that I can see to the big problem? Do I really believe the Lord still does things that are beyond anything that we could ask or think?

The burden of a guilty conscience, v.1-12

When God begins to do spiritual work in an area, there are many "principalities and powers" that take notice and will seek to hinder and/or stop completely the work of God. The miracles of the Lord Jesus, awakened in the conscience of Herod Antipas a sense of guilt as he went back over the recent past and his dealings with John the Baptist. It may have been fear that gripped his soul as he thought of John coming back from the dead to confront him. The writing of Josephus, a secular historian in the time of Christ, in "Jewish Antiquities;" writes quite a commentary regarding John the Baptist. He gives an agnostic's opinion of the events surrounding John's arrest that is of interest in understanding the time of Herod Antipas' reign.

John rebuked Herod for his immoral sins by marrying his sister-in-law. Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. She married her uncle Philip who lived in Rome. When Herod Antipas went to Rome, he persuaded Herodias to leave his half-brother, Herod Philip, and marry him. Marriage to a brother's wife, while he was living, was forbidden by law. Herodias was an implacable woman who was not below putting her own daughter in a debased performance for the lascivious entertainment of wicked people.

When Herod made a stupid offer from his perverted mind, he likely never thought that such a gory request would come from a woman's mind. Deep-seated hatred has no limits to the depth to which it can go. When the request for John the Baptist's head to be placed before him on a platter was made by Salome, Herod did not want to be embarrassed in front of his guests. Consequently, he was pressured to do what he knew was wrong, but did it anyway. That display of the evil of human pride in contrast to what is righteous, has been told all over the world as an example of peer pressure. Strangely, similar actions take place often in the lives of people who are more concerned about what people think of them than what God thinks of them. When John the Baptist's followers had buried his body, perhaps Herod thought he was done with John, but he had a guilty conscience that wouldn't go away.

At a later time, when the Lord Jesus was sent to him from Pilate; he wanted Jesus to do a miracle for him at his command. The Lord Jesus Christ didn't speak a word to him. "No John, no Jesus." To reject the messenger is to reject the Master. I imagine the piercing eyes of the Lord looking into his dark soul, must have made his guilty conscience burn even more. Even at that, he still never learned the need of facing guilt and repent of his awful sins. Four years later Herod was eaten of worms as he spoke to fawning people, and he dropped down dead in front of them.

The functions of the human conscience can be good or bad. It is the inner judge of moral issues that every human being has been given by God. The conscience can be good and pure; or evil, defiled and seared. Our conscience serves us as a witness, an accuser, and an upholder. It can be a server of good for us, and a source of joy. One's conscience be dead, as in the case of an adulterous woman according to Proverbs 30:20. There are limitations to the conscience that may need purging. It may be subject to others' opinions or differ from them. We do know that the conscience is fallible and cannot be counted on in every action, especially if we have allowed it to be seared.

The Compassion of the Benevolent Savior, v.13-21

There are times when we need to be alone to deal with a loss due to grief or for some other emotional reason. It is not always wise to let grief be observed by other people. When grief has been dealt with; then we need to return to the work God gives us, rather than prolong feelings of loss over which we have no control. The work we do is important, and it may be our losses make us more qualified to be a help to other people. People need someone who has compassion, instead of a hard-hearted person who has a tendency to be "cut and dried."

Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand would emphasize to the new believers in those early assemblies; who the Lord Jesus was. When they heard this event being read, they would realize the One who fed the children of Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven; was the same One who created bread and fish in an act of compassion and love for His people today. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This event happened a year before the crucifixion of the Lord in the season of the Passover feast. It happened in the evening when the need of the people would have been the greatest. The Lord didn't make a suggestion to His disciples when He said, "Give ye them to eat." Tests of faith come from the Lord at unexpected times and in unexpected ways. It would have given the disciples as well as the readers of Matthew's Gospel, an awakening awareness of what it means

to be associated with Christ. Andrew was the one disciple who had an awareness of the Lord's compassion and interest, as well as His power. To have brought a boy with five small loaves of bread and two fish was in itself an act of confidence in the Lord; even though he didn't know what could really be done by himself if he acted in faith.

Both divine power and love are demonstrated in this remarkable act of compassion toward hungry people. There may be times when we tell the Lord what little we have to offer Him, but it is then we need to listen to what He says to us and act on what He commands no matter what it is. In times like that, we find great joy in what He is willing to do through us. What we have to offer Him may seem very simple and commonplace, but when it is given gladly to our Lord, we can trust Him to use it for His own glory. Our contribution to the work of the Lord or a specific need, may not be able to be very big, but God can use what we give Him from a full heart. Time, treasure, and talent all can be used in the service of the Lord. He can multiply what we give.

How touching and how significant it is, that the Lord gave God thanks for the bread and fish. He blessed it to the use of thousands of hungry people, and its impact has been felt by those of little faith down through the centuries when we tell others of the power and authority of our Lord. What He was then, He still is now.

The authority of the Supreme Master, v.22-36

There seemed to be an urgency on the part of the Lord Jesus to get His disciples to go toward the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Most likely it was because the people would attempt to make Him their king; which wasn't why He came the first time. He came to seek and save the lost, and to open the door to the doctrine and principles of the kingdom. People want the results of kingdom blessing without being born again into the kingdom of God.

Time alone with God is never wasted time. A secluded place to pray like on a mountain alone is very significant to any person who loves the Lord and wants to spend time in prayer and fellowship with the Father in heaven. Evenings can be as important a time to pray as the morning. Preparation times are always more important than presentation times. From that mountain, the Lord could see the sea before Him and the storm that was slowing the journey across the water that was making the rowing time long and hard for the disciples. The distance from the shore when the Lord walked on the water near the boat, was three miles from shore or more. Between three and six o'clock in the morning when He drew near them, meant they would have been hard at work rowing into the headwind, for nearly twelve hours.

Doing the will of God from the heart is not always an easy work in which we are involved. If we get our focus on the circumstances around us, we may give in to despair and discouragement. It was the sight of the Savior walking on the water that caused their fear, far more than the storm. The appearance of the Lord in times of stress can create both fear and faith. Fear, because often the way the Lord brings answers is so astounding that we realize we are on holy ground, and the fear of the Lord leaves us no room for self-satisfaction when the result of a matter is obviously by God's grace alone.

Our focus needs to be on the Object of our faith and His will, at all times. He knows the end from the beginning. His power over gravity, wind, and waves was fearful to the disciples. The

Lord's voice and words were more reassuring than the sight of Him. The need for faith to be in Christ alone is fundamental to our security. Supernatural power from our Lord is what we need for every work in which He wants us to be engaged.

As time goes by and life is lived in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, faith becomes a greater reality to us and there is an ever-increasing realization that it is God who is working in us to will and do His good pleasure. The power of Jesus in contrast to the failing faith of the disciples; made them declare for the first time, "Thou art the Son of God," giving Him His full title when they worshipped Him. Their confession came from assurance, not from fear and the same is true with us. We know our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God. He is God. He is God our Savior.

Gennesaret was a fertile farming area a few miles distant from Capernaum. There had been opportunities for healing before, and now another time of blessing came. When God comes near in a time of visitation, that may be the time of final opportunity. He heals and forgives. He saves and blesses. He has compassion and authority. He has power and grace. He has authority over nature and men. He is the One in whom we place our faith and whom we worship and serve. Weak faith in a strong Savior is far more valuable than a strong faith in a weak man.

MATTHEW 15

To the Jewish believers in the assemblies in the early days of this day of grace, reading the Gospel that Matthew wrote, would have been very important. They would have learned from this chapter that the Lord Jesus Christ interpreted the law correctly in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees. They had led people astray by their teaching and adapting the practices of the books of Moses known as the Torah, to suit their own opinions. The purity regulations they insisted on, were not for the purposes of hygiene, but for ceremonial reasons. The word of God is where we learn what must be taught and practiced, rather than the traditions of men. Evil thoughts and actions are what defile people.

It would have been important to early Christians to know the Lord Jesus went beyond the boundaries of Israel to Phoenicia and there connected with a Gentile woman who had faith in Him. The fact that He healed the daughter of the woman, and then in another place fed Gentiles as well as Jews with miracle bread and fish when He went back to the east side of the Sea of Galilee; would have opened their minds and hearts to reach out to others. The mixed population of Decapolis was those who listened to His teaching for three days. Gentiles were willing to put their trust in the Jewish Jesus; the Messiah of the Jews. When we bring all of our needs and burdens to the Lord, He will not despise nor disappoint those who put their faith in Him.

The conflict between truth and traditions, v.1-20

Traditions had become the interpretive guides to the scriptures that teaching rabbis passed on to their students and those who became "elders" of the people. A delegation of scribes and Pharisees went from Jerusalem to Galilee to check out the Lord Jesus and to join with the local Pharisees and scribes to harass the Lord. The scribes and Pharisees put their own views above the revelation of God through His word, and yet they claimed to be following God. Religious hypocrisy puts human ideas above divine truth. Those traditions had been allowed to override the

law as written in the scriptures. It was for that reason they harassed the disciples of Jesus for not washing their hands before eating.

What they were referring to was not washing for the purpose of hygiene and to have physically clean hands for eating a meal, but some of the old rabbis had made a ceremony of some sort about hand washing. The Lord Jesus Christ responded to the conflict they had made, by contrasting the traditions of men with the commandment of God. Some traditions violated the law, and the Lord Jesus called them on it.

One of those they practiced allowed them to simply make a declaration that the “Corban vow” released them from their legal obligations to their parents. At first glance that vow seemed to be a worthy action that made those who looked on, think that you were giving money to the temple. That would give them a certain degree of respect and prestige among people who didn’t see beyond the giving. Actually, the money they gave, which could after be used as they wanted; should have gone to caring for their parents who were old and needy. They pretended to be performing a duty to God in place of fulfilling their duty to their parents. By doing that, they violated the law. God does not want what belongs to parents.

“This people,” was Israel throughout their history. Those hypocritical actions were criticized by Isaiah because the Jews were practicing the same things in his day as they were when the Lord Jesus Christ was here. To act religiously without sincerity is an act of hypocrisy. To claim to honor God when our heart is not in it, nor is our worship from the heart; means absolutely nothing. Those people, like many today, knew a lot about the Bible but not what honors God. The inner qualities of a person are the measure of who they really are.

The Lord called the multitude to come to hear Him when He wanted them to understand something that affected them all. Moral defilement is spiritual, not physical. Food is not moral or spiritual. What defiles a person is a rebellious heart that is against God. To be unduly concerned about the food we eat is to strain at an act that isn’t essential. The food we eat isn’t what makes us morally unclean. It is what we allow in our minds, and what our spirits feed on that is important to our cleanness or uncleanness. The principles of the word of God are how we know what is right, what is questionable, and what is wrong. The outward appearance of a person is not nearly as important as what a person is like in their heart. Our spiritual appetite needs to be fed with good scriptural food.

The disciples seemed like they were worried about offending those influential Pharisees from headquarters in Jerusalem. The disciples needed to know that the doctrines of human traditions, needed to be rooted up and they will ultimately be destroyed. Those who taught false doctrine were to be abandoned. They were blind people leading blind people, and both the blind leaders and blind followers would fall into the pit.

Parables can sometimes be difficult sayings that the hearers don’t understand. That is what Peter was asking about when he questioned the Lord about the things that go in that do not defile, in contrast with that which comes from within. Normally, spiritually enlightened people would have understood that food isn’t what defiles the soul. Sinful words and deeds find their beginning in sinful thoughts. After sinful thoughts, come the violations of the commandments and those

blasphemies that pollute the soul of the one who has them within and the ones who hear the words that are expressed. What we think, is who we are. What we take in will soon settle in our hearts and minds. That is why it is so important that we constantly take in God's word.

Connection between Jews and Gentiles, v.21-28

It would seem like when the Lord went all the way up to Phoenicia to where the "Canaanite" woman came to Him; He was going there to relieve the tension the Pharisees and scribes were creating. Most likely it was because there was a needy woman there, and He wanted his disciples to learn that God's blessings go beyond those of Israel. The woman whose daughter was "grievously vexed with a devil," knew who Jesus was – "Son of David." She persistently called out to Him for help, but He remained silent for quite some time. This really bothered the disciples, but the Lord waited until they spoke to Him about her and expressed their prejudice. He told them His work at this time was with the people of Israel, but in the same way, there are exceptions to the law in certain cases, so there were in this case.

In her urgency and faith, she came to Jesus and worshipped Him, and then made her request directly to Him. Her insistence brought about the focus of Christ's ministry. Though he was in Phoenicia, He was not abandoning Israel. The woman was willing to accept the divine order of things, but by faith, she grasped the truth that applied to her because she was a Gentile. The Lord praised her for her faith in the same way He had previously praised the centurion for his faith. In both cases, the desired healing took place right away even though the Lord Jesus was at a distance from where the sick persons were. Her daughter was healed at that "very hour."

Compassion for both Jews and Gentiles, v.29-39

On His return to Israel on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, where both Jews and Gentiles lived; people in that area brought their sick to Jesus and He healed them without any sign of prejudice. That resulted in those same people glorifying the God of Israel. Prejudice can be a problem today if we allow ourselves to look at people with only natural eyes. Seeing every person as God sees them; changes our perspective on the value of a human being. God's Gospel is for everyone on earth. Every person is worth more than the whole material world. The lessons for first-century Christians are the same for us today.

Jesus did not reject the Canaanite woman but used that event as a teaching moment for His disciples. The same was true when they gathered up the leftovers after the fish and bread meal when four thousand were fed. They actually gathered up the food left over in much larger baskets than when He fed the five thousand. Every person needs to admit who he or she is before God. Every person has the personal choice to make to put their faith in Christ. Faith is available to all people. Jesus did not degrade the woman of Tyre and Sidon, nor did He ignore the needs of people who had been listening to Him for three days without food. He did come to "His own," and that was plain all through the years of His ministry; making it a time of unique, national blessing. But blessing refused has lasting consequences.

Galilee was a place of special privilege. We can bring people to the Lord today through our prayers of intercession and our interest in them personally in private conversations. We can be confident that the blessings of the Lord to the Gentiles who believe in Him, are as great as the blessings to the Jews. We can trust God to do again in our day what He has done in the past if it

is His will. He repeated the same kind of miracle of providing needed food for four thousand as He did for the five thousand. The differences are quite insightful, because this miracle was after three days, and their food had run out. The amount of food distributed was certainly more than enough so the big baskets of leftover food, and the whole experience; were teaching the disciples of the need for repetition, but not to expect an exact repeat in similar situations. We don't have a template to follow. We follow the Lord and do what He says, knowing that what happens is according to His sovereign plans.

MATTHEW 16

The message of Matthew's Gospel from the time of His start in public preaching and teaching, and the many miracles he did, as well as the parables; all focused on the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It included reaching out to sinners and seekers; to Jews and Gentiles; to the sick and the healthy. Everyone who came to Him was affected in some way and responded in some way to Him who was the King of the Jews. Some people entered the kingdom of heaven by putting their faith in Him. Some rejected Him and sought to kill Him because He had exposed them for who they were in the sight of God.

The unbelief of the Jewish leaders and even the people of His hometown, Nazareth, left them outside of the blessings they could have had. The little faith and lack of understanding by the disciples give us a sense of why this book would have been so important to the believers in assemblies when they first began to gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Written words give us the opportunity to go over and over again important truths until we can grasp them and apply them to ourselves. Hearing audible words is important too, but they are never repeated in exactly the same way and are given through only one of our senses. When we can hear and see the truth, we get understanding both from the emotional expressions and intellectual responses of faith.

All of the teaching, miracles, and parables that happened in those first years of His ministry, make us realize the importance of the place we have in the kingdom of which our Lord is the King. The climax to this part of Matthew's account is the confession of Peter as to who the Lord is, and the introduction of those who read this book, to the church. This would have been to those people an enlightening understanding of the difference between Judaism and Christianity. The remaining part of the Gospel of Matthew takes readers forward to Jerusalem. In these next chapters, we are made to understand how the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ were necessary, in order for us to enter the kingdom of God.

Challenged by deceivers, v.1-12

In Magdala where Mary Magdalene had seven devils cast out of her, the Lord Jesus was opposed and challenged by religious leaders. They made their demands and expected the Lord to respond to them the way most people did in those days. They wanted Him to give them a visible sign in the heavens or at least something they could see without faith. They had seen evidence of His power and authority all around them in people being healed and then heard His teaching as He explained the doctrines of the kingdom of heaven. His true teaching and the fact that the law was able to be understood as to its purpose more than merely in practice, had opened the minds and hearts of some to what was true and real, even though it had to be accepted by faith.

Pharisees and Sadducees had previously been opposition religious parties, with very different teaching. At this time, they had united for the purpose of getting rid of the Lord Jesus Christ and His obvious authority. His authority was obviously far greater than anything they claimed they had. The question they asked was an insulting question that minimized all the miracles He had done, all the people He had blessed, and all the teaching He had given. In their evil unregenerate minds, they wanted a visible sign in the sky they could see without faith, and they would then be able to tell the people He was under their authority.

Strangely, that same attitude is prevalent today among people who claim to be Christians, but will only believe signs and wonders. Therefore, they reject the claims of Christ on them personally even though they claim to be followers of Him. The Lord directed their attention to the sky as they wanted. “You can tell the weather by looking at the sky, but you can’t see all the evil that is happening all around you.” Wicked people overlook sin and even don’t consider sin and evil to be all that bad, because everybody they know does evil. Sin has become open and commonplace. Adulterous people are not only morally corrupt but to adulterate the teaching of the word of God is to be spiritual adulterers. To add to the word of God, the opinions and practices of men are spiritually adulterating the seed of the word of God. To not accept the word of God as it is written as relevant to our day and age, is spiritual adultery.

In these changing times when something new arises every few months; we have to be careful to take our spiritual food from the scriptures. The internet, books that claim new light, or charismatic speakers who hold forth a new view of what is tried and proven biblical doctrine; can quickly deceive those who don’t read the Bible for themselves. The truth that has been practiced for generations, and the results seen in many souls who have been saved growing in the Lord; is being discounted by “revisionist history and new theology.” The sign of the prophet Jonah is easily understood: anything that demeans or in any way discounts the Gospel message of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; is not to be paid attention to. It is a sinful disregard for the truth of God.

Confessed by believers, v.5-20

In the scripture, leaven is a common symbol of evil, because even though it is unseen, its effects are far greater than the size of the leaven itself. In this chapter, leaven is used to represent the legalistic doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Instead of obedience to God’s word from the heart, their teaching was to maintain the ritual practices of “law-keepers.” As religious leaders, they demanded that of the Jews.

The Pharisees were legalists who were committed to the traditions of men. The rituals they performed and demanded of others were spiritually deadening. Rampant hypocrisy was evident in those who said a lot, but practiced a mere form. They had a fashion of making sure everyone knew they prayed a lot by putting phylactery on their foreheads and tying them on their hands. Inside those little leather boxes were prayers they wrote out. They made sure people heard them pray out loud. They also made sure people knew they were giving some money to the poor and to the temple. In other words; they advertised their religious practices to impress and intimidate people.

The doctrine of the Sadducees was to deny anything that could not be explained naturally from the human perspective. They denied the existence of spiritual things, including the fact of the resurrection of the dead. Most of the priests at that time were Sadducees. The warning the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi, needs to be paid attention to by us because of its relevance to our times. People today have a tendency to say, “There’s not much to that. What’s the big deal? What difference does a little bit of wrong make to the whole, if it makes people feel good? We have got to learn to be tolerant of those little ‘mistakes!’”

I wonder if the Lord wanted His disciples to go with Him to an isolated place, where He could privately discuss with them His identity and their understanding of how God reveals Himself to people. It seems to be that by being in that private place; He had designed a “teaching moment,” that they would not soon forget. Up until this time in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord had ministered to the needs of people and taught the principles of the kingdom of heaven. That included kingdom living which is to be to live righteously before God and man. From verse twenty-one on through the book of Matthew, the Lord Jesus directed the attention of the disciples to His death and resurrection. He focused on the future and the main purpose of His coming to earth the first time, which was to save His people from their sins.

The variety of opinions the Jews had concerning who Jesus was, reveals that many connected Him with the Messiah, but none, or very few regarded Him as the Messiah. Those who thought Him to be John the Baptist, considered the Lord to be just the forerunner of the Messiah. Others who considered Him to be Elijah thought of Him as the warning prophet telling of judgments to come because of national sin. Jeremiah was a prophet who explained the scriptures and that was what the Lord was doing.

After Jesus let them express the wrong opinions of the people, He then asked them for their personal opinion. Whether Peter was the spokesman of all of them, or whether he was just the first to speak up, is not the real point. His confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!” was not merely a burst of enthusiasm as a result of all he had seen heard, and experienced. It was a carefully worded response of his solemn faith and soul-searching reflection, that was put into one powerful confession of faith.

The response of Peter was the result of God the Father working in the heart and soul of a true believer in Christ. God Himself enlightens the minds of people and moves their hearts to seek after God, as the “hart pants after the water brooks.” By acknowledging Jesus as “the Christ;” Peter stated his assurance that He knew Jesus to be the promised Savior. When he said, “The Son of the living God;” he was acknowledging divine power and authority were inherent in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When one confesses with their mouth, Jesus as Lord; that first demonstrates the right understanding of who Jesus is. In this day, that particular confession has been watered down to where people think and say they are saved, without owning Jesus as their personal Lord and Master. They want Him as Savior but not as Lord, because they do not want to do what He says in His word. It is as important now as it was when Peter stated his confession of faith, that we make sure people do not forget the fact that “If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.”

In the time when Matthew's Gospel was first being read by believers in the early local churches, the teaching of Jesus as the Messiah would have been important to the functioning of the assembly. The uniting of Jewish and Gentile believers into "one new man," would have been hard to accept simply by word of mouth. Jesus as the Messiah would be important for those early believers because in the Roman empire, "Caesar is lord," was a common affirmation that was made by most people. Many Christians died because they would not acknowledge Caesar as Lord, but publicly testified that Jesus only is Lord.

When we affirm that truth in our lives, we are stating that all other powers, institutions, governments, nations, and people; have less authority over us than our Lord Jesus Christ. This is not well-liked by employers who think they control your lives in the interest of making profits. Government representatives and religious leaders both demand authority over those they lead, by insisting they owe their allegiance to their world systems, rather than to our unseen Savior and Lord.

Like Peter and the other disciples, our confession as to who Jesus is, and our testimony of Him as our personal Savior and Lord; does not automatically make us exemplary disciples. Words are one thing. Actions are another. We look at some of the people we read about in the Bible as great examples, but not all are good examples of morality, spirituality, and fidelity to the Lord. They were failing people even as we are. It is important that the Holy Spirit lets us know of some of the faults and failures of those early apostles so that we don't get discouraged and lose our commitment to the Lord when we fail.

The introduction of the church in the Bible begins here, with the first mention of the church. Christ is the foundation, the "bedrock" on which the church is built. That confession of faith as to who our Lord Jesus is, and the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ; forms the body of truth that is gladly accepted by those who believe in Him. He is the indestructible and unsurpassed power of God upon which we are built as a habitation of God. Satan's attempts to overcome and destroy the church will never succeed. The Mighty God, the Creator; is the Owner and Master of the church. Everything in the dispensational church comes from and is dependent upon Him.

In the Old Testament, the church was an unknown mystery. Typical teaching from the Old Testament that we can learn from, was not for their time but is useful to us. Peter was not the rock on which the church is built, but he was an important part of the early church. We are built upon the "foundation of the apostles and prophets," Jesus Christ is the "Chief Cornerstone." The keys of the truths of the Gospel were preached by Peter and those early brethren, and they are still being preached today by those the Spirit of God uses to proclaim the Gospel.

When people preach the Gospel, the door is wide open to those who are willing to enter by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The religious leaders couldn't keep people out even though they tried. We can't keep people out, but it is far more important that we can help others to come in. Like the disciples of the Lord Jesus who followed Him day after day, learning from Him the message of the Gospel, and learning how to present it; we too need to know the truths of who Christ is, and how to explain them. We need to know the Gospel well enough to be able to define it, present it clearly and faithfully, and discern those who respond out of true hearts to it.

A change: Journey of suffering to the cross, v.21-28

The first time the phrase, “From that time on...,” was used in Matthew chapter four verse seventeen; it was an announcement of the kingdom of heaven. This time when it is used in verse twenty-one; it is pointing forward to the emphasis of the Lord Jesus on His coming death and resurrection. The disciples couldn’t grasp that because of their conception of the kingdom. They were thinking of a military victory and the Lord Jesus Christ taking the throne of David as the mighty King of the Jews. The disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah, but the idea of a suffering Messiah had not entered their minds. The lack of understanding by the disciples was one of the reasons defining discipleship and what it meant in practical ways had to be taught to them. Then they would be ready to carry on the work of the kingdom after His resurrection and ascension. For their Lord to “go... suffer... be killed... and be raised again,” was foreign to their thinking or imagining.

Jesus is the Messiah, but as the Suffering Messiah; He must die and be raised again to inaugurate His reign on earth. The disciples confessed Him as their Messiah but did not yet understand the nature of the kingdom of heaven completely, nor of the mission that would lead the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. In Judaism there is not much taught that would include the suffering and death of the Messiah.

Many, and perhaps most who practice Judaism today, would believe Isaiah 53 and similar passages relating to the suffering Messiah, are referring to suffering Israelis and the suffering nation of Israel. The message of the Gospel that the disciples had to grasp fully, makes plain the fact that “The Christ, the Son of the living God,” had to suffer and die for our sins. He then had to rise from among the dead for our justification – a completed work that has no additions to it. “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

The Lord in speaking of what would happen to Him, said those who follow Him would endure the same sufferings, but at the end would be rewarded for what they passed through. He Himself, “Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame...” Peter attempted to do what a friend would do who only thinks as a natural man. Even though he had just had a revelation from the Father as to who Jesus was, and knew Him to be the true Messiah; he looked at people and events still from the human perspective instead of the divine perspective. That is a tactic of Satan. He wants us to forget how God sees people and things and seeks to make sure we leave God out.

Jesus recognized an attempt by Satan to tempt Him to not go to the cross. He had sought to stop Him in the work of the kingdom of God for forty days in the wilderness. The devil had moved people in Nazareth to try to kill the Savior by pushing Him over a cliff. Now the enemy was trying again to keep Him from being the sacrifice for our sins in order to bring us to God. By using a disciple who was moved by the emotions of his nature instead of spiritual understanding, the implacable foe made another attack on the humanity of our Lord, who rebuked Satan through Peter.

When we look at the things that happen to us and around us, it is important for us to be “mindful of the things of God.” Let us never leave God out of our understanding of the big picture of life

now and in the future. We can learn the value of careful and thoughtful consideration by reading the scriptures and learning from lessons taught to others who lived in past times. Spiritual discernment and carnal thinking can happen in the same person. The commitment to true discipleship makes it possible to go beyond normal living. A conviction of the value of others will make self-denial and identification with Christ, much more important to us than the temporal things of life. Worldly attractions rob us of what we really are and can be for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Carrying a cross is a personal action. The disciples knew what he meant. They had already seen and experienced the animosity of those who opposed the truth of God against the Lord, and now they understood it would be against them too. Anyone carrying a cross was cut off from their past. They were on a one-way street and there was no turning back. Worldly ambitions and success are all gone to the cross-bearer. The cost of cross-bearing discipleship is a real and personal commitment. All we are and have is pledged to the One we follow. Our existence has a new objective. Instead of our lives being focused inward and self-ward; it is outward and upward.

The purpose of life becomes real to us when we commit ourselves to the service of our Lord. Our spiritual and emotional life becomes brightly alive, and we see beyond what is natural and normal, to that which is spiritual and eternal. Our life becomes a real part of our eternity, instead of a span of only a few years. Eternal life is what we actually live now when we take up our cross and follow our Lord. All we do has an eternal perspective. Our values, our decisions, and our choices all have a different emphasis. Rather than a life lived for what we can get now, it becomes a part of our eternal consciousness and God-given commission.

Life for a person carrying a cross daily is important for what and who it is focused on. We think in terms of what pleases our Lord and what can help others. It is not loathing ourselves or eliminating ourselves from all that is going on around us. Rather, it focuses on following the Lord Jesus: doing His will, being committed to Him and His work, and serving Him wherever and in whatever way He opens up before us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who is the Universal Judge. He will determine the value of all that is done in our lives. The gifts that divine Persons have given to God's people, and how they have been used in His service, will be evaluated by Him who is omniscient. Believers will give an account of things done in the body. Unbelievers will face the Holy Judge they have rejected in that future day of reckoning.

Those who were eyewitnesses of the His glory and majesty never forgot what they saw. There was majesty and glory seen by three people on the Mount of Transfiguration. There was majesty and glory seen by hundreds of believers in Christ after His resurrection. There will be majesty and glory revealed to the whole world when the King comes back to rule and reign in righteousness. Then every eye will see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.

MATTHEW 17

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ was a revelation of the glory of the Son of God, that had been veiled when He was here. It was a divine affirmation of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That glory will be fully revealed when He returns. The word from God to the disciples was that they should listen to what Jesus taught, and learn from what He did. He is God's authorized and obedient Servant, and at the same time, He is always God's Beloved Son to whom we must pay heed.

He is the unique and glorious Messiah of Israel, and Peter, James, and John saw that glory briefly with their own eyes. What they saw was also a confirmation of the Lord's teaching following Peter's God-given profession of faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The disciples had to learn their own limitations and the necessity of putting their faith in the One who called them to follow Him. He authorized their work by working through them, not them acting of their own volition. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ were a necessity for the plans of God to be fulfilled. The Lord's mission on earth wasn't accomplished until that redemptive work was completed.

Teaching regarding the church did not give Peter authority over the church or over people as their head. When they saw the transfigured Christ, it would have lifted the spirits of Peter, James, and John who had heard His first prediction of His death and would wonder what was going to happen when that took place.

Transfiguration, a Look into the Future, v.1-13

Transfiguration is a visible change of appearance in a positive sense. In the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, the on-lookers saw what He looks like without veiling His glory. On that mountain, like other mountains Matthew wrote about, the Lord was seen as to who He was, the Holy One come from God. He was on an exceeding high mountain when He was tempted by the devil. It was on a mountain the Lord taught and gave principles of living in the kingdom. The Mount of Olives was a special place to which our Lord resorted often, and from which He was taken into heaven. At this holy mountain; He was seen by Peter, James, and John in His holy glory in which His face shone brighter than the sun and His clothes were brilliantly white.

It was there: where Moses who represented the old covenant and the law that would be fulfilled in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ; talked to the Lord about His coming redemptive work that would happen at Jerusalem. Elijah represented the prophets and the expectations of not only the sacrifice of Christ; but the fulfillment of prophecy relating to the coming kingdom. He reminds us of the closing prophecy of the Old Testament in the book of Malachi, where the Lord would be the Restorer of all things.

The sense of awe at the view of the transfigured Christ, and the sense of the presence of God and His glory; terrified those three disciples. They likely believed they were going to die as they saw the majesty of the Lord in His glory. It is a human response to want to do something or say something when we are overwhelmed by the sense we are in the presence of God. Actually, we can learn some things about heaven in this foretaste of what it is like there, with those who have gone before us.

Recognition of each person by name and characteristics is maintained. The three disciples knew Moses and Elijah even though they had never met them. There is interpersonal communication about events and people there. They talked with the Lord about the things that would happen in Jerusalem. There was interaction with the Lord. Apparently, both heavenly visitors could converse with the Lord as in a personal conversation. A person's individuality is maintained. There was no question as to which person was Moses and which was Elijah. Their minds, emotions, and opinions were still functioning as in personhood. It appears there was an interactive relationship with the Lord Jesus on the part of Moses and Elijah, and the relationship was that of friends communicating about a common point of interest. It would seem then, that there are purposeful activities in heaven that are not removed from events happening on earth because those two men were obviously sent to that mountaintop.

The first mission of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth was to fulfill God's law and the words of the prophets in the context of His humanity. He was given authority to do that work when "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." When He was here, He fulfilled all righteousness, or the full demands of holiness that we must have in order to be brought to God. Peter wanted to take action and do something; when the time was really only appropriate to worship and adoration.

He wanted to make dwelling places or temporary places of worship so that time of transfiguration would continue. He could imagine how impacting that would be on the skeptics and forces of opposition. Instead of capturing the moment; he was supposed to learn from it and move forward in faith and obedience to his Lord. The disciples were learning many lessons in that place. Jesus is more than a leader, an example, a good influence, and a good teacher. He is more than a great prophet. He is the Almighty Son of God!

When we are really conscious of God and being in His presence; the only adequate response to understanding who Jesus is, is to worship and obey Him. The significance of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ hadn't yet dawned on the minds of the disciples. When we realize we are in the presence of God, even though we do not see our Lord in His glory; there is awe, reverence, and respectful fear when we glimpse by faith a brief foresight of resurrection glory. It is in times like that, the voice of God becomes real to us. "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him!" That should permeate our souls and spirits, and purify our bodies and control our conduct.

The time hadn't yet come for the glory of the Lord to be revealed. Nor was the visible glory of the Lord to be the focal point of the ministry of the disciples that He was preparing them for. The brief time of enlightenment was for those men, at that time. The scribes were right when they testified that Elijah would come before the Lord was revealed. But the scribes didn't consider John the Baptist to be the forerunner of Jesus as the Messiah. However, those disciples learned that day on their way down off that mountain that John was the "Elijah" that was to come, and he had done the work he was called to do. Then they had to hear, that like John was killed, so the time was soon coming when those who rejected John would reject Jesus and crucify Him.

Authority, and the challenge of faith, v.14-21

Spiritual experiences with God are high points in the lives of believers. Many of those times remain indelibly printed on our minds and hearts, bringing us great joy throughout our whole lifetime. The flat plain of human suffering is where we generally live and serve our Lord. Loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind is one thing. Loving suffering, sinful, dissatisfied neighbors like ourselves are quite a different story – until we realize they are just like us.

Faithlessness keeps us from doing what our Lord intends. The question of the disciples who could not heal the epileptic son was quite revealing. “Why could we not cast it out?” They had not yet understood that it is God working through us that brings results. Without Him, we can do nothing. It is not “we” or “us,” but rather Him and His power, that brings healing of the body and soul. At a later time in the book of Acts, they learned that power was in “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

For nearly three years the disciples had been with Jesus, and He was disappointed that they still did not understand what it meant to be a disciple and do the Lord’s work through His power and authority. Their problem was their faith was too little and in the wrong person. The little faith of the disciples wasn’t so much the quantity, but the quality. Faith in God comes as a result of listening to God and earnest prayer and fellowship with God. Problems often do seem like insurmountable mountains, but “with God, all things are possible.”

Betrayal, and fear of coming events, v.22-23

The Lord Jesus gave this second prediction in a week, regarding His coming death and resurrection. It must have given them enough understanding of what was coming to greatly disturb them. Often warnings are given and we know they are warnings; but after a short time, we think it was likely a false alarm. It is then we are in danger because complacency is a deadening influence on the soul.

When warnings are repeated enough times; then we begin to be impressed with the seriousness of what is ahead, even though it may not be very clear what to expect. When the whole prediction is beyond our control, and yet we know it is going to happen; we become fearful. Understanding can be slow for us all. We experience answered prayer, miracles, teaching, and learning from the word of God. Yet, we have difficulty at times claiming all that God has given us and we are slow to act in faith. When knowledge and faith work together, understanding comes and makes real and believable, all we once knew only theoretically.

The disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus would go right into the place where trouble would come. They didn’t really grasp what the Lord Jesus would do, and accomplish by His death and resurrection. When the Holy Spirit came upon them and then dwelt in them at the day of Pentecost; then they could see clearly what previously had been hard to get for themselves.

Instructions, and our responsibility to the government, v.24-27

Being taxed by our own country is bad enough, but when other political powers demand our taxes, and religious leaders demand taxes including temple taxes; that can be not only burdensome but very vexing. When the tax man came to Peter asking about paying taxes, the Lord Jesus used that as a teaching moment for the disciples as to who they were and where their

allegiance lay. They actually were free from obligation to the temple tax and the religious regulations of a religion that was contrary to the kingdom of God. The temple tax was about two days' wages a year for every Jewish male from twenty and above. This was paid yearly about a month before the Passover. However, the Lord made it plain that even though they were really not obligated to pay that, we do have a responsibility to cooperate and not offend in nonessential matters. It was better to pay, rather than make a fuss.

Peter knew from this conversation with the Lord, that not only was Jesus the Son of the living God, but also those who believe in Him as their Savior and Lord are sons of God through faith in Him. In that way, they were free from the temple tax. To not necessarily offend; Peter had to act under divine authority, catch a fish that was under divine authority, and take the one piece of money that was sufficient in value to pay the tax for them both.

We are expected by our Master, to be responsible participants in what He is doing whatever kind it is. Even though we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, we are to cooperate with the government of the place where we live. The laws that are concerned with righteousness of life and order in society, are to be obeyed. The community and country in which we live provide us with security and opportunities. We have an obligation to pay what is owed; even though we may not agree with all that is done by the various governments under whose authority we live.

MATTHEW 18

Position and status were really important in the first century AD. This "Community Discourse," the fourth one of the five our Lord gave that we read of in the book of Matthew; deals with a number of things that the disciples had yet to really learn in spite of having been with the Lord Jesus Christ for three years. "Greatness" in society was to many of them, a sign of their own worth as a person. Status, honor, and prestige set people apart from one another in social settings, including who was invited to another person's house. When they got there, where and how they were seated at a meal or a banquet was a real big consideration to those who attended. Rank in the kingdom of heaven under God's rule, is determined by who is willing to honestly humble themselves before God and people. Those who are humble are considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

It is expected of those in the kingdom of heaven to be childlike in their attitude, not childish. Sincerity and humility are to be from the heart, not merely a religious affectation. We are to be careful not to sin or cause others to sin. If we lose sight of living life with the perspective of the new nature and God's view of things, that will not only hinder people from trusting us, but it has the potential of turning others away from "the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

When a fellow believer sins, we must do all we can to bring that erring person back to where they can have fellowship with God and His people once again. It is our responsibility to follow the guidelines given by the Holy Spirit to correct the wrong. When sin has been dealt with, then reconciliation can take place. Conscious, full, and free forgiveness, we have received from the Lord Jesus Himself, and that is what we are to give when called upon to forgive those who sin against us.

Rank in the kingdom of heaven, v.1-6

Because the disciples were wanting to know about the whole matter of “greatness” and where they would fit in the scheme of things in the kingdom; the Lord Jesus used a child as an object lesson. A little child is personally inadequate to govern him or herself. They are completely dependent on others for survival. The whole community of believers is addressed in this fourth discourse, showing a very different view of social living than that which was prevalent in those days and is really quite similar to life today. The concept of greatness the Lord gave, is reversed from what is normal human practice.

Instead of proud self-seeking attitudes with a “me first” mindset; a humble, sincere, child-like attitude is expected of those who lead others with what should be dignity and grace. Lack of pretense, and common-sense trust; characterize spiritual leadership. Severe punishment is in order for those who turn away believers of all ages and maturity from the faith. It is not that children have an attitude of selflessness, but in the kingdom of heaven being preoccupied with status is a danger to those believers who are marginalized in some way. The Lord Jesus moved from an example to a welcome which is very impacting and insightful. When we receive those who are considered “not great,” we receive our Lord.

The warning associated with causing another believer, no matter who that person may be in social status, to stumble, sin, and fall; is of very great consequence. The millstone is no small hand grinder but is rather the “donkey stone” that was pulled around and around on top of the grindstone. Misleading, offending, deceiving, or in any way turning another believer aside, whether that person is a child or new believer of any age, puts a person up against the Lord Himself.

Stumbling blocks are actions, v.7-11

Human offenders are responsible for the guilt of one who stumbles. The actions that a person takes that causes someone else to sin are a stumbling block. Any relationship, activity, or practice that leads to sin on my part or sin in any other person, is to be stopped at all costs. Drastic measures need to be taken to avoid causing stumbling in others.

Self-mutilation or avoiding it is not the point of this message, but rather anything; be it a person, practice, program, or preaching that is a threat against the Lord’s people, has to be done away with. It has to be removed from among the people of God. Sin affects what we do, so the hand and foot that are affected by that sin must be dealt with. What I do and where I go cannot be allowed to continue if the effects are detrimental to me or anyone else. That practice must be stopped. What I allow to enter my heart and mind through “eye-gate or ear-gate;” affects my emotions, convictions, commitments, and ambitions either positively or negatively. There is no neutrality. What we allow to come inside our being comes through our senses. If we allow ourselves to watch, read, or indulge our passions to consider things that are evil or prone to sinfulness and sinful thinking; that must be dealt with and cut out of our lives immediately.

Angels are charged with caring for children, child-like believers, and those whose limitations are such that their spiritual capacity may be less in some ways than others. Those whose lives are basic and humble are those whom the Lord takes special care of. Perhaps that is why the verse from Luke 19:10 is inserted here, referring to limited believers rather than those who are lost in sin and are facing sin’s consequences.

One wandering sheep, plus ninety-nine more, v.12-14

Let us never forget that who we would consider the lowliest believer, is important to the Lord. In this parable, the sheep is not a lost sinner in need of salvation as in the parable in Luke 15. The context here is that of a straying believer. We are to spare no effort to seek to restore that erring believer back to the fold of safety among God's people. The lowest and most vulnerable of God's children are important to Him. They should be important to us. It is wrong to casually write them off because they are "not of us," as some are prone to say.

God's love for those lost in sin was so great that the Lord Jesus Christ came to die in their place upon the cross. The love He demonstrated for them in that way, does not stop. It is the Father's will that the weak, compromised brothers and sisters in Christ, be gone after and recovered when they have gone from among us. Some people are easily led astray by every "wind of doctrine." Others "don't see what's wrong with that," because others do the same thing and "get away with it." A wasted Christian life is a sad thing to watch.

Discipline and reconciliation go together, v.15-20

Discipline, prayer, and reconciliation go together when sin divides the Lord's people. The guidelines for restoring fellowship that has been broken between Christians, are not complicated. One-on-one conversations between two believers to resolve a conflict or an issue between them are usually the solution to a problem. To go privately to one who you have offended, or who has offended you, keeps a matter small and unknown to others. Any matter must be kept as small as possible because if it becomes public, then the problem expands to include other people and other issues that are not necessarily related to the problem between the two.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the objectives of the original parties. Even if two or three witnesses have to be involved, the point of the outcome is still the same. When a matter between believers is of such grave importance that it has to be taken to the church; the objective is still restoration and reconciliation. This first mention of the church indicates this is something new. This was not referred to the synagogue. Authority in a local church is of greater importance than a court of law because the Lord Jesus is there in the midst of His people who have gathered under the authority of His name which is above every name. The authority of the decision a church comes to, is reached through prayer, the word of God, and the presidency of the Holy Spirit of God.

When believers pray to the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and under the authority of the name of the Son of God; we can expect the right decision and the appropriate conclusion of the matter being dealt with. To refuse to listen and respond correctly to the church results in that person no longer being a part of that Christian fellowship. They are regarded in the same way as an unsaved person or a deceptive government lackey. Agreements in assembly discipline are divinely honored and enforced. When considered in the light of the scriptures, Christ promises His presence with His people. He is in the midst of those He has gathered together in His name and continues to gather under His authority.

Forgiveness: forgiven people forgive, v. 21-35

In response to the teaching of the Lord regarding differences between believers, Peter seemed to get a little understanding, that in the kingdom of heaven, we go farther than the three or four times of forgiveness the Jewish leaders taught. The teaching of the Jews was that one should forgive a repentant person four times. Peter's consideration of the Lord's teaching on reconciliation, prompted a statement he would have considered quite generous. He must have thought, should I go way beyond the teaching of the Jewish leaders and forgive seven times? There was no mention of repentance on the part of either Peter or the Lord Jesus as a condition for forgiveness. The Lord Jesus stated that we should forgive without setting any restrictions or limits.

God freely forgives, and in doing so, takes the loss for the debts we owe Him. He expects forgiven sinners to demonstrate gratitude by forgiving those who sin against them. "I, even I, am He that blots out thy transgressions for My own sake; and will not remember thy sins. Put Me in remembrance; let us contend together; state your case; that you may be acquitted" [Isa.43:25]. "To the Lord, our God belongs mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him" [Dan.9:9]. Every time forgiveness is needed and/or requested, we are to give it. Experiencing God's forgiveness in the kingdom of heaven is where we all began our new life in Christ. Seventy times seven indicates God expects us to forgive without setting any limits.

By using the parable of the two debtors to illustrate the principles of the kingdom of heaven, the Lord Jesus made it plain that in the kingdom of heaven, we must go far beyond what is considered normal or even fair. We who are in the kingdom of heaven know that if what was normal and fair were done to us, we would be in hell already because of our sins. By God's grace, we have been forgiven and that same spirit of grace should be shown to others by us. One of the debtors in the parable had a debt so great that if he lived ten lifetimes, he would not be able to pay the debt off. By the debtor pretending humility and regret, his debt was forgiven. He was forgiven by the benevolent king who demonstrated unmerited grace.

In contrast, the one who owed the great debt had a fellow servant who owed him about three months' wages; but would not give him an opportunity to pay the debt off. Instead, he had him put into prison, and ultimately, he would be able to claim all he had because he couldn't pay off the debt while in prison. Mercy should be shown, especially by those who have been forgiven what they could never pay. Compassion for sinners and debtors is a fundamental principle in the kingdom of heaven. If those are ignored or despised, forgiveness will not happen. "If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother; he is a liar."

Biblical forgiveness is expected to be from the heart. Whole-hearted gratitude for God's forgiveness of us produces unreserved forgiveness from us toward others. God forgives fully and freely, but He judges those who refuse to forgive others.

MATTHEW 19

The values of the world system and the teaching of Jesus are very different. In fact, the "Community Discourse" Jesus had just taught His disciples in the previous chapter, turn the values of the world upside down. In the world system today, it is no different than it was when our Lord Jesus Christ was here. Very few well-known and powerful people, got where they are by being humble and gentle, let alone self-effacing.

People push and shove others aside to get ahead in society, government, business, and even in the military. Children in many families vie for first place to get the favor of parents and friends, even if they have to lie to get that recognition. In the coming day, the last will be the first.

It will be necessary to accept disapproval from people now to have divine approval in the future. Willing sacrifices made now in the interests of the kingdom of God will bring blessings of lasting reward at a later time. Whether in marriages, families, or personal life, the wise person will look beyond difficulties, discomforts, and disappointments in living for the Lord, in order to further kingdom interests. The future is where lasting benefits and interests are waiting.

Marriages and consequences, v.1-12

When our Lord Jesus Christ was here, He was tested by those who opposed Him on many diverse subjects to try to get some legal charge against Him, or at least some inconsistency. Pharisees considered their interpretations of scripture to be the right and final word. However, in the commitment of one person to another in marriage, they had different schools of thought. The Shammai group considered the first four verses of Deuteronomy to be a command of Moses in which the cause of divorce was only sexual immorality. The Hillel group believed divorce could take place for almost any conceivable cause.

Jesus' answer did not align with either position. He opposed all divorce. His answer went back to the original purpose of marriage. It included marriage being "one flesh" between one man and one woman for life. Monogamy was God's intention. Any disruption of marriage by one person entering another person's body illicitly is forbidden. It is only on this basis that a divorce could be granted. Some people interpret this to mean during the period of engagement only. That opinion is based on the comment the disciples made that marriage would be an intolerable burden.

The Lord's reply to that statement of the disciples was that marriage is not always a good idea. Singleness and celibacy are an allowable state for those who for one reason or another could not, would not, or should not marry. However, not all are able to be abstinent. Some are able to be abstinent because of physiological limitations. Others are able to be abstinent because of injury or castration for some reason. Some choose to abstain from sexual practice because they want to be free from the responsibility of having a family. The Lord indicated that was permissible when the interest is that they may give themselves without any restraints to the work of God.

None of these reasons indicate marriage between one man and one woman is wrong, but it raises the understanding of marriage to God's original and pure estate in which "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled but whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge." God does hate divorce [Mal.2:15-16] and His desire is that marriage is to be permanent and unbroken. There are always sad consequences that are unavoidable when a divorce takes place.

Children and blessing, v.13-15

The disciples must not have really understood the message the Lord Jesus just previously had given about children. To give children and women much thought as to the equality of their personhood, was in great contrast to the religious leaders who allowed their religion, education,

and sophistication to come in the way of faith. Simple faith in Christ is not as hard for children and child-like people, and women who have a different emotional makeup as men, as it is for those who think they have to be able to “figure out what it means to believe.”

Jesus was always interested in children and weak people. Those who were disenfranchised for some reason, be it age, status in society, or infirmity, are persons of great concern to the Lord. Such people have to live by faith in others to survive. They are not independent, or in a position to reject what is given to them. That is what people must be like in order to be saved and enter the kingdom of God. Faith in Christ to do for us that which we cannot do ourselves is the response of a person who knows their need for God’s grace.

Young Man and Values, v.16-30

The starting point to getting eternal life is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to do some “good thing.” Probably one of the greatest deceptions in the “Christian religion” and all other religions, is to “do the best you can.” That indicates one is independent, and if they do what they think they should; God is obligated to them and will have to accept them into heaven after they die, because of what they have done. They think they earned their way there.

The young man who came to Jesus thought eternal life was earned by his personal performance and good deeds. In reply, the Lord Jesus made him review how he estimated Jesus and what God had to say in the law. He quickly clarified to that young man that no one is good but God. Did that young man believe He was God? Salvation and the gift of eternal life are based on God’s goodness, not ours. It doesn’t appear like the young man was speaking as a self-righteous, brazen narcissist, but as one who thought external law-keeping would be what was needed. In spite of his morality of life, something was missing in him, and he knew it.

The six commandments the Lord told the young man deal with our relationship with people and can be kept in an outward sense. Obedience to the law is more than outward actions. To give God unreserved obedience and loyalty, meant giving up anything that has a prior claim, or perceived more important claim, on us. In the case of this young man, money had a claim on him. His choice, in spite of the sorrow it brought him, was to keep for himself what kept him from getting eternal life. Anything a person allows to keep them from Christ will cause them to be lost forever because of their own choice, not because God didn’t love them and want them to be saved forever.

The Lord Jesus Christ used that as a teaching moment for His disciples. No one who loves riches will enter the kingdom of God. Any person, ambition, possession, or perceived important obligation, that claims first place in your life; will keep you out of the kingdom of God. It is impossible to be saved unless there is an unreserved surrender to the Lord, and faith placed in Him alone for salvation.

Spiritual maturity comes when one can see the necessity of faith. That happens when our possessions, skills, intellect, or anything we might claim as making us worthy of acceptance into the kingdom of God, are gone or set aside as that which has no lasting value. All one has then is their personal faith in Christ. The problem of wealth is not that a person has a lot of possessions, but that the false trust in wealth has a tendency to give.

The camel and the eye of the needle are meant to be literal, making it plain that only God can overrule false trust in riches and provide salvation and true righteousness. Apparently up until this time, the disciples had thought there was some virtue in riches that indicated God's favor and blessing. The Lord Jesus plainly stated that only God can provide the righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom of God. False trust in riches has no value at all.

The disciples had done what the rich young man was not willing to do, so they asked a question that was appropriate to the situation. The Lord's answer was that rebirth will occur in the nation, society, and creation when He shall sit on the throne of His glory in the millennium. There is a new world order that will come when Christ returns, and just judgment will be administered across the whole world. Those who had lost everything for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ will receive far more than they have ever lost, as well as eternal life. God's gifts are not earned by how long or how energetically we have served Him, but rather by how faithfully we followed Him.

Any sacrifice that has been made for the Lord Jesus Christ will be amply rewarded on that coming day. But there is a warning that many, not all, who are first, shall be last and the last first. An attitude of presumption in the sense that the Lord has an obligation to those who came into the kingdom first is given warning that it should never make us think we deserve the grace our gracious God has extended to us. May we always be thankful for every way He has guided and blessed us in this life.

MATTHEW 20

Entrance into the kingdom of God is by the grace of God alone; not by any effort of human endeavor. There is equality in the kingdom. Those who were His followers could not presume they had a higher status because were with Him from the beginning of His public ministry. In the kingdom of God, the way up is down. The way to win is to lose. The way to get is to give. The way to live is to die. The amazing generosity of God reveals the fullness and the greatness of His grace.

God's grace makes of no-account, religious superstars, and church heroes. There are no higher and lower classes of people in a scripturally gathered New Testament assembly of believers in Christ. Every one of the children of God admits openly and gladly, "By the grace of God, I am what I am! I have nothing, nor have I done anything to deserve the least of God's mercies!"

God's values are the opposite of human values. Greatness in the kingdom is found in service, not in position or dominion over other people. Cross-bearing daily is what counts in the kingdom of God instead of wearing a crown of honor that is seen by people. The Lord Jesus demonstrated what is valuable by stopping to show His care for two blind men who expressed their faith in Him openly. He gave them sight as He passed through Jericho on the way to His death at Jerusalem. Compassion and service are kingdom characteristics.

Laborers in the vineyard, v.1-16

This chapter begins with illustrating the Lord's previous teaching in chapter 19:30. A normal and acceptable wage for laborers and soldiers in the time and place of which the Lord spoke in the

parable, was a penny (a denarius). A day's labor was from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 at night. Both the landowner and laborer would have agreed to that before the laborer went to work. The marketplace in those days was like the employment office now, or a location that is common in rural America where day laborers wait for an opportunity to get work.

Getting workers at 9:00, 12:00, 3:00, and 5:00 would indicate the landowner had an urgent need of help to either harvest or tend to the vineyard. Urgency creates a need, and each of those who were in the market area responded immediately to the opportunity to work. The point the Lord made was that each responded to the call of the landowner to work in spite of the time of day. The 5:00 workers didn't say it was too late in the day. None of those who were called to work later than the first group asked nor knew how much they would be paid. They were just glad for the opportunity to get something. They trusted in the grace of the landowner to pay what He considered was right.

The conclusion of the parable is a look into the principles of the kingdom in which there is no respect for persons, no need to compare one person with the other, and no favoritism shown because of the length of life and service in the kingdom. Everyone in the kingdom of God is there because of the grace of God; not because of any efforts or merits of their own.

By paying the last laborers first, each group of laborers would know what the ones before they received. There would have been no grumbling while they were all working in the vineyard because they were all working because of the grace of the landowner. Likely when the last group joined the work at the last hour, even those who came early in the morning would be glad because the urgent work would be concluded earlier and without loss of product. The grumbling came when they began to compare themselves with each other. They focused their attention on themselves and what they thought they were worth in comparison with other people rather than on the One who gave them what the contract agreed to. No one received less than he was worth.

The parties involved in the contract were not the laborers with each other, but each one to the landowner. His obligation to the laborers was his affair. Those who grumbled against the owner did so because of His generosity. He was in no way unfair. Service for the Lord Jesus Christ will be faithfully and fully rewarded, no matter who the person is or how long they were saved and living for the Lord. Equal faithfulness as it relates to one's opportunity, will be equally rewarded.

It is only God who can properly make an assessment of faithfulness and opportunities to serve Him. Human judgments based on human efforts have nothing at all to do with grace, but rather with debt. Human judgments may be reversed when we are limited to what is considered "fair" by our standards. In contrast to that, God deals with us in grace, not by what we deserve. If we were given what we deserve, no one would ever be saved. But unmerited favor is an act on the part of God's own great heart of love and grace to us.

More details of Jesus' death and resurrection, v.17-19

Further details of Christ's death and resurrection were given to the disciples this third time the Lord Jesus told them about what was going to happen at Jerusalem. More information about what was going to happen at His death and resurrection included the fact that His suffering

would not only be at the hands of those Jews who rejected Him. In this passage of scripture, the Lord spoke about the Gentiles and what they would do to Him.

The Gentiles would mock Him because of His claim to kingship and omniscient power. “Thou could have no power at all against Me except it was given thee from above.” He who was the King of the Jews, but did not use His power against those who vented their cruelty against Him, endured the blindfolding and buffeting; the spitting and verbal abuse. He was given a mocking crown of thorns on His head and a reed in His hand as a scepter. The borrowed robe was to mock His position of authority.

Scourging was a Roman practice that in the case of our Lord Jesus, was a fulfillment of a prophecy that was made regarding those who made “long their furrows.” Crucifixion was a long and excruciatingly painful execution during which many people would see and hear the suffering person dying a slow death. It was a Roman means to create fear and subjugate people into submitting to the imperial power of Rome. To see a crucifixion would inflict fear in all who saw it as to what could happen to them if they stepped out of line with Roman authority.

The Lord Jesus Christ told them about the resurrection, so they would know He had ultimate power over every power in heaven and earth. The disciples had been witnesses to His power over death in others. They would be witnesses to His statement, “I have the power to lay down My life, and I have the power to take it again.” Our Lord Jesus Christ has victorious power over even the cruelest things Gentiles could do because He would rise again triumphant over death.

A request for preferment, v. 20-28

Despite Jesus’ teaching on true greatness and true reward; those who heard it, including the disciples and likely the mother of James and John, hadn’t understood. Perhaps they were still expecting preference and privilege because they had been following Him from the beginning of His public ministry. The mother of James and John, was likely Salome, a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. She was the wife of Zebedee, a fisherman, and would have been the aunt of Jesus. She must have thought the twelve thrones on which the disciples would sit, would be established soon, and wanted to see her sons in places of authority. Apparently, her opinion was shared by the two of them as well.

Nepotism was common then, and it is common quite common everywhere in the world today, but it is not based on faith and humility as is the kingdom of heaven. Rather, it is based on position, prestige, power, pretense, and family connections. God’s values are the opposite of sinful human values. Greatness in God’s kingdom is in serving, not in domination. The cross, not the crown is evidence of greatness in the kingdom of God.

The response of James and John to the question the Lord asked regarding the cup of suffering He had told them of, was sincere and serious when they said they were able to experience suffering. They knew the cup was that of suffering and the baptism He spoke of was even to the extent of death. In faith, they could see farther into the kingdom. They knew there would be a serious cost to pay for following Jesus. James was the first disciple to die for the Lord Jesus Christ. John suffered probably the longest of any of the disciples because he lived the longest, and experienced imprisonment in isolation on the island of Patmos.

In the roles of divine Persons, there are designated areas over which each has a prerogative. The Lord Jesus is the king of the coming kingdom. People are born into the kingdom by the Holy Spirit. The Father assigns positions in the kingdom.

The other ten disciples were quite upset because they looked at leadership as those who have authority over others. The Lord made it clear that in the kingdom, leaders are true servants to the people. They serve as willing bond slaves, not only in practical matters but as spiritually mature people who are willing to do whatever is necessary for the blessing of others. The Lord Himself came to do that very thing, and He was their example. Many will be saved because of the willingness of God to save them by His grace, but sadly not all are willing to take God's offer of salvation.

Sight for the Blind, v.29-34

There are variations in the accounts of the healing of blind men. That makes it clear the writers of the four Gospels, didn't deliberately try to make the events of the ministry of Jesus exactly the same. The Holy Spirit made each account suitable to the distinct purpose of each Gospel. The differences emphasize different points of interest. Relating to the event.

For instance, there were two parts to Jericho. One part was where the poor Jews lived, and the other part was where Herod and the wealthy people who served him in the winter months, lived a lavish lifestyle in a huge protected compound. The blind men were in neither place as outcast beggars seeking help between the two parts of Jericho. One blind man stood out as the prominent one of the two. He was Bartimaeus who had no hesitation to call out to Jesus calling Him "Lord," and "Son of David" (Messiah).

Even as He was going to Jerusalem and facing His own death, the Lord Jesus Christ showed His compassion and grace to those in need of Him. In the people of the Lord, there are certain inborn spiritual characteristics that go along with the new nature God gives us. There is a real desire in every newborn believer to see other people saved from their sins and hell. There is an inherent concern for the welfare of others as fellow travelers to eternity. There is love for others and a willingness to show grace to those who need grace. There is love for Christ that constrains a child of God to do what is best for other people and give them the Gospel message. There is a willingness to take the low place without any fuss about it, and gracious dignity and humility when for some reason they are given the honor. They give God all the glory for any blessing they have been able to bestow on others and are grateful to God for any blessing bestowed on them. Kingdom living and all it entails comes naturally to the newborn believers, although the practices and principles of the kingdom have to be taught as to how best to do the will of God.

MATTHEW 21

Beginning in Matthew twenty-one, Jesus is publicly identified as the Messiah of Israel. Right from the start, the Gospel of Matthew identified the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. To the Jewish readers in local assemblies where this book was read, it would have been a very significant point in strengthening their faith. They would have been able to confidently identify themselves as people of faith, along with those written about in the earlier chapters who knew

Jesus to be “The Christ.” The written words would have given authenticity to the testimony they would give to others as to why they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Roman authorities, any person who claimed to have a higher authority than Rome had to be eliminated. Up until this time in the narrative, Jesus had told those who believed Him to be the Messiah, “the Son of David,” to keep His identity to themselves. Then the time came for Him to intentionally set the stage for the coming events by riding into Jerusalem riding on a small donkey beside the animal’s mother. This was a visible response to the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 and the fulfillment as He entered Jerusalem as a merciful and peaceable King. This all happened less than a week before He was crucified by the Gentiles as He had just recently told His disciples.

As the Messiah, He had authority over the temples and what went on there. By purifying it from the religious hucksters and their crooked money-changing, He clearly emphasized what God’s intention for the temple was. It was intended to be a place of prayer and worship, not a business. Temple focus would soon be done away along with the form of religion that was superseded by personal faith in Christ. True believers would be a part of the temple which is His body, the New Testament church in which we are built. Jesus Christ is the Chief Cornerstone and believers as living stones become part of that temple. The disciples were called by the Lord to have unwavering faith in Him.

The first parable in this chapter specifies that people of faith who are faithful to the Lord, are what is important in the kingdom of God. Social status and rank in religion do not count in the kingdom of God. Repentance and faith in Christ are necessary to be in the kingdom. The second parable has to do with what they thought of Jesus. Did they put their faith in Him and were they loyal to Him? The Jewish leaders did not and were not. They would not be in the kingdom of God.

Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, v. 1-11

The Lord Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem from the east, by way of Bethany and Bethpage, to the Mount of Olives. The small donkey and its mother were covered with garments, and in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy came in a peacetime action to approach the city. That was the first time that kind of entrance on a donkey happened since the time of Solomon who was a peacetime king. If it had been on a horse, it would have been symbolic of going to war. Meekness and lowliness are earmarks of the Messiah in the prophecy of Zechariah.

Homage to the Lord was shown by garments and branches on the road. “Hosanna” (save us now), indicated that the people who were there had pinned their hopes on Jesus as the Messiah, “The Son of David.” They were hoping for Him to deliver the nation then. Christ had previously avoided public displays of being the Messiah but now presented Himself to the nation in an unmistakable way. The people knew who He was, and even those who said, “Who is this?” knew Him to be Jesus. That question was like a challenge similar to saying, “Who does He think He is coming into the city like this? He is acting like He is the coming Messiah!”

It is so wrong to say one thing and mean another deliberately as those religious people did. Some people join crowds when it is the popular thing to do. They can sing hymns or songs. Some

praise and others just fake their praise to be accepted by the people they are with. Many people are moved by emotions and enthusiasm to do what is right one time, and then when that moment has passed, they revert to what is normal to them when they just want to get along with people in spite of whether a matter is right or wrong.

Cleansing the temple, v. 12-17

Early in the Lord's ministry according to the Gospel of John, this had happened before. At that first time, there had been cattle and sheep in the temple as well as doves and money changers. This second time, we are reminded that evil people quickly revert to evil ways when it is to their advantage financially, socially, or for other kinds of personal gain. In the case of selling doves and changing money, there was a lot of money to be made off of people coming from different countries to buy sacrificial animals at the temple.

Temple money was shekels, and those exchanging money of a different kind were at the mercy of the moneychangers. Money exchange is an open field for extortion, and the temple shekel was controlled by the family of Annas, who was the high priest at that particular time. It was well-known in Jerusalem, that Annas, and "the Bazar of Annas," were noted for extortion and evil practices that were protected by being located in the temple precincts and controlled by priests.

In spite of the evil being done there, and the Lord Jesus overthrowing the money changers' table, and driving out the sellers of doves; He healed right there in the temple, all who came to Him who were diseased and sick. The "Hosannas" to the Son of David from the young boys in the temple, brought praise to God from those who would have been considered insignificant to the priests. Those priests became very indignant because of the clear voices and words of real praise that came from those children who recognized Jesus for who he really was. By leaving the city of Jerusalem and going to Bethany for the night, Jesus disassociated Himself from the shallowness, the wickedness, and the deception of those people who were satisfied with that which was superficial.

There are times when we who know the Lord and are committed to following Him and His word, have to walk away from, and have nothing to do with, that which is called "Christian," but has no characteristic of that which is biblical. It is impossible for light and darkness to share the same space. Neither truth nor deception can function in the same time and place. We cannot serve God and money at the same time. Rather than confrontation and conflict, we need to follow the practice of our Lord and remove ourselves from that which denies and defies God. That will never be popular with a generation of people who praise what they call "tolerance," and oppose that which they call "fundamental bigotry of Bible-believing Christians."

The fruitless fig tree, v.18-22

It was well-known to the Jews that the nation of Israel was symbolized as a fig tree. In the incident of the fig tree that had leaves but no fruit, the Lord Jesus Christ was clearly making the point that the nation was spiritually fruitless as far as God was concerned. Usually leaves and fruit are on a tree at the same time, although the fig tree sometimes does have a bit of fruit on it after the leaves are gone. This tree had only leaves left on it. There was no evidence of fruit that was a testimony of the spiritual emptiness and barrenness of the nation as a whole. When people get used to sinning and are incensed when they are corrected and challenged to put right that

which is wrong, they are barren and unfruitful. This condition is prevalent in this country today when even religionists accept morally perverse people as spiritual advisors and leaders.

A barren, fruitless tree is useless and is doomed to both fruitlessness and is in danger of being cut down and removed because it “encumbers the ground.” Israel had long had the advantage of being the recipients of blessings which the Lord had provided for them as His chosen earthly people. But they had despised and ignored their privileges in the same way many children of believers today ignore and despise their favored upbringing in a Christian home. It is sad to see those who were spiritually privileged going the way of the world and abandoning that which they had been taught as if it was of no value. They spend their lives looking for what they think they have missed because Christian parents preserved them from social sins when they were young. Many become wealthy and unhappy people because they know within themselves what is right, but have deliberately chosen that which was not God’s will.

The disciples must have been amazed when in such a short time the tree withered. The Lord Jesus pointed out that power like that was available to them through faith when such actions are according to the will of God. To move a mountain on a whim or just to see if it can be done is not an act of faith. It is rather an act of doubt. Acts of faith have a spiritual purpose behind them and are that which can glorify God.

Jesus’ authority challenged, v. 23-27

Members of the Sanhedrin or some important rabbis like Gamaliel, were the ones who authorized the teaching and religious practices of the Jewish people. Social and religious activities were closely linked in Israel because of the temple, the feast days, the sacrifices, and the close ties between the priesthood, the Sanhedrin, and the political system. Those leaders were considered to be the ones who knew the right traditional practices because they studied the law and the Talmud and added to biblical teaching what they considered to be appropriate for the present needs. Without a commitment to the written word only, the opinions of those men were considered to be what must be practiced. The Roman Catholic church today considered the writings of “the early church fathers,” to be as binding and authoritative as the Bible.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the temple, and the purging of the temple were a threat to the authority of those in leadership. When the Lord healed people and to cap it off, His acceptance of the homage given when the “Hosannas to the Son of David” indicated He was the Messiah of Israel; the leaders had enough. They had not sanctioned Him in any way, and He was actually taking authority they believed they alone should have. They thought they should have the last word. This is a result of people taking control of things that have not been given that place by God. Chaos and discontent; fraud and failure follow when the standard of law is changed to suit the times and the will of the people rather than the unchanging standards of God.

The question the Lord asked in answer to their question, was not an evasion of their question, but had the purpose of both implying the answer and exposing the dishonesty of those who asked the question in the first place. John was recognized as a prophet who had authority from God. He publicly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, “the Lamb of God” who bears away the sin of the world. He taught that people should put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those questioners saw clearly what Jesus' question posed, and it was a dilemma to them. If they acknowledged John's authorization to be from heaven, they would have to acknowledge what he taught about Jesus being the Messiah had authorization from God. To deny John was a prophet would bring the public down on them because John was considered by all the people to be a prophet sent from God. Dishonest and cowardly people like that deserve no answer when such "loaded" challenges are made against the truth of God. When confronted with obviously insincere people with insincere questions, we can be sure they are not looking for a sincere answer but are looking for an excuse to condemn and reject what they do not agree with.

Parable of two sons, v.28-32

Another teaching moment came that was used by the Lord Jesus to show the response of those who were considered outcasts and were despised by the religious leaders. The publicans and harlots who were known to be sinners, and knew themselves to be sinners against God, paid attention to the preaching of John. His teaching was to "Prepare the way of the Lord." His teaching opened the way for people to be willing to accept the teaching of Jesus. Many who had followed John, became followers of Jesus.

In the parable, the first son represented the outcasts, publicans, and open sinners who had gone their own way, but they repented and followed the Lord. The second son who said the right thing but didn't do it, represented the religious leaders. They gave a distant approval of what John taught, but never acted upon what he taught and never did what they said. The outwardly sinful people who repent of their sins and respond in faith to what God says, go into the kingdom of God. Those who imply they will do what God wants but don't will be shut out of the kingdom of God.

John practiced what he preached and he both practiced and preached the way of righteousness, but the religious leaders did not receive it. Those who say they believe the truth but do not act upon it, are lost. The religious outcasts of John's day heard what he preached, understood the message, and believed it.

Parable of the landowner, v.33-46

In this parable, the Lord Jesus Christ goes beyond what the religious leaders were thinking in their mind and exposes their thoughts. He let them know that He knew what they were thinking and planning to do. The whole parable was so plain to them, there was no way they could misinterpret it. The characters in the parable were as obvious to them as they are to us.

The landowner is God. The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the Jewish leaders who thought they were in full control of what happened in the nation. The landowner's servants were the prophets of God who were faithful to Him, and the priests who did what was right. These faithful people down through the generations of the nation's history, preached the word of the Lord faithfully and left them without excuse. The son in the parable is the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." The "other" tenants are Gentile believers who do the will of God. In the telling of this parable, Jesus was letting them know that He knew what they were plotting against Him.

Israel belonged to God by His sovereign choice. Every Jew would be familiar with the nation of Israel being depicted as a vineyard, and the vineyard as the kingdom of God. Every provision was made for the kingdom to be a place of blessing. The landowner planted the vineyard to be a fruitful place. He built the wall around it. Israel has survived because of divine protection. He dug the winepress. There was a place to make the fruit of the vineyard into that which brings joy to all who are involved. The watchtower was for those whom God arranged to make sure all was safe and secure from false teachers, those who would pollute or poison the fruit, or who would uproot the tender plants.

The religious rulers as the tenants and caretakers, were responsible for what the vineyard produced for the benefit of the landowner. But instead of working for God's interests, the servants who were sent as representatives of Him were beaten, stoned, and killed. Faithful prophets and priests who did what God wanted were rejected by those who claimed authority for themselves but were not faithful to the trust placed on them by God. This is a serious lesson for all of us. In grace, God has allowed us to participate in His work and has designated roles to fill and work to do. He has every right to expect us to follow His word and be able to bring the fruit of our labor to Him and present it to Him for His glory, honor, and use.

The son of the landowner depicts the Lord Jesus Christ. In the telling of this parable, He was making sure the listeners knew that he knew what they were planning. When that point was made, the parable changes from the past and present to the future. Perhaps the religious leaders didn't grasp the point of the parable, or if they did, they brazenly answered without realizing they were predicting their own coming judgment.

"The stone which the builders reject," is a statement regarding the stupidity of the experts. They were builders who should have looked carefully at the perfect stone. After scrutiny, they rejected that which was perfect. In the divine purposes of God, that rejection led to the triumph of the cross. Now the way is opened to "whosoever will may come." The kingdom of God was taken from the leaders and "another nation," the church composed of Jews and Gentiles, the "whosoever" people of the world, will bring in the fruit God intends to receive from those who believe in Him.

Those leaders were removed from the potential blessings of the kingdom. The nation will again be blessed in the future, but all those individuals who rejected the Lord are lost souls. We experience God's blessings today when we are built into the church by putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church will actually share with Jesus in the coming kingdom. What a blessed hope we have who believe in Him and know Him personally. We will live and reign with Him.

Pharisees and priests who heard this parable from Jesus knew what He meant. They also knew He was popular with the people at that moment so were afraid to cast any adverse reflection on the memory of John the Baptist. However, with the week they would fulfill their terrible plot, and the Savior would be taken and crucified. Theirs would be "the greater sin," than even that of the Gentile Romans who carried out the actual crucifixion.

MATTHEW 22

The parable of the marriage feast is symbolic of the blessings God has for those who respond to His offer of grace and salvation both now for us all, but also for Israel in a specific way. God sends invitations again and again because He is not willing that any should perish. Sadly, people reject and ignore His offers and because of that choice, they will be lost forever.

Questions by various groups when the Lord Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem as the Messiah who offered Himself to the nation of Israel; revealed their rejection of Him. His identity had been made openly plain for three and a half years of public ministry, but they would not acknowledge Him as the Christ. Even though the questions they asked were obviously to trap Him in some inconsistency, each of the answers He gave, offered an opportunity for them to recognize that His wisdom and understanding were beyond that which would be given by a normal man.

Like them, we are to give God what belongs to Him. He is the living God who is active in the lives of people. God's law and God's word are relevant to us today. The answers He gave to those people then, were clearly that of the One who is the Messiah. The Lord then asked them a question that was personal, insightful, and vital. "What think ye of Christ is the test, that tries both the state and the scheme. You cannot be right in the rest until you think rightly of Him!"

The marriage feast, v.1-14

There are some differences in the details of some of the parable illustrations the Lord gave more than one time. Similarities are used by any teacher, as well as differences, to emphasize the points to be made in a new situation. The kingdom of heaven is the period of time from the times of Jesus' first coming until the time He reigns as the Messiah over all the earth. It is in this time in which we live that He is the Mediator between God and men, "the man Christ Jesus."

The marriage feast parable describes that time and the persons in the parable are representative of the Father who prepared the feast for His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Messianic kingdom to which the people of Israel were special guests as a chosen nation. To refuse to attend the marriage of a king's son who is the heir of a kingdom, is not merely discourteous, but indicates disloyalty to the king and the kingdom in which they live.

That is why the king in the parable dealt so harshly with those who refused his invitation. He destroyed them and their cities. It was not just a discourtesy, but it was a rebellious response. Two invitations were given. One was an announcement of the wedding and the second was the call to come now because everything is ready. The Lord Jesus plainly indicated Israel was invited in the initial invitation, but when the call came to come at that specific time, Israel refused. They refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on His name."

Further entreaties were made and were brazenly refused and rejected outright. Those invited even went so far as to murder those servants who gave the message; like John the Baptist, James, the first to be killed in the Christian era, and then Stephen who was martyred. Many other servants since then have been treated in the same way. Just like the parable indicated would happen; Jerusalem was totally destroyed by the army of Titus about forty years after the Lord told this parable. The "highways and streets" where "as many as ye shall find" people were

located, is an illustration of Gentile people. The relationship of Gentile believers in this church age to the Lord Jesus Christ is the same as believing Jews. They are neither Jew nor Gentile but church of God. The Bride of Christ is the church composed of believers from all parts of the world who respond to the invitation to come and partake of the blessings of God's salvation.

In grace, both bad and good, open sinners and morally upright sinners, are invited to come to the wedding feast God has prepared for those who love the Lord. From all parts of the world, the wedding will be furnished with guests. The rejection of Jesus by Israel as a nation has brought judgment on them for generations. Now the outcasts of Israel and the Gentiles are included in the blessings of being in the kingdom of God.

The righteousness of Christ imputed to sinners is typified by all of them being provided with a suitable wedding garment. All of the guests were given a similar garment making the focus of the wedding and all who attend, on the Heir, the Son of God. Each person was able to avail themselves of the wedding garment, and then they could go into the wedding feast. Any person who thinks they can enter the kingdom of God the way they are, without having trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior, is not fit for the kingdom. Acceptance into the kingdom is because of the righteousness God provides for us through Christ, and every person who enters chooses to accept that personally. Salvation is "not of works lest any many should boast."

Entrance into the kingdom of God is open to all who will come, but it is only "upon all that believe." Without the salvation God provides, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in outer darkness. Being shut out of heaven for not accepting what God has freely provided, will leave a soul on "the shores of the castaway." God's call goes out to sinners to come and be saved. When a person comes by faith and accepts the wonderful blessings of God's salvation, they find themselves safe and secure for all eternity. To resist and reject the invitation makes a person responsible for rejecting Christ, rebellion against God, and their own eternal loss because of their perceived self-righteousness. "Few there be that find it."

Question about tribute to Caesar, v.15-22

Pharisees had students whom they were training and teaching the rabbinical practices of their sect. Likely the Sadducees had theirs as well. Who the Herodians were, is not entirely clear to me. They seem to have political ties, instead of religious convictions, although in Israel; social, political, and religious life were all closely linked. They must have been those who wanted the family of Herod to take back the rule in Judea and Samaria that had been taken from them by the Romans because of the excessive cruelty of Archelaus who followed the rule of Herod when Christ was born. The Romans put those two provinces under the authority of procurators like Pontius Pilate.

Opposition against Christ makes strange "bedfellows" of very divergent groups. The ecumenical movement of our times is an example of opposition against the supreme authority of the Bible over church doctrine and practice, which reflects the opinions of religious men. The verbal flattery and hypocritical words of those who came to Jesus opened a series of loaded questions that had been deliberately prepared to try to trip up the Lord Jesus. The first one was to make Jesus acknowledge servitude to Rome and thus compromise His claim as the Messiah. If He

would not do that, He would be charged with rebellion and disloyalty to Rome's authority. The Herodians would turn Him over to the Roman authorities for Roman justice against rebellion.

If He agreed to pay taxes, the Pharisees would say He was opposed to God, who was the only authority they said they recognized. The Lord knew the deception in them, so asked them for a coin that was used by them in doing business. Someone of them obviously had one, but the Lord did not produce one Himself. That was the first step in exposing their hypocrisy to open view. By asking about the image and the words on the coin, and them stating they knew who it was and what it said, they took the second step of revealing their deception. By using the coin for their own business and advantage, they were using and doing something they considered was wrong. It implied they didn't agree with Rome but they were using it for their own ends, which was another evidence of their hypocrisy.

When a person subjects themselves to the national, state, or municipal government, and accepts the benefits and protection of that government, they are obligated to obey its laws. They are to support that government and pay the taxes that are levied in order to maintain what we take advantage of until it becomes sinful to do so. Giving to God what is His goes much further and deeper than what is owed to the government.

The only way to fulfill even a small part of our duty to God is to give ourselves to Him, with everything we are and have. Our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires far more than the tax money we give to the state. We owe God our obedience, our service, our unreserved commitment. We who are in the kingdom of heaven are subject to the will of God.

Question about the resurrection of the dead, v.23-33

The Pharisees and Herodians failed in the attempt to snare the Lord Jesus with their question, so the Sadducees stepped into the affair with their trick question. They came with an absolutely absurd illustration regarding a practice that was not often used at that time. Their question was merely a theological supposition based on a teaching in Deuteronomy 25:5. Their attempt to discredit Jesus and make their point, was contrary to their own belief that there is no resurrection of the dead. For their purposes, they simply presumed that if there was a resurrection, people would be just the same after they were raised from the dead as they were before they died. That was what those Jesus raised from the dead were like.

Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch as the word of God. All the rest of the Old Testament to them was history, poetry, etc. Knowing that the Lord answered them from the book of Exodus, and made the point that by using the present tense, from God's perspective, which is the only one that really counts; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were presently alive. He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

He did not say that in the resurrection humans become angels, but that they are like the angels of God who do not marry. The Sadducees did not know what the scriptures taught or what God was able to do. We can't understand what heaven is like, or what relationships in heaven are like compared to the terms we use to understand them in the world today. There is nothing said about our earthly relationships being forgotten, or how glorified bodies will function. But we are told

that the resurrected state of believers is blessedness, comfort, and perfect fellowship. That is enough to make us glad to be going there.

The concern we should have is that our relationship with God is what it should be now. That is much more important than what we will look like in heaven or what we will do there, or even what heaven looks like. Those things we don't clearly know and that are beyond our expectations and limitations, we don't need to be concerned about now. Dead things can have a creator and controller but only living beings have a God. He is the God of the living, and that is all we really know or need to know about what we will be like in heaven.

Question about the great commandment, v.34-40

The Pharisees were likely glad the Sadducees were silenced by the Lord's answer. One would think they had enough sense to know enough to keep quiet themselves after they had been answered so succinctly by the Lord regarding taxes. But pride of position often overrides common sense because we can become too impressed with ourselves. The Pharisees were more concerned with bringing Jesus down in defeat than they were with learning what is right.

Pharisees had classified hundreds of laws in their additions to the word of God and consequently had to list some more important than others. Their expert lawyer stepped out to ask Jesus what He thought was the greatest commandment. The Lord Jesus cut through all their subterfuge and quoted the scripture precisely. Then He quickly summed up the whole law in three brief sentences. All of the commandments and all the moral laws are contained in those words. All the books the Pharisees studied were just words that could be summed up in three sentences.

The point of the law is not to tell us what we should not do, but to reveal to us what we should do and can do. Law-keeping is not so much an action but an attitude. It is the reflection of one's heart and their personal disposition to do what is right. Loving God and doing His will to our neighbor, is simply the evidence and outworking of our love for God and what is in our heart. God cares for us simply because He is a gracious and loving God and it is His nature to care. He expects the same from us toward others. This is the summation of God's will for all of humanity.

Jesus' question to them about Christ, v.41-46

The Lord then challenged the Pharisees with one simple question that had national, political, religious, and personal significance. It was not complicated to answer but it penetrated right to the point of why they were questioning Him in the first place. When they said that Christ was the Son of David; they implied they thought the Messiah would be a mere man. They either did not know or would not accept that Messiah would be God. When Jesus quoted the first verse of Psalm 110, He affirmed that it was the Spirit of God who identified this Person as one of supernatural revelation.

All of those who heard that question and were left speechless knew that the Lord Jesus Christ was identifying Himself as the Messiah. The helpless and the blind had called Him the "Son of David," and He healed them completely because of their faith in Him. People had praised Him when He entered Jerusalem as the "Son of David" and He had not stopped them. Now they had to make a decision. Would they believe in Him or not? Their decision was to no longer seek the

truth or even ask a question of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had their minds made up and did not want to be faced with the truth.

MATTHEW 23

There were a number of Jewish sects during the time our Lord Jesus Christ was here. These groups developed during the years between the closing of the Old Testament and the time of the New Testament. The roots of the sect of the Pharisees began about two hundred years before Christ was born. They accepted the Torah as the truth and also accepted as inspired and authoritative, the things that were passed on as oral traditions. That meant that the opinions of certain men were as important to them as the inspired word of God.

Much of what the Pharisees believed was quite good and consistent with the scriptures. They believed in angels and demons; free will and divine sovereignty. They also believed in human equality and the resurrection of the dead. The big problem was that their teaching was simply ethics; rather than the unchanging word of God. Their teaching was adaptable to whatever they wanted to believe at that particular time. Consequently, what they taught was only an outward form of acceptance of their own doctrine. Even the practices of the teachers were inconsistent with what they taught themselves. They were satisfied with an outward show, rather than an inward heart for God.

Sadducees interpreted the law of Moses more literally than the Pharisees and were very exacting in maintaining the purity of the priesthood. They were the priests at the time of Christ. To them, free will was the reason for everything. They did not accept divine sovereign will, to have authority over the affairs of men. They did not believe in life after death in angels and demons; or even in a spiritual world of any kind. The other two prominent sects were the Essenes and Zealots, but they were not the focus of this chapter of Matthew.

Sadly, the attitude of the Pharisees and Sadducees permeated the whole city of Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus Christ mourned over the city because of the lost souls who would be in hell and who lived there and didn't want Him as their Messiah. He could see beyond the privilege and favor of the city to the fact that it would soon be destroyed.

The Pharisees exposed, v. 1-12

This chapter begins with an open warning against the practices of the Pharisees. The problem with the Pharisees whose laws were not all bad and some were even beneficial, was that they took their own rules as seriously as the laws of God. They told people to obey their rules when they didn't do that themselves. Further, they obeyed their own rules just to the extent that made them look good before people, not in obedience to God. The teaching of the Pharisees was not the real problem. The Lord Jesus condemned them for who they were. They were hypocrites who were only concerned with looking holy, not being holy. They wanted the praise of men and were not concerned about the praise of God. They were looking for the people to honor them rather than honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

Attitudes that we have, and the actions we take, expose who we really are. It is possible for us to study the Bible, preach its truths to other people, and tell them what they should do for the Lord, and not match our own teaching and beliefs with our actions. It is fundamental to Christian

testimony, for us to live by the standard of love for God and the people around us. To know the truth and not practice it from our hearts is hypocrisy. Greatness in the kingdom of God comes from serving, not from being served.

Seven Woes on the Pharisees, v.13-36

The Pharisees and other religious leaders in Israel at the time when Christ was here, were the most powerful, influential, and respected leaders in Jerusalem. Religion had greater authority over the Jews than business and government because those three areas of life, plus personal life, were all controlled by the public practices of religion. Those men had a lot of power and wanted more. They wanted a Messiah who would lead them to more power, money, and status than they already had. Their craving for those things, made them lose sight of God. They were willing to make changes in their doctrine and teaching to suit their own aims. Even more sadly, their own spiritual blindness spread to the whole nation as the “blind leaders of the blind,” led them into a ditch.

The first of the seven woes in this chapter, was because not only did they not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves; they were keeping other people from entering by their hypocritical teaching and actions.

Further in the Lord’s indictment of the Pharisees, was the fact that the Pharisees were very zealous in getting converts to their beliefs, and were attracting people to what they believed instead of to God. The small details and the “nit-picking” of their regulations, and the man-made additions to God’s laws; pointed their converts to them, not to God. Pressure to accommodate to their rules made new converts more zealous and willing to go further in their wrong actions, than other contemporaries or even their teachers. Saul of Tarsus was an example. He said himself that he lived as a Pharisee after the strictest sect of their religion.

So, this second woe was pronounced on them because of their zeal in converting others to follow the Jewish leaders and leading them away from God. The consequence was their converts became more hell-bound than those who taught them. The woe was because of the results of their misguided zeal, more than the fact that they were zealous.

When the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, the “blind guides,” took an oath; they made a difference between what was a binding oath and what was considered not binding because in their minds it was of less importance. That was their way of evading “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” The Lord Jesus called them blind fools for making such evasive oath-taking. It made the whole practice valueless. Jesus insisted that people simply tell the truth always, and abolish taking an oath.

Therefore, this third woe was pronounced on the Pharisees for commanding people to make superstitious and frivolous vows. The Pharisees were blindly leading people to follow them and their man-made traditions instead of following the word of God. To emphasize outward forms of religion instead of new life from within, and glad obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ; leads people to eternal woe and dark damnation.

Jesus didn't criticize the Pharisees for observing the law, but for the hypocrisy that was involved in their interpretations of the law and the practices of their own lives. They were preoccupied with the petty rules they had made and ignored what were real scriptural principles that were to be followed. It is possible to be concerned about the little things and refuse to commit ourselves to those things that are important. Justice, mercy, and faith are much more important than how much money you give to support people, or who cuts the grass and who moves the seats in the assembly building. Little things need to be done, but to strain on them and make them a major issue is not right. That is especially true when false doctrine is being taught or unscriptural teaching is allowed to go uncorrected. Moral sin overlooked in the lives of believers is of greater importance than the temperature in the main auditorium. Some things may be overlooked because of a position a person has in society or in the local church.

So, a fourth woe was pronounced for neglecting the weightier matters of the law and ignoring what was important, and focusing on minor details that have no real consequences one way or another.

Then the Pharisees were really concerned about what the people thought when they saw their outward appearance. They made a point of looking like they were holy and very saintly so they would be well thought of and given respect by other people. Inwardly, however, they were not pure. Religious appearances are only to be seen by people. God looks on the heart. The outside of cups and dishes may be clean but that does not make them clean. The thoughts of our hearts are affected by what we feed our minds and spirits on. To look at immoral things on a computer or a television set can leave an indelible impression on our minds, and that makes us unclean inside. Greed and self-indulgence can control the mind and will of people even though they may appear holy and pure outwardly.

What we feed our souls on and what we take in through our senses, doesn't leave. However, we can keep our fellowship with the Lord real and vital, by confessing and forsaking sin. The outward person can then reflect that inward purity. The fifth woe was because the Pharisees were keeping up outward appearances of being holy, while inwardly and privately they were corrupt.

The sixth woe of the Pharisees was because they were acting like they were spiritual, to cover up the sin in which they were indulging themselves. Hypocrisy makes a point of looking good no matter what is going on in private or in one's own soul. The Lord said that is like whitewashing a tomb to make it beautiful outside, but it doesn't change a thing within.

"How are you today?" is a common greeting, and is most often answered with, "Just fine, thank you!" even though it may not be true. To tell the truth about what is happening in our lives can be humiliating and so light-weight responses to lightweight questions are not really the truth as to what is really happening. When we ask a question of another person, it is important that it is a thoughtful and meaningful one. Then the answer may be more real. Living out our faith in Christ as a believer who is clean on the inside and who is in happy fellowship with the Lord, makes outward cleanliness real. If we live with only an outward show of Christianity, that is a sham and blatant hypocrisy.

The seventh woe was because the Pharisees pretended to have learned lessons from their forefathers, but in reality, they were unspiritual “sons” of their ancestors who killed the prophets in old times. Abel was the first person murdered and Zechariah was the last one we read about in 2nd Chronicles 24, the last book of the Old Testament in chronological order. Even as the Lord was speaking to them, they were plotting and planning to kill Him. The Lord knew they would do the same to those who followed Him after He was gone. He told them in scathing terms that they were condemned to hell because He already knew they would be persecuting, scourging, and killing those believers who would not follow their hypocritical ways. The Pharisees were guilty of shedding innocent blood. To claim to be God’s people and do what they were doing was hypocrisy.

There is no way the practice of Pharisaical hypocrisy can be ever considered a righteous way for believers in Christ to practice their faith. Laws and traditions must never take the place of love, justice, grace, mercy, and forgiveness in the lives of God’s people. The Lord Jesus Christ was not being peevish or filled with animosity when He pronounced all those woes on the Pharisees. He was just looking ahead and could easily see the results of such an attitude on the part of those who held that attitude, and on those who followed their leadership. That was one reason why He was so grieved as He looked over Jerusalem.

The Lament over Jerusalem, v. 37-39

The heart of the Lord Jesus was still tied to His people, and even to the city of Jerusalem. It was the capital city of God’s chosen people and was important to Him. The temple was there and it was still considered the place to go to worship the true God collectively. It was supposed to be the place where justice and mercy met. Peace and thanksgiving should have emanated from the courts of the temple, but instead, there was confusion, greed, and open covetousness. Jerusalem had become blind to God even though it was a city of people whom God loved. The character of the city had changed with the change of character in the people. Instead of being a place of peace that should have been sensitive to the spiritual needs of God’s people; it had become a covetous, greedy, ungodly place of business and intrigue without any redeeming factors to be found there.

Jesus grieved over those people and would have protected them from coming judgment, but they didn’t want Him. Even though people are loved and God wants to help and comfort those who need Him; He does not force or impose Himself on those who want their own way. People reject Him because they don’t want Him personally in their lives, or because they don’t think they need Him. Those of us who know who we really are and who have gratefully and gladly come to Him and put our faith in Him; know that “Without Him how lost I would be!”

MATTHEW 24

When Jesus left the temple for the last time, His teaching went in a very different direction. Instead of giving principles for living for the Lord and serving Him, He had His disciples look into the future. The beautiful temple building had been extensively renovated by Herod. It had become a far more dramatic and impressive place than the returning remnant had built under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Ezra. But in rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah, the “Father’s house” was now no more than a gathering center for the Jews.

The temple Solomon built was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The new temple built by the remnant had not been completed, until some years later when Haggai and Zechariah prompted the complacent people to finish what had been started. Herod made additions and lavish decorations to the temple over a long period of years, which apparently weren't finished until 64 AD. Not long after the renovations were finished, the temple was destroyed by the Roman army under the leadership of Titus, a son of the emperor.

As Jesus sat with His disciples looking over the city and temple from the Mount of Olives, He told them of future events beginning with false teachers and describing the first half of the tribulation. Then after the "perilous times" of the last half of the tribulation, He would come back in power and glory. The challenge to be ready for this was clarified by the fact that Israel would survive, but barely. The comparison of "the days of Noah," illustrated the necessity of being watchful and conscious of the fact that at the end of the tribulation, divine judgment will come swiftly.

Destruction of the temple, v.1-3

Some of those disciples would be alive when the army of Rome under the leadership of Titus, would desecrate the temple which happened when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, and again when Antiochus IV offered a pig on the altar. In the future, the anti-Christ will again pollute the new temple that will be built. The disciple needed to look beyond the temple and a physical, materialistic view of that which was valueless. There was going to be a new and living temple composed of believers in Christ and He would be the Head of that new temple made of living stones built upon Christ, the Living Stone. The church of God is a temple not made with hands. The body of Christ is an eternal temple that will never be destroyed.

The first half of the tribulation, v.4-14

The disciples were still typical Jews who wanted a sign to assure them of the proof of a message. This lack of faith has stumbled many people when false "Christs" and prophets come with manmade predictions and dates as to when the end of the age will come. Some have even tried to predict the first part of the "Coming of the Lord," when He comes for the church before the tribulation begins. People who look for signs can be easily deceived. The Lord warned His disciples to watch out that no one deceived them with false predictions. We certainly need to take that as a warning for ourselves because there is a lot going on today in the name of the "Christian religion," but it is not with divine authority.

Many Christians are facing severe persecution now, in various parts of the world. This foreshadowing of the coming tribulation gives us a little idea of what is going to come upon the world after all of the church has been caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The "beginning of sorrows" will be experienced worldwide, and those who respond to the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom by the 144,000 converted Jews, will have to endure a lot of persecution for their faith in Christ. A great multitude will be put to death for their testimony as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Some will endure to the end and physically survive those terrible times.

Lawlessness and lack of love to control human behavior; leaves chaos, danger, hatred, and animosity against those who are willing to openly testify to God's saving grace and declare their

allegiance to the Lord. Pressure is put on believers now, and will be in the future, to conform to social norms and popular opinions even though they are contrary to righteous living and the standards of God's word. Those who control the media have already made it a point to demean fundamental Christians who base their convictions on the Bible.

The last half of the tribulation, v.15-28

The "perilous times" of the last days will seem bad enough for three and a half years, but when the anti-Christ is revealed as the "abomination of desolation," all restraint of any kind in the minds of unregenerate people, will be removed. Then thousands of Jewish believers, as well as those of other nations, will be hunted down and many will be executed. They won't be able to work, buy or sell, without showing obedience to the world system under the authority of the anti-Christ.

The only safe place for those believers in the Lord Jesus Christ at that time will be in hidden places; not in homes or cities. During the tribulation, God in mercy will have the 144,000 Jews who believe in the Lord Jesus following the rapture, spread out around the world preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. Many will be saved under their preaching, and many will die martyrs' deaths. To remain loyal to the Lord in those times will be difficult. The promise of Christ's return will sustain them at that time, in the way that it sustains us today.

We know that the promise of the Lord to return for His own is a sure promise. It is important that we live each day with the fact in mind that His coming will be soon, sudden, and sure. What God promises, He fulfills. He has said to us that He will never leave us or forsake us. With the assurance of His presence with us, we need to daily be looking up for His return that is imminent, and looking ahead for opportunities to serve Him until that time comes. But perhaps more importantly, we should live each day with the conviction that he has something for us to do for Him right now. We should apply ourselves vigorously to do what we do for Him no matter what it might be, as long as it is according to His revealed will.

The Coming of the Son of Man, v.29-31

There will be no question as to what is the true return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth. All the false reports from various places that people will hear about, will be spurious. His future return to earth will be a glorious event that the whole world will see. "Every eye shall see Him." It will be like a worldwide flash of brilliant lightning. His return will be accompanied by momentous events that will be unmistakable, divine interventions in the affairs of every nation.

People all over the world who had mocked God, or even denied the fact there is a God, will be terrified and mourn. They will be totally afraid because they will realize they have been on the wrong side all the time. Despised believers in Christ that they have persecuted, tormented, and killed; will be gathered from everywhere as the dawn of a new age begins with the Lord Jesus Christ reigning as the universal King.

The Fig Tree, v.32-36

Jesus intended His disciples to learn from what He was telling them, because they would soon be spreading out over the world to preach the Gospel of the grace of God, and would make disciples in all nations. The warnings of disasters, persecution, and false "Christs" were not given so they

(or we) could date the time of the Coming of the Son of Man, but were given so people would be prepared to meet Him when He comes. The imminent return of Christ has been preached since the time He left so that preparation would be made ahead of time. Because we don't know the time of His coming, a person can get ready to meet Him now, and will not be too late if death comes suddenly.

If we knew the time of His coming was a long way in the future, we would likely put off what needs to be done until we think the time of preparation would be more convenient to us. People who plan to keep on sinning until the end of their life and then prepare to meet God will find death may overtake them before they had planned. It may be when they get to the end of life, they will find no place of repentance or are unable to reason or even think straight.

The generation of people living when Jesus was here, saw the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple. Many people died in the streets of the devastated city, and many fled to Masada and died there. There were signs in Israel because the Gospel brought new life to many born-again Jews. Evidence of "this generation" (the nation of Israel) is able to be seen today. Israel has become a recognized nation. There are quite a number of Israelis who are listening to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the last few years, more Israelis have been saved in the nation of Israel, than have been for a long time previously. As for the end of the age in a time frame: that is up to the Father.

The Days of Noah, v.37-39

Complacency even in an age of great wickedness, characterized the days of Noah. He preached God's truth during the years he was building the ark to save his house. Perhaps some of those to whom he preached repented and put their faith in God before they died, but in spite of his faithful preaching, the wickedness of that time ended in divine judgment on the ungodly world of willfully sinful humanity. The majority of people in Noah's day were going about the normal things of life that wicked people do, in spite of the warnings from that faithful man who walked with God. The result was that the flood took everyone away except for the eight people who inherited the earth at that time. It all happened suddenly even though the period of warning lasted for at least one hundred twenty years. Then in one week, that which had been warned about, happened. Within a year, the whole earth had changed because of the flood and subsequent effects of the violent actions of water over all the world.

Similar warnings are given in relation to the coming tribulation. The tribulation will be a very terrible time because of the wickedness of people, and then the sudden coming of the Son of Man will remove the wicked leadership from the earth. The faithful remnant that survives those terrible seven years will be able to enter into the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah/King. The whole demographics of life on earth will be changed from evil to righteousness, supported and enforced by the Righteous King.

Unity is broken by physical separation, v.40-42

The swiftness of the coming of Christ will catch people unaware so there will be no time for repentance. Two will be in a field going about the tasks of fieldwork and farming when one is snatched away and the other left. Two women will be grinding flour and going about normal home life when one is snatched away and the other left. Those taken away will be one taken for judgment and the other one left to enter the millennium kingdom of blessing. There will be no

time to make changes or to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord for salvation. Watchfulness now and preparation ahead of time are good warnings for people today.

We can become so engrossed in daily life as it is lived from day to day, that we forget the future. For those who will not be ready when Christ returns, the opportunity will have been lost and they will be lost. The unity of those who look the same and do the same things at first glance; will be broken forever because one will be ready and the other not. One will be caught away for judgment, and the other one saved for blessing.

The Master of the House, v.43-44

The coming of the Son of Man will be as unexpected as the coming of a thief in the night. The master of the house could have prevented the house from being broken into if he had not been careless and complacent. There will be no further forewarnings as to the time of the Coming of Christ. The first part of His coming which we call “the rapture of the church,” is not known as to when it will be. All the false predictions and warnings from the opinions and “date-setting” of people who do not carefully read the scripture are simply a deceptive plan of the enemy of souls to side-track believers from the work of the Gospel. When God’s people get their eyes on events instead of the Lord, it is very easy to focus on false teaching and persuasive false prophets.

It is in the second part of His Coming as the King when unbelievers are taken away for judgment. That will be sudden, swift, and separating as the wheat and tares are separated at the time of “the harvest.” Those who are tares, the unprepared and unsaved, will be cast into the fire. Those who are wheat are those who are saved and are useful for the King in His kingdom.

Two Servants, v.44-51

Faithful servants of the Lord should not grow careless and presumptuous in our service to the Master today. A worthy and prudent servant will be faithful in his or her work for the Master in spite of uncertain times. We are not sure of when the Lord will come and that in itself should motivate us to keep at the work to which we are called. At His coming, we should be still actively engaged in His work. As we prove our trustworthiness; increased privileges and responsibilities are given by the Lord for faithfulness to Him and His work.

Evil servants are self-centered and claim authority for themselves. Such people are not true servants in any way. Doctrinally that servant will claim the Lord is not coming anytime soon, so don’t worry about it. Ethically, an evil servant may even abuse those who are true to the Master. He will become a careless living, pleasure-seeking, party-going drunk who doesn’t believe that payday is coming soon. Judgment and justice will come unexpectedly to such people and they will not escape the eternal consequences of their evil intentions and practices.

MATTHEW 25

The Olivet Discourse is continued in this chapter having us look farther into the future, but with particular emphasis as to how we conduct ourselves in view of what is ahead of us and the world. The return of Christ is compared to a wedding in Matthew chapter twenty-two and in Revelation nineteen. The point being made in the parable of the ten virgins is to be prepared for His coming and to keep watching for it to happen.

The second parable of the talents in which large sums of money are given to servants, depicts the trust of the master in each of his servants, and his knowledge of their capability. Faith is required in every person who serves the Lord. The point of this parable is that faithfulness to our master is expected to bring some results. To play it safe and do little or nothing for the Lord indicates the condition of one's heart toward Christ's coming. The Lord intends for us to be active and stay at the work He gives us.

The judgment of the nations in which sheep and goats are separated will be according to the evidence that is seen, not what is professed. What is practiced is what counts, not what is said. What we do, reflects who we are, so we should be concerned that our love for God is demonstrated by our love for people.

Be Prepared, v.1-13

The parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins was likely directed to the Jews relating to the Jewish remnant in the tribulation. But the principle of being prepared for the coming of the Lord applies to us today, as well as this "word to the wise" to be ready for the Coming of the Lord in His revelation in glory. To be careless and indifferent to the promises of God is to be in a condition of unbelief, or at least unpreparedness.

It is not enough to have a lamp of a profession. When the Holy Spirit is not there to provide the light, a lamp is useless. The Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth with His bride, so the bridegroom is the focus of this parable, not the bride. Those who are going to participate in the "wedding feast" of millennium blessings, are those Jewish believers who have the Holy "Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced" [Zech.12:10] poured out upon them. This is the work of the Spirit in regeneration. Even though the ten virgins all appeared the same outwardly, and were doing the same thing; five had the oil, Holy Spirit, so they were prepared for Christ's return. The five foolish ones still did not believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

The point of the parable is not that they were slumbering and sleeping as they waited, but that half were not prepared as they could have been had they responded to the truth of God that was preached worldwide. We do not, and cannot share preparedness. That is an individual responsibility. No blame is attached to the fact they were all asleep. The remnant of Jews awaiting the return of the Messiah, the heavenly Bridegroom, are assured of His coming. The problem illustrated is that in the carelessness of half of them, their assurance was false assurance. Just because they were favored people as a chosen nation, does not mean that individual faith and responsibility is not required. Spiritual preparation is personal. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

When Christ returns, it will be too late to get prepared then. We can apply this to those who hear the Gospel today. Many complacently think they are all right and acceptable before God because they have the profession of being a Christian, without the light of the Holy Spirit in them. To put off responsibility to the call of Christ now, or in the case of the remnant of the Jews in the future, which is the teaching in the parable; is to be shut out of the kingdom. Life eternal is to "know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

To watch and be ready is expected of those who will enter into the kingdom blessings. Today, those who prepare by faith in Christ, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the future, those who respond to the Gospel of the kingdom will have the Holy Spirit “poured out” upon them. In view of the present opportunity, the urgent word is, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

Be Active, v.14-30

The emphasis of this parable the Lord told the disciples what would affect them personally, was to be faithful in their service to Him while He was gone. The talents used as an illustration in this parable are of more value than the pounds, He used in the parable in Luke nineteen. There were two different purposes for telling two similar parables. The one in Luke took place earlier when the disciples thought the kingdom of God would soon appear. This time the parable was a look into the distant future. The one in Luke was to teach that equal gifts if used with unequal diligence, will produce unequal rewards. This parable of the talents shows that unequal gifts used with equal faithfulness will be equally rewarded.

Those individuals in the parable refer to Christ as “a man traveling to a far country.” The servants are His disciples who were given large amounts of money suited to their individual capacity to produce profitable results. Talent as a unit of money is a huge amount in the extreme. The Lord knows the ability of each person and expects results suited to their capability. It is our Lord’s expectation that we use our time, talents, and assets diligently in any and every way possible in our service to Him. Each person has to consider what is the best way to further the interests of the kingdom of God and pursue that goal with vigor.

What that means in practical ways, is to think of how we can use each hour of each day in a way that will be labor “as unto the Lord.” The responsible use of our abilities may mean we have to step out of our “comfort zone” and change our occupation or the place we live, to better serve Him consistently to the best use of our “talents.” When we have been entrusted with money or other assets, we need to commit the use of it in ways that best serve the interests of our Master.

Two servants were good and faithful, and were invited to “enter into the joy of [their] lord.” The other one was wicked and lazy. The two were rewarded equally because they both responsibly used what they had been given. What a joy it will be to share Christ’s joy. The Lord Jesus said Himself, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Contrast the joy of the “good and faithful” servants with the unprofitable servant, who not only was not diligent with what he had been given, but he was not even challenged by the opportunity he had been given to use his time well. He was not wicked because he had tried and failed, but because he had not tried to do anything. He was simply playing it safe and he put the reflection of his laxity on his professed fear of his master. He did not even pass what he had been given, to others to use for a little profit. There are no legitimate excuses for us not doing what God tells us to do. He is our Lord, and He has given us all we have to use for Him as caretakers of His interests while He is away. To ignore, abuse, or be careless of what He has given us, is for a believer to suffer loss, and for one who is only a false Christian, his true nature is revealed. The one who is unprofitable because he is not a true servant will suffer eternal punishment.

This parable is a continuation of teaching regarding the tribulation saints, both Jews and Gentiles, who will enjoy the blessings of the millennium. Those who will not put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, will suffer the consequences the prophet Ezekiel predicted in Ezekiel 20:37-38. The principle of righteous judgment for sin is true in all ages. God holds us responsible for how we use the gifts He gives us.

Be Concerned, 31-46

The judgment of the nations will be the judgment of people living on earth at the time the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and glory. They will be judged as individuals who will be separated as sheep are separated from goats that were previously together in a flock. This judgment will be according to what is actually practiced, not merely professed. It is not what is said that counts, but what is actually done. Words do not earn salvation, but works of love reflect the life of one who has been redeemed by the work of Christ on the cross and expresses their gratitude. The Holy Spirit empowers believers of every age to demonstrate God's love by loving others.

Righteous people are described as sheep that are set on the King's right hand, and the wicked are the goats on the left. The right hand is the hand of blessing and honor. The left hand is the hand of rejection. Those on the right hand are invited to "Come" and experience the blessings the Father gives. Those on the left are told to "Depart." Those who look at the Lord's "brethren" with compassion and caring concern, and then take steps to meet their needs, are considered by the Lord to have done those works of blessing others; as having been done to Him.

Gentile "nations" of people from all over the world who show kindness to the Jewish remnant in the tribulation, are the sheep who had real concern for the persecuted Jewish people and took action to help them. Many Gentiles will be brought to faith in Christ through the testimony of those Jewish preachers. They will identify themselves with those who suffer for Christ's sake during those terrible times.

Acts of mercy are always in order for those who belong to Christ. We are to feed the hungry and care for those who have wants and needs we can meet. We can visit the lonely, look after the sick and demonstrate the grace of God in many practical ways. Simple acts that are freely and gladly done as to the Lord, do not depend on whether we are wealthy or have great ability and intellect. We don't have to be well-educated to do acts of kindness. Those things that really count are done from a warm heart toward the Lord and His people. Our gratitude toward Him for His saving grace to us, motivates us to look for ways to serve Him by serving people. Because of what we have freely received, we should freely give. Personal interest and involvement in the lives of others is a Christian privilege that brings joy to those who receive, to those who give, and to the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we are able to serve others.

To the group on the left who are described as "goats," the King says, "Depart from Me..." Not only are they rejected by the Lord, but they are "cursed," which is the total opposite of the blessedness of those to whom the King says, "Come thou blessed..." Those who are rejected go to "everlasting fire" rather than into the "kingdom prepared for you." The everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for men. God would have "all men to be saved." However, those who refuse His grace, and live for self-interest described as the "lust of the flesh,

the lust of the eyes and the pride of life,” would be totally out of place in the kingdom of God. Those who follow the ways of the world, the flesh and the devil, are enemies of the Lord and His people. They will follow their leader to the place of eternal punishment. The contrast is starkly clear between everlasting punishment and eternal life. It is plain that the destiny of the two distinct groups is determined before people die, not after. It is at the beginning of the millennium this judgment is held. The wicked will be removed and those who have been born again will enter into the millennial kingdom.

MATTHEW 26

Each of the four Gospels have some written differences in the accounts of events that took place during the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. These differences are not contradictory but are in keeping with what the individual writers were conveying as to what they saw and heard. They were each guided by the Holy Spirit to present, and sometimes emphasize, the whole tenor of the book. Matthew being the book that presents our Lord as the King of the Jews, presents things differently than Luke who emphasizes Jesus as the perfect Son of Man, or John who presents Jesus as the Son of God.

All believers are deeply moved when we read of the passion and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. With dignity and clear facts, those whom the Spirit of God used to write of this time of supreme importance in all of history, put into words without undue emotion, the rejection and sufferings of Christ. Our Lord Jesus was faced in those two days before the Passover, with the rejection of the leaders of Israel. The religious leaders – the priests; those who interpreted the law – the scribes, and the Sanhedrin – a council of 70 men who applied and enforced the law and religion; were determined to have Jesus Christ killed. He was a threat to their positions of authority and if the people really believed He was the Messiah, their role as leaders was finished.

By contrast, during that time He was again anointed with costly fragrant oil by a woman who loved Him as her Savior. This woman poured the spikenard on His head as a “good work” for her Lord, and He in turn would make that act of appreciation and love, to be a memorial of His Gospel. The reality of true love for Christ by a redeemed person wherever the Gospel is preached, can be easily understood by any person who has been saved by grace.

Perhaps the most deceptive and satanically inspired act we know of, was when self-serving Judas, betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Through it all, Jesus was always in charge of events and the outcome of them. He knew where He and the disciples would eat the Passover and who would betray Him. He explained the reason for and the meaning of His death, and He predicted the denial of Peter before it happened. When events began to unfold: prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, affirmation of Jesus’ commitment to the Father’s will, and His composure when Judas and the multitude came; He was displayed openly as the One who was in the place of authority in every place. The fleeing disciples and the fact that He would be taken alone, He had plainly stated.

The illegal gathering and trial by Jewish authorities, and Pilate’s lack of courage, were contrasted by the dignity and courageous conduct and confession of the Lord Jesus Christ in the face of

death. Even the meekness and lowliness of Christ in the face of all the opposition against Him stands in contrast to Peter's denial before three simple accusations.

The Plot, v.1-5

After the Olivet Discourse in which the Lord Jesus gave an account of future events, He then told them of immediate events that would take place in two days. The Passover supper and the feast of unleavened bread the week following it are still referred to by the Jews as "The Passover." Previous predictions of His death and resurrection were given in chapters sixteen, seventeen, and twenty. In this passage, He states that the crucifixion and resurrection will take place at this Passover.

Those who plotted to kill Him, recognized the impact the Lord Jesus' coming into Jerusalem had on all the people who had gathered in the city for the annual Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread. They were afraid of what would happen if they took Him during the feast time. However, right at the beginning of this chapter, it is made plain that the Lord was in control of events; not the leaders of the people. He had fixed the time of His death to be the time of the "True Passover." "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast... of sincerity and truth."

Caiaphas was a Sadducee who had been appointed by the Roman government. The Roman authorities had taken over the process of appointing political and religious leaders because those two areas of society were closely tied then, as in present-day leadership in places like Iran. The Levitical priesthood was not in the place of religious authority in Israel at that time. Caiaphas had cooperated with the Romans and was not concerned with what was of God, or what was scriptural. He recommended that Jesus die in order to save the nation from Roman reprisal that would come from the people following Jesus as the Messiah.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ owe our allegiance to a much higher authority than local, state, and national governments. We are to be subject to them as those who have been appointed by God to be ministers of righteousness. Their role is to maintain social order among the people and to keep people from the chaos caused by everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. We are not obligated to obey those who are in authority and who openly and defiantly oppose God and His word. There have been millions of Christians who have had to pay the high cost of faith in Christ in nations in which anti-Christ people are in authority.

The Anointing, v.6-13

Not all accounts in the various Gospels follow the same chronological order of events. The purpose of the scripture is to give the message of our Lord, rather than a history of events in the order in which they happened. The contrast between the plot of the religious leaders who wanted to wait until after the feast, and the plans of God, are given at the beginning of this chapter. Then comes the contrast between the woman who anointed the head of Jesus with costly ointment, and the covetous spirit of Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord.

Simon was likely one who Jesus had healed of leprosy, but he had been, and was still known as "Simon the leper." The event recorded here and in Mark's Gospel has enough differences, both in time and actions; that it appears to have been a different event, then the one recorded in John

twelve which took place several days earlier. In John's account, the meal was apparently at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Mary anointed the feet of the Lord in view of His burial, and many observers were there to see both Jesus and Lazarus who Jesus raised from the dead. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem took place the day after that event.

In this account, all of the disciples; not just Judas Iscariot, grumbled with indignation. Perhaps they were thinking that Mary had done this before and that was enough. They said the same words Judas had said previously. Worship of the Lord is never out of date and it is never too often. Mary's spiritual comprehension of the truth of the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, brought tremendous praise from the Lord Jesus Christ. True worshippers can understand the value of what our Lord has done, is doing and will yet do for His people. Other women who had not understood what Mary did; came later with what they had prepared to anoint His body with after His death, and found they were too late. He had already risen from among the dead by the time they got there.

This woman's understanding and perception of spiritual things didn't come by accident. She had listened when He spoke. She had been at Jesus's feet before and knew what was going to come to pass. The message of the Gospel is the truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This woman of understanding and faith, recognized her actions had to be taken ahead of time. This was her opportunity to testify to her faith by actions, not mere words. It seemed like she alone was the one who listened without questioning what Jesus said. She had listened, learned, believed and accepted without complicating things, what the Lord had said, and she took His words at face value. True belief in our Lord Jesus Christ, goes beyond what is ordinary and what we know and have experienced ourselves in our lives. Faith goes beyond normality to spirituality where the vistas of things eternal are able to become real to us before they even happen.

Judas' Betrayal, v.14-19

The enormity of Judas' sin is testified to in the words, "one of the twelve." Jesus was betrayed by one who had been close to Him for over three years. It was probably in Judas' mind that Jesus would overthrow Roman rule, and the disciples would be given important positions in the government of the Messiah who would rule as King. Because the Lord had let him carry the bag with the money they used, he may have considered he would be the treasurer in the kingdom. He was a man who loved money and was wanting both money and status.

A desire for money and status can bring down any of us if we allow it to continue and control our thinking. It won't be long until what is in comes out, and we will realize; "As a man thinketh, so is he." To look at the things of the kingdom of God through eyes that look at life in a world-view; will lead a person away from God if they are a Christian. Evil is the result of the love of money. For unbelievers, many millions will be lost eternally because they wanted money more than God's salvation.

When the Lord honored and praised the woman who had anointed His head with costly oil, and the Lord again said she did it for His burial; Judas must have finally understood the kingdom of heaven is not a political kingdom but a spiritual one and he was spiritually dead. Just because a person is involved in religious activity, seems to be spiritually motivated, and is engaged in spiritual work, doesn't mean it is true. Many Christians' children assure their parents they know

they are saved, even when there is no evidence of salvation in their lives. “By their fruits, ye shall know them.” Those are serious words to consider lest we give lost souls false hope.

Here in Matthew’s account, is the only place in the four Gospels the exact amount of money; thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave, is recorded. Again, we can see the Lord Jesus Christ was in control of events as Judas opened the way for the Jewish leaders to go forward with their evil intent on God’s timetable, rather than at a later time as they had intended. It was with the help of the betrayer that Jesus was taken at night in the garden of Gethsemane without there being a riot of the people.

Both bad and good events in personal life, in the world and in the governments, are under God’s sovereign authority. We may never understand why wicked leaders are allowed to control nations, or why deceptive leaders can control religions – or even assemblies. We may never know why evil people are allowed to do what they do without being stopped by divine intervention, but as people of faith in Christ, we accept what God allows in others, as well as in our lives. Our responsibility is to get on with what we are called to do, and to act in faith on those things that He has given us in order to do His will. The will of God for us individually is what should motivate us and control our thoughts and our actions.

The Last Passover Supper, v.20-25

In this account of the last Passover supper, the Lord had arranged that this supper which the apostle John called a meal; was initiated by the disciples coming to Him regarding making the preparations. They likely didn’t know the Lord had already arranged for things to happen in the way He intended, but He allowed them to go and do it. God has His own timetable of events, and that meant that at the exact time on Friday afternoon when the Passover meal was normally eaten, Jesus died on the cross by dismissing His own spirit.

Judas was at this meal which was the Passover, not the Lord’s Supper. Only true believers are to eat of the Lord’s Supper after examining themselves before the Lord. This particular meal was for the disciples. The Lord Jesus for His own reasons, did not want the disciples to know at that time the exact moment of His death. This last supper was a common meal eaten from a common bowl into which each person was able to dip bread. The announcement that one of them would betray Him, would have been a shock to them. They must have realized their own weakness as one after another around that table asked, “Is it I?” or “It is not I, is it?” Even Judas said the same thing and the Lord told him personally He knew what Judas had done. It is not likely the others heard that exchange, but the Spirit of God made it known later so that we have it in words. It was from that meal that Judas arose and went out to do his dastardly deed.

Wise people have learned their own limitations and will not say they are immune to, or impervious of what they may do in unguarded moments or times of weakness. We can be encouraged when we learn from the Lord’s answer to Paul; “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” How grateful we should be for the grace of God that is available to us when we ask for it at the throne of grace. God gives grace to the humble, and He directs believers to “minister grace” to one another when there are needs that are known.

The Lord’s Supper, v.26-35

After the “Passover meal” was ended, the Lord Jesus instituted the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper for the church in this age of grace. Judas was not there because Satan had energized him to leave in pursuit of his betrayal. Those left at the table with the Lord were all true believers in Christ with “Jesus in the midst of them.” The bread and the cup had previously been to commemorate the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. From this time on there is a new feast of remembrance. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted for us the Lord’s Supper, to remember Him and to make a public proclamation of His death until He returns. In this testimony of the new covenant, it identifies the true Passover which is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice He made to deliver us from our sins.

By choosing bread and the fruit of the vine in the cup; our Lord Jesus gave to us the real meaning and value of the sacrifice He made on our behalf. He was the “corn of wheat” that fell into the ground and died, from which death has come forth “much fruit.” From one seed has come all that now composes the body of Christ. It has all been ground, baked and formed into bread that reminds us, “Jesus died for me.” When He died as our substitute, we died in Him. We are now made alive in Him and are one body in the Lord. The unity in the bread of many “corns of wheat,” indicate the unity in the body of Christ of which we are each one a part. We are members of that one body of which He is the Head. We are “body of Christ,” and members of that body as individuals. The unity in that loaf of which we partake at the Lord’s Supper, is a symbol of His body.

The cup testifies to a whole different truth. All our blessings come from our Lord Jesus Christ alone. When each believer takes from that cup, that is the symbol of the eternal life of Christ that has been given to us as the gift of God. The “new covenant” of His blood, assures us that death for our sin has taken place, and divine justice is satisfied with the price paid. “The wages of sin is death,” and that has been paid. “The gift of God is eternal life,” and that has been offered to whosoever will take the gift. All of our blessings come from Him alone. We earn none ourselves nor can anyone else give us what we need. He has given us new life, provided for at the cost of giving His own life for us at the cross. His blood cleanses us from all sin. Without that death for sin on our behalf, we would never have eternal life. The price of His “precious blood” that has redeemed us, goes far beyond what we can ever comprehend.

All over the world, the Lord’s people remember Him weekly by partaking of those two emblems that testify publicly to the sacrifice Christ made when He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” He gave His own life to redeem us and fully pay, to God’s righteous and eternal satisfaction; the cost of our sins with His own life. There is nothing we can do that can add to that, and nothing can be taken away from it. The full effect of that will be seen when our Lord comes again and His kingdom is established. Then, again He will host His disciples at His own table.

The quiet reflection of the sufferings and death of Christ at the Lord’s Supper, gives evidence of the unspeakable worth of what He has done for us. We seek to put into words, hymns and thoughts what we have in our hearts when we meet at the Lord’s Supper, but our worship cannot put the true value on what He has done for us. Faith in Him and His death for us, has made those who trust in Him acceptable in the sight of the Holy God. The shadow of the old Passover is gone because the “Lamb of God” bore away the sin of the world. Forgiven people love to

remember Him at the Lord's Supper. The closing hymn they sang as they left that room was likely from the Psalms. Four Psalms: 115-118, were sung traditionally at the Passover as the Jews would come to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover feast. Probably the "Upper Room" ministry took place between the Lord's Supper and the final hymn. We try to follow this pattern in scripturally gathered assemblies of God's people today.

The conclusion to that supper indicates the disciples didn't really know what it all meant. On the way to Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus warned them of what was coming that night, but even that didn't sink in until it happened a short time later. Peter seemed to think he was stronger in faith and loyalty than the other disciples, but the Lord warned him about his own frail humanity. The other disciples also affirmed their loyalty and commitment, but a few hours later they were all scattered.

We need to be careful as to what we say, because "There is many a slip, between the cup and the lip." It is quite easy to say we are strong in faith, but when testing times come is when what we really are, is made known. We are not deliberately deceptive when we testify to our allegiance to the Lord, but we don't really know our weaknesses until the "crunch comes."

Gethsemane, v.36-46

Gethsemane means "olive press," and that was the name of the olive orchard where Jesus and the eleven disciples went to pray. Eight disciples were directed by the Lord to sit in one place to pray together. Then the Lord took Peter, James and John to a different location to pray together, and He went farther away to pray alone. There are times in our lives when fellowship in prayer with as many of the Lord's people as possible is both a comfort to each one, and is a unifying action centered around one purpose. By joining together in a prayer meeting, our personal faith is strengthened by hearing the prayers of others, and we become stronger as a group of believers as we get a larger view of a matter when we hear different audible prayers from the perspective of different people.

Praying about more personal matters that are known to be of great importance to a person, is why only those who are personally involved, or we know in a more intimate way, pray in a small group. There may be some issues that need to be kept in a close group of people that still need the power of fellowship in prayer. There are also some things that are only known between me and my heavenly Father in heaven. He knows about every matter, so I do not pray to inform Him, but to unburden my own soul to One who I know can do something about the matter. God is sovereign, and our prayer/fellowship with Him unites us to His purposes with faith and assurance, in a way that is appropriate. It is then we can sense that we have done what we could do, and can rest confidently in His will bringing the right result. I am then more contented when my anxieties about a matter have been expressed to Him and left in the place with the only Person who can do something about it.

Likely after the three or four disciples had prayed in the first group, and the others waited for their turn to pray; that the events of the day, the lateness of the hour and the intensity of what the Lord taught them in the upper room and His own prayer for them caused them to be overcome with tiredness. The three who prayed together in a different place may have contrasted the darkness of the night in the garden, with the brightness they had seen on the mountain, and by

the time they prayed, they were emotionally drained, and went quiet for a short time. Sleep then caught up with them.

With total omniscience still intact even though the Lord was found in fashion as a man, the Lord Jesus began to experience the suffering of holy perfection being made “sin for us.” He was not dispassionate, and His soul was already suffering the excruciating sorrow of the sin-bearer. He did not sin in His soul, but the “pains of hell” got hold of Him. Sorrow for sin and the awareness of its consequences brought Him right to the edge of death.

The connection of divine Persons in holy fellowship is beyond our ability to comprehend, because the Three are as one. Yet in the roles they designated; each Holy Person experienced uniqueness. A Father who had to see His Son suffer, would be moved in His unique and infinite personhood. A Son calling out to His Father in pain and anguish of a holy soul, would experience grief beyond the reach of any human experience. Some things we are not permitted to know.

There is holy ground over which we should never try to walk. That distance between the eight disciples and the shorter distance between Peter, James and John, and the Lord; is an area we cannot cross. The same is true in those dark hours when Jesus “suffered to bring us to God.” From human limitations, divine infinity cannot really be conceived. We can look from the distance that is allowed us in God’s word, and see with amazement the Creator on His face on the ground He made, and praying with strong crying and tears. We see with fearfulness, blood-like sweat falling onto the ground from the body that was “prepared” for Him in order to take our place as the innocent Sacrifice for us. We can hear a little bit in our mind’s eye; words from the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ in some of the Psalms. We can sense the loneliness and sense of abandonment, as He was distanced from those men, He had been with for over three years.

The Kiss of Betrayal and Arrest, v.47-56

Then we have to step away from the place of a distant on-looker, and come to the reality of a betrayer’s kiss; the bold actions of an angry friend swinging a sword. A healing miracle; a step forward with open hands to be bound; words that were spoken to men from the same Person who could call more than 72,000 mighty angels to deliver Him. All of this was subservient to the “determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The scriptures of truth had to be fulfilled! In that fulfillment; there has been light, life, salvation and eternal blessing that has come to us and will remain ours forever.

And then, the disciples fled! He was left alone on His own to do for us what no one else could ever do! Save us!

Jesus before Caiaphas, v.57-68

The first place they took Jesus was to the ex-high priest, Annas who had been replaced by the Romans, with his son-in-law, Caiaphas. John was known to Annas so he went in to where Jesus was brought before Annas, but Peter was left outside the door. It was there that he first denied knowing the Lord Jesus when a servant girl identified him as a disciple of Jesus.

Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas where by this time the Sanhedrin had been hastily gathered for an illegal council meeting. The whole plan of the council had been taken over by a sovereign act of God. Scripture had to be fulfilled, not the will of men. The true Passover was being prepared after being observed for three and a half years, not just three and a half days like the Passover lamb. The Lamb of God was found to be perfect in body, soul and spirit. In their haste, the Sanhedrin met at the house of Caiaphas rather than waiting to meet in the temple in the morning. The special Sabbath was coming shortly and they wanted their nefarious deed done before that day.

They knew the charges against the Lord were all trumped up, but in order to have the semblance of legality, they called two so-called witnesses to misquote and misapply the words of Jesus who had referred to His body as a temple. Caiaphas tried to force Jesus into some unguarded statement, but Jesus never answered deceptive statements. Those questions and comments that had no bearing on the truth or were insincere, He did not answer; even to the high priest. Dignified silence is hard to deal with by those who rely on deception.

Caiaphas put Jesus under oath and identified openly and verbally the real charges they had against Him, and Jesus answered that real question plainly. He declared publicly and without any equivocation who He was; the Son of Man, the Messiah, divine royalty. He openly said His authority was far greater than that of Caiaphas because He had, and would exercise divine authority from God's right hand. He would be coming again on the clouds to judge the world. Then the position of the judges would be reversed.

The Lord Jesus knew this declaration, though true, would be the point of them condemning His to die. With calmness, courage, quiet dignity and determination; those few words brought everything to a standstill and a conclusion. The high priest made his judgment with great protestations to even tearing his clothes to demonstrate the seriousness of what he considered was blasphemy. That, to a Jewish tribunal, was a death sentence. Then they went beyond that to the physical abuse of spitting on the Lord; hitting Him and beating Him to vent their animosity to His righteousness that exposed their own deception. They resorted to mockery to try to make Him suffer emotionally.

Peter's Denials, v.69-72

When a person is alone in adverse circumstances, they are very vulnerable to pressures from those who oppose them. It doesn't take long to remember the value of the proverb that says. "Two are better than one." The checks and balances of accountability are a powerful reminder as to how important fellowship is in the lives of God's people. Peter was not able to go into the court of Annas with the other disciple, and so found a place to sit where others who were not followers of the Lord were sitting. "Blessed is the man..." who doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful.

The first challenge of the servant girl, led Peter to act like he was confused and didn't know what she was talking about. He tried to divert attention from himself by denying he understood the accusation made against him. He left that place to go farther away where there was a fire to warm himself, but even there he was recognized as having been with Jesus. It was then the rooster crowed for the first time and Peter used an oath to deny He knew Jesus. The third

accusation came from more than two servant girls, and apparently Peter sensed some danger in being associated with Jesus. Even his Galilean accent seemed to cause him fear. The curses on himself and the oaths he made were like one would swear in a courtroom, as he again denied knowing Jesus.

People do that today quite often when called into question about a matter. “On my mother’s grave,” or “God strike me dead if I am lying,” or “By my sainted aunt’s memory,” are common curses people use on themselves to try to convince others they are telling the truth. When challenged, oaths are also used such as “God is my witness,” or “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” We are told by our Lord Jesus Christ to let our “Yes, be yes,” and our “No, be no.”

It was just then the rooster crowed the second time and Peter remembered the words the Lord had said to him. Pressures of the moment can easily turn us aside from faithfulness to the Lord if we are not convinced of the authority and power of the word of God in everyday living. Unease comes first. Then comes fear following soon after. Then when pressure to conform becomes more intense, angry and verbal denial follows. Then comes bitterness, anguish and guilt for sin committed. Bitter tears do not make amends for sin. Confession to God and any other person sinned against is the only way to find the relief of forgiveness. Communion and fellowship can be restored when sin is confessed and forsaken.

MATTHEW 27

The events of this one day in the city of Jerusalem have affected the history of mankind, the world and the universe; more than any other day. It wasn’t merely the natural calamities of supernatural darkness and an earthquake so severe that rocks were broken and graves were opened; but one Person died that day over whom death had no claim. Every one in heaven, on earth and in hell as well as creation itself, were affected by the death of the One sinless Person who gave His life that day, as a ransom for all. The Jewish Sanhedrin plotted to kill Him; the morally weak Roman curator, Pontius Pilate, condemned Jesus to die; the unstable crowds of people called for Him to die; the Roman soldiers skilled in dealing with death – all were powerless to take the life of the One who holds the keys of life and death. Jesus was in control of all of the events of that momentous day because He is the sovereign God.

Judas died in remorse, shame and guilt by hanging himself on a tree. Jesus died on “the tree” in victory and triumph over all foes, bringing salvation and freedom from the guilt of sin to millions of people. Thirty pieces of silver lay scattered on the floor of the temple when the betrayer died at his own hand. Precious blood was shed that paid the redemption price for hundreds of millions of sinful people when Jesus died at the hands of cruel men, and yet had the power to dismiss His own life by His own authority. The contrasts we read of through the Gospel of Matthew continue as Judas died alone in disgrace on a tree, and Jesus died in declared innocence and triumphant power over sin, death and hell. Millions will live forever who can say, “Jesus died for me!”

Two things are recorded in Matthew’s account of the trial of Jesus that are not written in the other three Gospel accounts. At the trial of Jesus before Pilate, Pilate’s wife sent a warning to her husband to have nothing to do with “that just man.” He was dealing with an innocent Person. Then a little later, the second incident happened when Pilate took water and washed his hands

before the people to declare his innocence of perverting justice in the worst possible way. That was a mockery of a Jewish custom we read of in Deuteronomy, that was originally to absolve an innocent person from implication in a wrongful death. Pilate could wash his hands all he wanted, but he was responsible for ordering Jesus to be executed. When he did that, he used the same words as his wife to describe Jesus as “This just (righteous) man.” People have picked up and use that same phrase today on certain occasions when they say, “I wash my hands of the whole thing!”

The next section of this chapter, describes the crucifixion of Jesus at Calvary. During the first three hours He was on the cross, He was involved in some interaction with people. In the hours between twelve o’clock and three, there was silence in the supernatural darkness. Then came the last four cries of Jesus from the cross, and then He “gave up the ghost,” “dismissed His spirit,” “gave His life a ransom for many,” “died for the ungodly.”

A number of people are mentioned in the narrative who were involved in the burial of Jesus’ body. As one reads this passage of scripture and considers the fact that this was when the Lord Jesus Christ became the accepted Sacrifice, the Passover, the Lamb of God which the righteous and just God, accepted as full payment for my sins; all one can do is wonder, worship and sometimes cry for joy and sorrow at the same time. I praise Him for substituting Himself in my place. Then I consider that all over this world for nearly 2000 years, God’s children read again and again the Matthew account of that day, and worship the Lord!

The Second Sanhedrin Trial, v.1-2

Jewish law forbade night trials, so this second trial was to try to make some semblance of legality about what all the Sanhedrin knew was deception and unlawful. The Roman government had taken away the authority of Jewish leaders to carry out capital punishment, and the reason the Sanhedrin had for condemning Jesus was that as far as they were concerned, He made Himself the Son of God. For a mere man to do that was blasphemy which was a death sentence. In order to make the Roman rulers willing to kill Jesus, they had to have a Roman law that was broken, so they ended up with the decision of saying He made Himself a king in opposition to Caesar. That charge would bring a death sentence according to Roman law.

Unsubstantiated charges have been made against those who follow Christ from that day to this. Opposition against believers in Christ is to be expected by those who “live godly in Christ Jesus.” All of the apostles were killed or imprisoned because of false charges laid against them, so it is likely to soon be our turn if the Lord doesn’t come for us soon. Many nations of the world today are openly opposed to Christianity and carry out death sentences against believers in Christ. Christians owe our first allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ and His claims upon us. Also, the standards of righteousness that are in the Bible, are our guide for life and service. Changing laws to suit the changing morals of society is not Christian, nor is it biblical, so we who have our faith in Christ do not adapt to the changes in social practices.

Judas Iscariot’s Remorse, v.3-10

It is possible for a person to set in motion plans they have for their own advantage, before they stop to think the whole matter through and the possible outcome. Judas did that and soon regretted the chain of events he had started because of his covetous heart. There is a difference

between remorse, and repentance that leads to salvation. Remorse doesn't involve a commitment to turn from sin or a change of direction. Judas had a change of mind about the thirty pieces of silver he had received for betraying Jesus. What he had coveted, he came to loath and hurled it into the sanctuary of the temple. But "blood money" paid even to a covetous person doesn't bring any satisfaction. The same devil that moved him to covetousness, moved him to despair and self-murder.

Poor hopeless Judas not only hung himself, and in the fall his body burst open, but the "son of perdition" ended in hell with all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. "Deeper down than Tyre and Sidon, shall the Christ-rejector go." The only other person we read of in the scripture who is called "son of perdition," is the anti-Christ who will also follow the directives of Satan. The prophecy that was fulfilled is quoted in Zech.11:12 and in chapters 18 and 19 of Jeremiah.

The religious leaders had no qualms or concern about paying money to kill an innocent person, but they were careful to not break their ritual requirements regarding temple money. Judas had not defeated the plans of God, and the disciples had understood that by the time the Lord ascended into heaven as recorded in Acts chapter one. Acts 1:18 states that Judas' "blood money" paid for the potter's field to bury strangers in. The priests and leaders had lost all sense of right and wrong in their deep-seated malice against the Lord Jesus. They were not about to guide Judas to a place of repentance where a sacrifice for sin could be found. They wouldn't take back the money they had paid for murder, and neither they nor Judas were inclined to turn to God in humble repentance for grievous sin.

Jesus before Pilate, v.11-26

The leaders of the Jews knew their reason for putting Jesus to death would be rejected by the Roman judge. The charges of blasphemy according to Jewish religion, would not be heard in a Roman court nor would it be a reason for the death sentence. Under Roman rule, the death sentence was dealt with only under Roman law, not local laws. On the other hand; forbidding people to pay taxes to Rome, claiming to be a king, and causing riots would be taken seriously by Roman authorities. Those were the charges laid against the Lord Jesus Christ when the Jews took Jesus to Pilate's judgment hall early in the morning.

Pilate's first question to Jesus was in response to the formal charge made by the Jews that He claimed to be a king. Jesus answered questions that were honestly asked, but refused to respond to spurious questions or those that we call "loaded questions." When insincere questions are asked, or questions that are deliberately asked to trap a person because they are misleading; silence is the right way to respond. Composure when compared to foolishness has weight that exposes deceit for what it really is.

When Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"; Jesus' reply was an assent to the question, and then He explained to Pilate the nature of His kingdom. That part of the conversation we read about in the Gospel of John chapter eighteen. That was when Pilate realized Jesus was not a menace to Roman authority. "My kingdom is not of this world," and the fact that outwardly Jesus had no marks nor attitude of arrogant kingship, moved Pilate to ask again, "Are you a king?"

It was then Jesus said He was born to be king, the King of Truth. Pilate knew then that Jesus wasn't into politics, nor did He have any interest in starting an insurrection against Rome. One wonders whether his response, "What is truth?" was a cynical denial of the possibility of knowing truth, a mocking jest of being able to know truth, or a sincere desire to know what no one had ever been able to tell him.

The unusual composure of the Lord Jesus before Pilate, the Jewish antagonists and the crowd of accusers, was a fulfillment of the words in Isaiah fifty-three, "...as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." Anything He would have said would have openly clarified His perfect innocence. There was a higher purpose behind all that happened at that trial: the accusations, the obvious jealousy and envy, the perversions of justice and the deceit.

It was in God's eternal purpose to bring us to Himself through the Lamb of God bearing away our sins in His own body on the cross. The substitution of the Perfect Sacrifice on behalf of guilty sinners was the way God dealt in legal justice for sins committed. "He suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God."

Pilate didn't consider Jesus' silence as an admission of guilt. He was amazed that He could remain silent in the face of such obviously false accusations. He marveled that the Jews could be so envious, and that Jesus was so composed and in control of the situation. He likely was amazed at his own lack of courage because he knew himself well enough to know that he would have to do what was wrong in order to keep the peace – and keep his job.

As a way out of his dilemma, and to put an end to this sham and mockery of "a trial of justice," Pilate offered the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. The choice was obvious. One was already a condemned insurrectionist and a murderer, Barabbas, and the other an obviously innocent person, Jesus. Barabbas had actually already done what they were charging Jesus with doing – insurrection against Rome. Even an ungodly judge like Pilate could see behind the ridiculous accusations against an obviously spiritual teacher. To have them choose Barabbas who was an insurrectionist and a murderer to be released, and to insist that Jesus be crucified, seemed to be to Pilate beyond his comprehension.

The moral and spiritual depravity of man, only needs a certain set of circumstances and people will make incredibly evil choices for no sensible reason. It seems beyond belief that not just one or two people, but a whole multitude can turn against one person who is holy, just, pure and kind in a very short time. People are willing to go against their own consciences, common sense, morality, human dignity and what is obviously right; to accommodate to the pressure of evil people and practices around them. What happened in Pilate's judgment hall when the people turned against Jesus, who less than a week before they had honored; has happened, is happening and will happen to those who are Christians. When people testify to their faith in Christ and their loyalty to Him is obvious, they will be openly opposed by those who reject divine truth and the unchanging standards of God's moral law.

Pilate still hesitated to release Jesus to be crucified as he looked for a way to pacify the Jews and yet deliver Jesus, an innocent person. The warning message from his wife would have given his superstitious mind a further reason to release Jesus. Truly, jealousy is crueler than the grave. The threat of reporting to Caesar his unwillingness to yield to Jewish religious traditions, was the

“final straw that broke the camel’s back.” Pilate was afraid that if a formal complaint was made to Caesar, he would lose his position. The Romans weren’t about to put an army in an insignificant place like Judea to keep the peace. That was Pilate’s job. The outcome of the matter, as far as he was concerned, was in his hands.

To wash his hands in front of the people in a way Jews did to absolve an innocent man from being implicated in a wrongful death, did not cancel Pilate’s guilt. To “wash our hands” of something we do not want to be held responsible for, doesn’t take away our responsibility to do what is right. We can try to excuse ourselves from hard decisions or unpopular activities, but that doesn’t free us from our responsibility. To say that the Jews alone are responsible for the death of Jesus when they said, “His blood be on us and on our children,” is not correct. It was because we had all sinned and comes short of the glory of God that Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrated His love for us in Jesus dying for us on the cross. Pilate was guilty, the Jews were guilty and all mankind is guilty of condemning an innocent Person to take our place on the cross and suffer for all of us.

Pilate resorted to having Jesus terribly beaten as a way to try to satisfy the blood-lust of the Jews. But by that time the blood-thirsty mob of people were ready to riot, so Pilate ordered his soldiers to crucify Jesus. This trial was an open perversion of justice, and yet the result has brought blessing and salvation to many. Those who love the Lord Jesus Christ are, and will forever be, thankful that Jesus did not call for legions of angels to deliver Him in the garden of Gethsemane, nor did He use his own power to deliver Himself from the false accusations, false trial, and terrible judgment for sin that He had to endure. The scriptures were fulfilled when “the plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows,” before Jesus was led out to be crucified.

Jesus is Mocked, v.27-32

The mockery of Jesus by the soldiers was not ordered by Pilate, but it was done at his official residence, the Praetorium. Therefore, even though he was not involved in what those soldiers did to Jesus, he was responsible for it because he was the one in authority there. A person in the place of authority is accountable not only for what he does and what he allows to be done in his area of jurisdiction, but he is responsible for what he does not restrain.

Lacking restraint from those over them, the “whole band” of soldiers, which would have been perhaps several hundred who were stationed there, gathered together to mock the Lord Jesus Christ. Bored soldiers mock each other when they are waiting for something to do, but there was something beyond the ordinary when they mocked our Lord Jesus. It seemed like there was unleashed, latent animosity against the Jews, and Jesus was condemned because he was called “The King of the Jews.” When there is one object of mockery, sinful people soon try to outdo each other in acts of cruelty. One person or more had already scourged the back of the Lord Jesus with official sanction from Pilate. When He was released to them to be crucified, they knew they were free to do what they wanted.

With a discarded scarlet cloak worn by Roman officers, a crown made of thorns, a small stick as a scepter, and spitting as the lowest action of dishonor; they abused the Lord both physically and emotionally. The prophetic words of Psalms 22 and 69 were fulfilled. Cruel contempt for the “King of the Jews,” seemed to drive them further into cruelty until the head and face of the Lord

Jesus was beaten, bloody and unrecognizable. His back had the stripes of the scourging that opened the flesh, and resembled a plowed field.

Those soldiers made Him out to be a sham king and openly mocked Him in pretending to do Him homage. It was likely the anti-Jewish sentiment, that was vented upon the One who was the true King of the Jews but had been rejected by His own people. What a marvelous act of grace was to follow, when Jesus actually gave up His life, that some of that band along with the centurion who was over them, believed on Him. His own clothes would be part of the soldiers' share of the humiliation of Jesus when they drove nails into His hands and feet. Cyrene was a city in the part of Africa we call Libya today, so that was where Simon came from when he came to Jerusalem for the Passover. It may have been a further way for those soldiers to demean Jesus, to force Simon to bear the cross after Jesus like a servant would carry a king's throne for him to sit on. Yet, in spite of all the indignities that were heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ, He was the One who was in control as prophetic scriptures concerning Him were being fulfilled. His dignity, and compassion were intact as He spoke to the weeping women on His way to Calvary. They could not take away anything from Him, or do anything to Him that He did not allow.

People living in that pivotal day in human history, showed their contempt for the Son of God by beating Him, putting a scarlet robe on Him, crowning Him with thorns, putting a twig in His holy hands as a scepter and spitting on Him as their expression of homage. However, there is a way of showing worse contempt for the Lord Jesus Christ that is popular today. To ignore a person of importance who should be honored by everyone, is more demeaning than physical abuse. That is what is being done to Jesus today. To disregard Him who is King of kings as not being worthy to even think about let alone take His words seriously, is the heights of disrespect.

Yet, people go even farther by not considering Him worthy of honor. "Santa Claus" is more important to children than Jesus at Christmas time. The chocolate Easter Bunny or Easter eggs, are of far more interest to children and their parents, than the crucifixion of Jesus who died for our sins and was raised again. To put Him down in such a way as to link Him with fairy tales is a major way to humiliate the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. For parents to never tell their children about Jesus or read the Bible and Bible stories to them, is to deprive them of faith and hope. Some people even use the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as a curse word to vent anger and disgust. Our Lord is still being put to shame by people today.

For believers in Christ to not be willing to remember Him in the way He commanded, or to consider their own interests and pleasure a priority, is to dishonor Him. To consider what we want to do of more importance than His request, "This do in remembrance of Me;" is to demean our Savior and Lord by putting Him and His desires lower than our own. May every child of God commit himself or herself to giving our Lord Jesus Christ the honor that is due Him. May we never in any way, be linked in attitude with those who despised and rejected the Man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief – who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Jesus was Crucified, v.33-56

To refrain from making precise descriptions of crucifixion is a very effective way of making it significant and real to those who read the words. Simplicity of descriptions adds power to the point to be made, because the minds of each person can make words come alive personally. The

depths of one's own experience limits us to what we can really understand. A child will perceive to a limited degree what an adult will grasp more fully. Yet, it is the faith of each person in the Lord Jesus Christ that is important, not how much they know or can fully understand. One person's description of the same event may give a different or expanded view of the same thing.

The crucifixion of Christ really defies description. God in His holy justice, looked at all that was done there by "His only begotten Son," and saw infinitely more than human minds can conceive. Those who have been made righteous because of the righteousness of Christ and the sacrifice He made for us, have been saved. It is by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we have been saved and from that view we look at the cross-death of our Lord as a personal matter. "He was made sin for us." "He suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God." "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "Christ died for the ungodly." "Christ died for our sins." "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me."

Indifferent people look for excuses to avoid facing the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. They want to disassociate themselves from the injustice of crucifying an innocent person, by relegating the death of Jesus to not being any more than a historical event that has no relevance to them. They will not accept the fact of their inability to deal with their own sin problem by making themselves think, "It is not all that bad. After all, everybody does things that are wrong sometimes." Willfully unbelieving sinners, deny there was any more significance to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ than any other person's death. Atheists and agnostics in essence say; "Jesus died, so what? So does everybody else! What's the big deal about His death?"

Those of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ, appreciate His substitutionary death on our behalf more than we can express. We don't understand the extent of divine justice because we can't perceive absolute holiness. We understand the concept of holiness and justice, but the reality of it is beyond our grasp. That is why three hours of darkness hid the Savior, the Lamb of God, from human observation. Angels, demons, humans, and whatever other "families" there are in the universe will never know all our Lord passed through "err He found His sheep that was lost." There are some things divine Persons reserve for themselves because they are too far beyond our comprehension.

Descriptions in Matthew's Gospel account, are basically those that human beings can understand and associate themselves with. "The place of the skull" to us can mean the place of death like we associate with the skull and crossed bones. It could be that the place of the skull could have been shaped like a skull or there was a perceived image of a skull in a hill, or at least in the mind of some people. It may have been on the emotional mind of some people who had seen people crucified previously in that place, that they called it the place of the skull.

"Wine mingled with gall" is a reference to a Jewish pain-killer that was foretold in Psalm 69. Our Lord Jesus, who "tasted death for every man," did not allow anything to interfere with our assurance that He knew to the fullest extent, any pain that sin has brought on all men. Pain at its maximum limit will cause a person's death. Jesus went to the farthest extent that sin has taken us away from God, and even there, death had no claim on Him. He was absolutely sinless. He could not and did not die until He chose to give up His own spirit. Nothing alleviated the extent of

suffering Jesus endured; so, no one can say He did not include them no matter how far astray they might have gone.

As far as the physical actions of crucifixion are concerned, they are not given in the biblical accounts. We know “they pierced My hands and My feet” is a reference to nailing the Lord to the tree. We know “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.” For a cruel soldier to be looking into the compassionate eyes of the One he was nailing to a piece of wood, and not hear Him cry out; would have deeply convicted his soul. The reticence of the description is what adds impact to the words, “They crucified Him.”

After dividing His garments and gambling for His seamless coat, the soldiers sat and watched Him. Others passed back and forth in front of the cross and insulted Jesus, mocked Him, and challenged Him, but those soldiers just sat there and watched Him. The chief priests and all the religionists mocked Him as well as the two thieves. They all joined their voices: the rabble crowd, the religionists, and the robbers. We read in another account that He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Those people went even further in their words of unbelief, rejection, and insults. They challenged Him to do something spectacular. Their blasphemy against God and the evil they did, were prophesied in the Old Testament prophesies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Psalms. The written condemnation over His head was a charge that was true, and before the day was over, the centurion and soldiers all knew the man they had crucified was a righteous man. They also knew Jesus was the Son of God.

The challenges made against the Lord Jesus were that He *could* not save Himself. The truth was that He *would* not save Himself so that He could save us. Then they said, “He saved others,” and that challenge was true, although they meant it to mean that He was incapable of doing that and was deluding the people He told, “Thy faith hath saved thee.” The challenge to Him as the “King of Israel,” was because they wanted the pomp and glory of a conquering king rather than a suffering Savior. We know that if there was no cross there would be no Christ, nor crown. Suffering comes before reigning.

They challenged the Lord Jesus further to “come down from the cross.” The love of Christ for sinners was so great in its demonstration there, that there was nothing in Him to tempt Him to come down before He had “accomplished all things.” Those deceitful mockers even promised if He would come down, they would believe Him. The sign he had given them was an even greater one – He would arise again from among the dead in three days. As a final indignity, they challenged Him by saying God, His Father, would not save Him. The implication was that if He was really the Son of God, He would not have allowed His Son to suffer like He was, and to be abandoned to suffer alone.

The great darkness over all the land at the time of the full moon indicates this truly was an event that happened by the power and authority of God over all creation. After three hours of darkness and Jesus’ silent suffering, the soldiers and those in fearful darkness were startled with a loud cry from the Lord Jesus. The tone of voice and the words of the first verse of Psalm 22 were plainly heard from the “loud voice.” That was not the voice of a weak sufferer nearing death, but the call

of one with a soul-searing question. The name “Eli” means “My God,” and Elias are similar, making those listeners think He was calling for help. Another one ran to get vinegar as He said, “I thirst.” It seemed light now that the light was coming back on and some of those watching reverted to a further mocking jibe at His claim to be the Messiah. One wonders at the response of the listeners to the loud cry of triumph, “It is finished!” and then the confident voice of One who knew He had done completely the will of the Father, “Father, into Thy hand I commend My spirit!”

In a loud victorious cry, the Lord Jesus Christ called out, and then in a deliberate act of His own will, He dismissed His spirit. That was when creation gave vent to the lack of normal control the Creator has over His creation. The absence of light was one thing, that would have created a measure of fear and trepidation. When rocks broke around them and under them, and gravestones fell down or rolled back, even the centurion and the guarding soldiers were terrified. No matter what the Jews said, those soldiers knew all of those things happening at once was not a coincidence. The Jewish leaders and the priests would have been even more frightened when the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom.

Through all of this darkness, the trembling earth, loud cries, and all the commotion; there stood watching from a distance, a group of women of faith. They had heard Jesus, had believed in Him, had followed Him the ninety miles or so from Galilee because they knew what He had said was true. They boldly stayed with Him when the disciples had fled and deserted Him. They had followed Him all that way and they were not about to desert Him there, even though He had to suffer alone.

When we realize all that our Lord Jesus Christ went through on the cross and all that He accomplished on our behalf; we are moved to give Him our heartfelt thanks and expressions of sincere gratitude. When we understand a little of what God got from that sacrifice of perfect righteousness for unrighteous sinners; we are compelled to marvel and wonder. For the eternal future, we will never stop worshipping our Savior for all He did for us when He was on the cross. We will never cease worshipping Him for who He is, and the new life He has given us that was His to give. The bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper, are our present and visible reminders of the events and effects of the greatest day in history when our Lord Jesus was crucified. The results of all of His accomplishments in that vicarious act will be experienced forever.

Jesus is Buried, v.57-66

Most of the disciples of the Lord were likely either poor or moderately poor, with the exception of Matthew, the ex-tax gatherer. Zacchaeus didn’t let his wealth keep him from seeking Jesus with no regard for the public’s perception of him. He was a tax collector who would have been despised anyway. Joseph of Arimathea was in a different position in society as a member of the Sanhedrin. The council of seventy men had a lot of authority over the people and was supposed to set the moral direction of the nation. Both Joseph and Nicodemus, members of that council, did not make it openly known what their association with the Lord Jesus was. They were both rich men, but now, when it was an obvious need to give honor and dignity to the Lord Jesus Christ by burying His body, they openly stepped out of the shadows.

Joseph had a new unused tomb that had no other remains in it that would make it inappropriate as a place to bury the Lord. He likely had designed it and cut it out of a rock to be a burying place for himself someday. However, a great Person needed to borrow it for the weekend, and the Spirit of God moved on Joseph, “a good man, and a just,” to give it for a higher purpose to a higher Person. He stepped out into the open and took immediate action to get the body of Jesus for an honorable burial before it would be taken and cast out to where the bodies of criminals were incinerated. He acted with courage and alacrity, and in faith took the matter in hand. He urgently asked for permission to take the body of Jesus off the cross and bury it in “his own new tomb.”

Sometimes we may be fearful to stand out before men in a crowd and testify as to our faith, but when a crisis comes and there is no time to waste, we find the necessary courage to act. God doesn't leave us alone in such times, and our faith in Him is greatly strengthened when we go forward without knowing what will happen to us personally. The importance of the moment, and the action that needs to be taken, overrides the momentary embarrassment and fear. That is faith in action!

Joseph would likely be criticized later by other members of the Sanhedrin, and he may have had to pay some kind of high cost of which we have not been told. All we read, and all we need to know is that he was God's man for that moment and that purpose. It is an encouragement to know, that often there is another hesitant person like Nicodemus who was wondering what to do. When one person takes the right step and makes the first move, then another steps up to help finish what needs to be done. One of those men had the grave and the cloth. The other one had one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes. When put together, it made a burial that was “fit for a king.”

Some of the women who were observers at the cross where Jesus died, were also at the grave where the Lord Jesus Christ was buried. True love for the Lord Jesus will help a child of God to go through times of fear, disappointment, loss, and potentially hopeless situations. Those women knew who Jesus was, what he had done for them, and where He was buried, and then they were ready to prepare themselves for what they would do three days later. He had said He was going to rise again, and those women believed Him. For seventy-two hours they waited, but when that time had passed, they were back at the tomb to see what was going to happen next. They knew that the burial of Christ was not all. They wanted to be in on the rest of the story.

Following that first night in which Jesus was in the tomb, another delegation went to Pilate. Priests and Pharisees both took seriously the claim of Jesus that He would rise from among the dead on the third day. They were as impacted by Jesus' words about what would happen after He died, as they were when they heard them before He died. Perhaps they had thought the teaching of Jesus was an error, but they knew if people believed Jesus rose from the dead, that would spread like wildfire and people would believe another miracle had taken place. The precautions they made seemed to be very great with the guard and the seal, but even Pilate seemed to have some doubts as to the outcome of the event. “Make it as sure as ye can” indicates that the darkness, the great earthquake, the opened graves, and torn veil in the temple, would have all unsettled him as much as it did the whole city.

When the Gospel is described and defined in 1st Corinthians 15, the message starts with “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures.” The reason for His death was to take away our sins. Death and its reality can be observed, but the reason behind death, or what caused it has to be believed by faith. His death was for our sins. His burial was an observable fact, and it is a normal thing to bury a dead body. Scripture was fulfilled in His burial, “He was with the rich man in His death,” even though He died in the company of wicked men. The honor was given by two rich men, where honor was due. It was in God’s sovereign plan to have the right man in the right place at the right time to do the right thing for the body of the Son of God.

It is incumbent on every believer to be ready and willing to do whatever God places in front of us, and do it as best we can. He chooses to use whomever He wants, even obscure people who seem timid, but when the bold was nowhere to be seen; those who were available, though often overlooked, stepped into the gap and filled the need in an honorable and appropriate way. Joseph and Nicodemus go back into obscurity as far as being recorded by name in the scriptures, but the “good man and just,” and the man who “came to Jesus by night,” were there when needed.

These men, and the circumstances of that late afternoon, were so important that the Spirit of God has put their names and what they did in that very short time, into the pages of holy scriptures to be remembered and read for all eternity. No Christian, whether they be famous, or not even known, is unimportant to God. Some may live for God and serve Him for a long time and have a whole lot written about them like Abraham, David, Peter, and Paul, and others are briefly mentioned like Stephen, Joseph, and Nicodemus. But let none of us think that there is nothing for us to do or no role to fill. What people think about a person is not what is important. If we are ready and willing to do anything for our Lord, that is what He wants and expects. Do not compare yourself and your service with that of others who are in the family of God.

MATTHEW 28

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the key to Christianity. Our faith is in a living Savior. Those who read through the Gospel of Matthew when it was first written, would have been full of joy at reading the words, “He is not here; He had risen, just as He said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciple that He has risen from the dead: and behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” We are moved with joy, gratitude, and worship to praise Him on this day as we realize our faith is in a living Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus finished the work He had been given to do on the sixth day, when He said, “It is finished!” On the seventh day, He rested, just as He had done when He created the world. On the first day of the week, a whole new world system and view opened up for those who believe in Him, know Him, love Him, and live to please Him.

The Empty Tomb, v.1-8

The ceremonial sabbath had passed as well as the last day of the week when the whole world dawned to a new day in the history of mankind. Death had been defeated by the One who had power over it. “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” This first day, in the New

Testament scriptures, is the day of the week in which Christians gather in assemblies to give honor to the Lord Jesus Christ [Jn.20:19,26; Acts 20:7; 1Co.16:2].

A new understanding of the authority and acceptance of the testimony of women began that first day of the week. A number of women came to the tomb, besides the two who are mentioned in this account by Matthew. The old day of subservience to male domination, in which Jews did not consider women competent to testify in court or bear credible witness to events, was now past. Divine authority was given to those women to first tell the news of Christ's resurrection. The church's estimation of women as witnesses to the Person and work of Christ has been established. Even though the public roles of men and women differ in the church and church gatherings, there is no difference in the responsibility of every believer to use God-given gifts in a scriptural way.

A violent earthquake took place before they arrived at the tomb, which would likely have awakened everyone in the city. When God moves to awaken people to life-changing events, He uses whatever means He thinks is best. It may be an "earthquake" in life, or it may be a "still small voice." When the angel rolled the stone away from the sepulcher in which the body of Jesus had been laid, it was not to let Jesus out but to let others go in and see for themselves that the tomb was empty. The Lord Jesus could have rolled the stone away Himself, but by having the angel do it, there is a testimony to the fact that divine justice was satisfied, divine authority was exercised, and "God raised Him from the dead."

The four messages to the women were important to them and to us. "Do not be afraid," because the message of His resurrection brings joy to all who believe in Him. Our faith is not in vain. We do not have to fear the future. Because He lives, we shall live also. The empty tomb reminds us of the confidence we have of looking ahead and seeing Jesus. "He is not here," was the second message. People have made statues of Jesus that stand in graveyards and in front of "church buildings," but we know from the message of the angel that our Lord Jesus Christ is not the God of the dead but of the living. Our Lord never lost anything of Himself when His body was in the grave. There is a fullness in Him that was not diminished in any way when He was found in fashion as a man. He had added to His experience, all of the attributes of manhood, including death and resurrection. In all of His experience in veiled glory while He was on earth, He never experienced sin as a man, and never will.

"Come and see the place..." gives every believer the evidence by faith, to know the tomb is empty and it remains empty. As far as where the actual tomb is, may not be clear; but the shining angel, the prostrate grave-guards, the earthquake; those things make it plain that something powerful happened by the authority and power of God. The empty tomb, "the place where He lay," assures us of the reality of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Go quickly and tell," was a

precise message directed to the women to tell to specific people. They began to testify as to what they knew under God's authority. The disciples needed to know, so they would be comforted and then motivated to go further and obey His word. In the same way they had been with Him before His death; He wanted them to be with Him after His resurrection. That is where we find ourselves today, With Him, following Him, serving Him, obeying Him and loving Him. Even

now we experience reverential fear and awe and joy at the same time when we think of our risen Lord.

The Risen Lord, v.9-10

Reverence is a necessity when we are on holy ground. At the sight of the Savior: honor, reverence, humility and worship were all in order by those women then, and it is the same for us today. We don't have to be afraid of seeing Jesus, but our attitude and actions testify as to what we see in Him. To be in the presence of the Lord Jesus by sight or by faith, should bring the same response in us to Jesus. "Jesus; Thou joy of loving hearts, Thou fount of life, Thou light of men."

A great delight to one's soul when reading this passage, is the awareness of the fact that He wanted to be with His own people. He even called them His "brethren;" they are His family! This goes way beyond human family ties, to where one's soul is knit to another in the bonds of holiness. In all the times we read of our Lord's appearances during the forty days He was here after His resurrection; it was only to those who knew Him and believed in Him that he was seen.

That will happen to believers when He comes to the air and calls His own to be with Him at the first phase of His return. The unbelievers of the world last saw Jesus, as the King of the Jews, hanging on the cross. When they see Him again, He will be the Kings of kings in total and absolute authority over all the world.

The Cover-up, v.11-15

The news of Jesus' resurrection didn't take long to cause a big stir in Jerusalem. The confession of the guards as to "all the things that had happened," would have strengthened the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They were at the grave as eyewitnesses of what happened but never saw Him, and yet they were enemies. The sign of the prophet Jonah that had been told to the Jewish leaders; had happened just as Jesus said it would. The clear evidence was right there for them to see, hear and believe.

The details of the coverup by those hateful elders of the people are given in Matthew's account which was written with a Jewish viewpoint. A large amount of money was given to the guards so they would openly lie. The members of the Sanhedrin promised to bribe Pilate if necessary, with money if for some reason he decided to take actions against the guards and investigate the matter. So, the guards were well paid and promised protection lest a penalty for dereliction of duty be laid against them.

Jesus' resurrection still creates a stir among people. Those of us who believe it is a fact that Jesus who died for our sins on the cross, rose again from the dead and we are justified because of it, by His grace; know that He is Lord of all. Those who deny the resurrection, have closed their minds to the truth of the resurrection and may try to explain it away based on the fact that they haven't seen Jesus. It will be a fearful day when they actually see Him but are yet in their sins.

The Commission, v.16-20

Other appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples and those who believed on Him are written about in other accounts in the Gospels. Paul mentioned some of them in 1st Corinthians

15. We are not told of those who doubted except for Thomas. It may be an encouragement for some people, to know that some of those who were actually there and saw the Lord, briefly had doubts about Him before they committed themselves fully to the risen Savior.

The Lord Jesus Christ has universal dominion and authority as the Mediator whose power extends to every nation on earth. He always was God, and now as the God-Man, He has made reconciliation between us and the Holy God possible. When He told His disciples that fact, they would have understood the importance of the commission He gave them to do. As Sovereign over heaven and earth, He has the right to command us to do what He wants and expects us to act on what He says.

There are at least six compelling reasons to fulfill the commission and share our faith in Christ with those who are still dead in their sins. First, He commanded us to do this [Ac.1:8]. If we love the Lord Jesus, we will keep His commandment, and in this way, our love for Christ is demonstrated [Jn.14:15]. People who are without Christ, do not have God's salvation and are lost [Ro.3:10,23]. God has chosen to use redeemed sinners to tell the lost to come to Christ and be saved [Ro.10:14-17; 1Ti.1:15]. God wants all people to be saved [Ac.4:12; 1Ti.2:4; 2Pe.3:9]. Our own faith grows when we conscientiously testify to our own faith in Christ and pass it on to others.

Believers are disciples in the sense that they follow Christ and learn from His word. Those who openly do what our Lord says, are "disciples indeed;" true disciples. They "go," "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach." They baptize those who publicly acknowledge they belong to Christ. Baptism testifies to other people that our allegiance and loyalty is to our Lord, and we intend to follow Him. Teaching obedience to the word of God and what it means, leads to practicing what we know to be right in spite of what other people might do.

"I am with you," is very different from "I will be with you." The presence of our Lord with us spiritually carries us through difficulties, pressures, and open opposition. His presence and authority give power to His servants to carry out the commission He gave. His perpetual presence with His people ensures that those who obey Him will be able to enjoy the privilege of representing Him all of our lives. He confirms His presence with us with His own, "Amen;" "It shall be so!"

