

# Jesus Christ

## Son Of Man

### Introduction

Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

The Gospel According to Luke is a gospel that gives us a view of Christ as being the Son of Man. The Lord Jesus was God in the flesh to which all the gospels give testimony. The Lord often referred to himself as the Son of Man, a designation that emphasized his connection to the human race. He didn't merely come here to co-habitate with us, as God dwelling among us, but rather as the Son of Man, God made flesh and dwelling among us.

In this gospel, it seems, the spotlight is upon the unique way in which this God/man relationship plays out. We see Jesus as a human being, as a baby born in the natural way although conceived in a supernatural way. He had a mother and a stepfather, who was his legal father, giving him rights to the throne of David as being a direct descendant. We see him interacting with the human race with love and compassion.

Luke dwells on matters that are of concern to people; where did he come from; what were the circumstances of his birth; and how did those around him perceive him? It seems Luke wanted us to see Jesus as truly one of us even though he was God. He wanted us to see God in him without compromising his humanity. He also wanted us to know for certain that he was who we believe him to be. No question about it, the man Jesus was every bit a man: the man Jesus was every bit God!

Though Luke was not an eyewitness to the events that he reported, he was a reliable source as he was of the first generation of the church. He had a friend named Theophilus, which means one who loves God. Luke had carefully investigated the facts reported and wrote this letter to strengthen the faith of Theophilus. It is believed that Theophilus was a Roman dignitary or at least of high position and wealth. It seems that Luke felt a certain responsibility to Theophilus; perhaps as one he was discipling. Not only is the book of Luke addressed to him but also the book of Acts.

Luke was probably a Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture and a physician by profession. He also traveled with Paul on occasions and was therefore an eyewitness to parts of the book of Acts.

He had a mind that paid attention to details and therefore we have many facts in the book of Luke about the birth of Jesus and John and the early life of our Lord that aren't reported elsewhere. These are important facts to anyone interested in the humanity of the Lord.

Our God is not a detached God who cares little about the affairs of people. He came here to this realm and experienced life, as we have to live it. He faced the everyday world of the workingman, laboring as a carpenter. He suffered the struggles of life in a small obscure village called Nazareth. There is no Biblical evidence that Jesus ever performed a miracle until after his baptism in Jordan. It is believed that at some point in the early life of our Lord that Joseph died. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that only Mary appears in any of the Gospels after the childhood experiences of Jesus. It is further strengthened by the fact that Jesus assigned responsibility for Mary to John while hanging on the cross.

There are many people who have suffered the loss of a dear loved one in early life; can our Lord understand that kind of loss? The answer is "yes"; he not only understands it, but also evidently experienced it. Some may wonder why Jesus would allow his earthly father to die. The fact seems to be that Jesus never used his power for personal convenience or comfort. He fully experienced everything that life has to offer, never limiting the pain or suffering, so that as our great high priest; he is touched by the feelings of our infirmities.

The book of Luke presents us with a very real person, one who knew what it was to walk where he needed to go. He got hungry, tired, and bore the heat of summer days while working for a living. He experienced grief in the loss of his earthly father, was betrayed, mocked, beaten and crucified.

In this book we will attempt to discover the real Jesus, the man of Galilee, the Savior of all mankind who accept him. A man among men who showed us the way to rise above adversity, stand tall in the face of danger and triumph over our enemies.

Though he was God, he functioned as a man. He lived a life of faith not in who he was, though he was well aware of that, but rather in his Father who worked in him doing the work. He lived in the condition of faith, enabling him to take authority over every power of the devil.

He functioned as men must function, both in the natural and in the spiritual. He had to set aside some of his divine attributes to be a man in every sense of the word, only without sin. He was born with a pure nature; he was God's one and only Son. He had the nature of God and therefore was able to show us the Father in how he conducted himself among us.

## **Chapter One**

### **God has a Plan**

Luke 1:5-25

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

To Matthew, Mark and John, the story about John the Baptist's birth was not an important story to their report. Their approach to the story of Jesus was from an entirely different point of view. But to Luke, and to all of us, it is a vitally important bit of information.

We like to know the background of people we trust. We want to know where they came from and what were the circumstances that shaped their lives.

John the Baptist was a key player in the story of Jesus, and knowing about his background lends credibility to his mission and words. Luke was not only writing to show us the humanity of Jesus but he was also aware of our humanity. We need to know this about John; that he was born as an act of divine purpose with a mission that was foreordained. John was as much a part of the divine miracle of Jesus as was the virgin birth of our Lord.

In this story we also gain insight into the reason in the heart of God for allowing some people to suffer the apparent deprivation of some blessing even though it seems totally irrational to those who look on.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had been childless all through the natural years of child bearing. We are told that this matter had been brought before the Lord in prayer, probably on many occasions, as children were very important in those days. To be childless was viewed as a sort of poverty that resulted in anguish of spirit.

I recall a young couple in our fellowship that went childless for several years after their wedding. Despite their desire to become parents they were unable to conceive. At first this was just a yearning to become parents, but as time went along the yearning turned to anxiety, and in time the anxiety yielded to anguish. Prayers were offered in their behalf and as other young women conceived and bore children their anguish increased.

It's hard to understand why God does not answer our prayers when we pray. We do all we know to do, pray, see doctors, take advice, but in some cases it seems to no avail. When we lose hope we also lose faith. Hope is the cornerstone upon which our optimism and faith rest. This young couple persevered even though the struggle to have hope was not always victorious and their faith faltered at times.

It is not at all unusual to struggle with discouragement especially in emotionally sensitive issues of life. Those of us with experience in the ways of the Lord bear the burden of responsibility to be there for people when they suffer in these matters. After repeated prayers and efforts, one day the great news came, she was pregnant! God had granted their request and a beautiful baby girl was born!

For Elizabeth the days became weeks, the weeks months, and the months years. One can only imagine the anguish they suffered, as years became decades. Finally the change of life set in, the twilight years were here and it seemed all hope was gone. After all, she wasn't Sarah! Or was she? Well, of course she wasn't Sarah, but Sarah's God was her God! We must never forget that! Never, never, build your hope on what can be seen; build your hope on who God is!

One of my sons in law was having financial difficulty; things were not going well in his business. He was praying one day and feeling very overwhelmed by the bills that were due and the insufficient funds to pay them. He was praying about this when the Lord spoke a question to him, "How much do you owe?" He replied with an amount, and the Lord replied, "Oh, that's not so bad." He went away from his prayer time feeling very encourage, if it didn't seem bad to God, why should it seem bad to him? The answer to his dilemma didn't come immediately, but it did come in time.

By the time Zechariah walked into the temple of the Lord on the day of destiny, his hope had faded and his faith was gone. Not even the holy atmosphere of the place where God dwelt could do anything

more for him than stir a sense of well being based on acceptance of fate. He still loved God, but it was in spite of his personal disappointment! He had hoped so long that he had become weary of hoping.

I have known people like this. As a pastor I find it hard to find new encouragement for people when prayers are said, and hope is raised, counsel is given, and things don't change. Time is our worst enemy in matters of this sort! We feel that there are limits beyond which we dare not hope! This is the common condition of humanity! Despite our best efforts to maintain hope, time will inevitably win out—no matter how grand the day, or the joy it has brought us—the sun will set, and the darkness of night will set in upon us. But, alas God is still the God of new beginnings!

In the dim light of the Holy Place only lit by the light of an ancient candelabrum came fresh illumination. Light filled the room and Zechariah was no longer alone! A new day had dawned; Gabriel stood beside the altar of incense.

Prayer often becomes more of a ritual than an experience. The priests did this every day; people came to the temple to pray and the priest went to the altar of incense to burn incense on the altar and present their prayers to God. This priest was a good man, and faithful in his duties. He would pray for the people, and believe in their behalf; never mind that his own life long prayer had not been answered. He would not hold it against the Lord; he would still do for God what was right to do.

Gabriel was not there for the people that day. Oh yes, it was for them, in fact, all Zechariah had suffered was for them, but he didn't know that yet. Gabriel came to change the life of Zechariah forever; he had a word from God! God had heard his prayers! From the text one could assume that he was praying at that very moment about having a baby, but I think that is a real stretch of real life facts. Actually, with God, once a prayer has been prayed, and God has determined to give us what has been prayed for, the answer will come to us no matter about time. It is my opinion that Zechariah had stopped praying this prayer, that's why he was so surprised by the angel's message.

Poor Zechariah, he was in no mood for jokes, the hurt was so deep, the despair so well entrenched that not even Gabriel standing beside the altar upon which his prayers had been offered could inspire hope again. The words of the angel must have sounded like a fable to those time hardened ears. Sure, tell me about it, would be our response. Sarah laughed when she heard such a word from an angel. It isn't easy to believe when all the gimmicks have been tried, and weeks of fasting and prayers have been offered on the altar of our prayer closet. Finally the words of the tempter begin to fill our hearts with despair. Reluctantly we yield up our hope; perhaps it just was meant to be.

Zechariah didn't have a clue that all his waiting was part of a grand story that had been written long ago in the heart of God. He was only a player on the stage of time. He didn't consider himself anything more than a priest, that was sufficient for him; but he wanted a son. Was that too much to ask? In the heart of God he was not just a priest, however; he was the man who would father a son who would go before the Lord to prepare the way for the salvation of Israel and indeed the whole world! Was a lifetime of sorrow too great a price to pay? Had he known it, it would not have been. He didn't know what was in the heart of God, nor could he. All he knew to do was to be faithful in the face of adversity. He did that to a fault!

I cannot blame Zechariah for his inability to believe the angel, actually I am sure he desperately wanted to, but it sounded so far fetched! This poor man was not only being asked to believe that his wife was going to become a mother after all the years of praying, yearning, and ultimately losing even her last hope of being a mother as her natural body shut down. Now he was being asked to believe that this baby would come in the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the coming messiah! How much can one unprepared mind stand?

Actually he did pretty well. He didn't reject the angel, nor did he outright disbelieve; he did however need verification, something to hang onto so he would know it was really true. I don't blame him for that, though we admire people who can believe in spite of everything, not many people can, especially in circumstances of this kind. There are so many challenges to our faith, but not to worry. When he got back home a wonderful thing happened; Elizabeth became pregnant!

## Chapter Two

### Mary, a Woman that God Chose

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Gabriel is one of two angels that are mentioned in the Bible by name; the other is Michael the warrior angel. Gabriel seems to be the one called on to deliver important messages from God's throne. In the book of Daniel it was Gabriel who was called on to explain an important prophetic message to Daniel. On another occasion an unnamed angel came to Daniel after he had been fasting and praying with the information that he had been in route from the first day Daniel began to pray, but he had been delayed by the Prince of Persia. In the heat of the battle Michael had been sent to rescue him so he could complete his mission.

This unnamed angel is described as follows; "I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. (Dan 10:5-6) Was this Gabriel? Likely so. These angels are archangels and seem to be more powerful than many of the other angels. The form they take and their appearance seems to be somewhat different according to the circumstances of their mission.

How is it that people see angels? Are they tangible beings? Sometimes they do seem to be tangible beings that anyone can see. This was the case in the story of the angels who went to rescue Lot from Sodom before God destroyed it, as recorded in the book of Genesis. At other times they came as visions, as in the case of Daniel, he clearly states that those with him didn't see what he saw, only that they felt the presence of something powerful.

I have been told that there have been occasions when people have seen angels by me when I have been ministering the word. I haven't seen them, but I do not doubt that they are there.

If we had eyes to see the presence of spiritual beings we would all probably be amazed at what really exists around us. We can only see what God has permitted us to see. The physical laws that govern us are such that we only interact with certain forms of matter. Spiritual beings are in a realm that we rarely see, and only perceive in the most subtle ways.

Some people plagued by evil spirits see them on occasions as intangible forms. These can be cast out of the area they like to occupy, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are both good and evil spiritual beings. They interact with people under certain conditions and evil spirits sometime cause mental or physical disorders. Most people find comfort in the realization that

angels are with them to protect them. Angels never intrude into anyone's life, nor do they act independent of God's direct orders. They are servants of God.

How startled Mary must have been when the angel of the Lord appeared to her! If he appeared in the sort of physical appearance as he did to Daniel, I am sure she was startled. Most likely he was somewhat less intimidating, but still recognizable as being an angel. It seemed to be his words that were the most troubling to Mary, how is it that an angel would speak to a woman in such a manner? In those days, women were treated in an "unworthy of great value" manner. Men and boys had value, but girls were a liability. For the angel to say to Mary, "You are highly favored! The Lord is with you.", was revolutionary! Men might hear words like that from an angel, but never women!

Christianity teaches honor of women. Jesus allowed women to transcend the cultural limits and never taught repression of anyone. God needed a woman to do what only women are capable of doing. Mary was the woman selected by God.

Women in the church have been a subject of controversy. What should women be permitted to do? Some have taken the words of Paul to be repressive of women. Words such as, he would not allow women to teach men, when taken out of the cultural context, sound repressive, but were they? We cannot be certain how Paul felt on a personal level, nor would I try to put words in his mouth, but from what we know of the culture of that time period, it was evident that most women lacked educational advantages and as a result were also culturally backward. They worked for the Lord in different capacities, but not many women were active in leadership or teaching roles.

Women today fare much better, equality is coming to almost every sector of cultural experience.

How should women be treated in the church today? I am sure that differences of opinion will continue to abound, but my personal conviction is that the Lord has assigned women a role. This role is influenced by the biological and psychological differences between men and women. Men are usually better suited to roles of hard labor, hunting, fishing, and physically competitive sports. They are sometimes better at making decisions from an objective point of view rather than an emotional or sensitive point of view. Women on the other hand are usually better caregivers and are better suited to physically less strenuous labor. They often act and react to pain and suffering in a more compassionate and caring way. It is therefore my personal belief that the church of today ought to take full advantage of the femininity of our women and encourage the full development of what God has endowed them with.

There is nothing more beautiful, in my opinion, than a Godly woman doing in the church what she is best suited to do. My wife is a caregiver in our family; she is a caregiver in the church as well. She is a mother at home and a mother in the church. Her role at home is much the same as her role in the church. She was active in the raising of our five children and she has been active in the raising of our church family as well. I do not repress her from her feminine role at home, nor do I repress it at church. She often speaks with authority at home because as head of the house I have given her authority. At church I am the pastor in the sense of authority and responsibility, but I have given my wife recognition of her pastoral role as well. We are a team at home; we are a team in the work of the Lord. My role is teaching in a pastoral sense, establishing doctrine and teaching the principles of the kingdom, looking after the business of the church, and giving counsel to those who need a fatherly point of view. My wife on the other hand teaches a marriage and relationships class, teaches women and gives messages that exhort to Godly living. I sometimes deal more with the theoretical and while she deals more with the experiential, though those lines are not hard and fast. In short, I believe that women in the church should be women in every sense of that term only maximized, and I believe that men should be men only tenderly.

God used Mary as a woman. He needed a woman to bring Jesus into this world and he needed a woman to care for him and nurture him. Mary was God's choice and she was glad and rejoiced to be able to fulfill her role.

Mary was selected by God to fill a role that was beyond her capability. She wasn't married, so how could she have a child? She was still a virgin. How could she conceive? The answer was given her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy

one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) No mystery here, she would still be a virgin. It would be by divine creation.

The promise concerning her child may not have fully sunk in because, the how of the matter, seemed to over shadow all other considerations. Yet the message of the angel was of enormous magnitude. This child she will bear will be the Son of the Most High. He will be the king, Messiah, for whom all Israel was waiting and his throne will be established forever.

Once Mary got passed the method of the miracle, she demonstrated the heart of submission to the will of God that had inspired God to choose her. She told the angel, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be to me as you have said."

## Chapter Three

### Mary and Elizabeth Share Their Joy

Luke 1:39-58

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

Mary, having heard the message of the angel, left her place of residence and hurried to the home of Elizabeth her cousin. How exhilarated she must have felt! The thoughts that filled her mind likely ranged from wonder to panic. Who could she tell? Who would understand? Perhaps Elizabeth would, if the words of the angel were true, she too was pregnant. Others might doubt her, but Elizabeth would surely believe.

Faith is what exists after we receive the knowledge that a promise is for us, and then receive the promise from God that lasts until the answer has come to pass. Faith doesn't create the answer, but provides the environment in which the creative power of the Holy Spirit works.

There is natural faith, and there is spiritual faith. Natural faith helps people perform to the maximum of their potential. It can stretch what would otherwise be limitations. Faith can be in our government, our friends, one's self or a host of other entities, most of which are legitimate objects of this form of faith. In the presence of this kind of believing, great and heroic feats can be accomplished. As great as this is, and as necessary to mental and even physical health, there are limits within which we must stay. We can

move to the outer limits of natural laws, but once having arrived we either discover new laws we didn't know existed, or are forced to retreat. Our faith cannot take us beyond the boundaries God has set for us.

Spiritual faith is different. Spiritual faith sees the person of Almighty God. Possibilities become limitless. What governs in this realm is the will of God. We interact with him as we walk in his presence, communing with his mind through the knowledge of his word, and the presence of his Holy Spirit. When we have needs we seek his intervention. Sometimes faith comes to us as an inner knowing, an affirmative response, but we must wait until the appropriate time for the fulfillment.

In Mary's case, the Holy Spirit was to come upon her and conception would take place. Her part was to be submissive to God's will. She was submissive, and the Holy Spirit brought forth the promised conception. When did it happen? Was it while the angel talked to her? Did she have a spiritual experience of divine presence? Perhaps it was a feeling of warmth or love that many have described who have experienced either the infilling of the Spirit or a healing. We do not know all the wonderful and mysterious ways of God. Sometimes in my life, great spiritual feelings have come over me while being ministered to by God, and at other times I have received from the Lord being unaware of it until the results manifested later. This was likely Mary's experience. The focus was upon the words of the angel, not upon the point of conception.

When she arrived at Elizabeth's house, her reception was beyond anything she could have hoped for. There was no need to explain anything; the Holy Spirit took charge of the meeting! The Spirit of prophetic knowledge came upon Elizabeth as she was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (Luke 1:42-45)

She wasn't the only one who had the Spirit of prophecy upon her that day; Mary also began to prophesy saying,

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. (Luke 1:56-58)

## **Chapter Four**

### **Birth of John the Baptist**

Luke 1:57-80



When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Mary had been with Elizabeth for the past three months and it isn't clear whether she was still with her when John was born or not. I think it is a safe assumption that she was still there, but Luke has turned his attention to Elizabeth and Zechariah. It seems that Luke's style was to tell her story and dispense with her as a character in the story by simply saying that she stayed with her for about three months and went back home. Simple arithmetic would put her at Elizabeth's house when John was born. Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy when the angel visited Mary and after that she traveled to Elizabeth's house and stayed there three months. It seems that she was one of those who shared her joy, and after that she returned home.

Luke is now devoting his full attention to the story of Elizabeth, her baby and Zechariah. This was a big story and deserved full coverage! Elizabeth had just made history! She had just delivered a baby after the years of childbearing had expired!

God had prepared the stage for this miracle! He took a couple, late in life, and gave them a child who was the forerunner of the Messiah, his one and only Son. The birth of this son was a miracle and God wanted the world to understand that. No one, not even Mary, was allowed to be a distraction on this stage. God wanted them front and center; this was important both to them and to the whole world! There would be another miracle baby that would also take center stage, but this was John's hour. God doesn't mix purposes, nor does he allow distractions to what he is doing.

This is an important lesson to be learned about how God does things, whether it is in a Biblical story or in a church service. When God is in control of what is happening in a given situation, there is unity of purpose. Satan is the author of confusion; we need to know that; it will help us in our discernment. Whenever things are out of control, Satan is in control! Satan is a master at taking confusion and manipulating it into mass destruction.

There was no confusion in this story; God was in charge here. He had chosen his people well. They had been through the fires of testing and training; God could trust them with this assignment.

When this miracle baby was born, the first matter on the agenda was circumcision, so on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. Family and friends were on hand for this occasion. It was also time to name the child and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." Today, we assume that the parents will make this decision, but on this occasion the people present were evidently very active in the naming process.

They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the

hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him. (Luke 1:60-66)

Attention had been successfully drawn to John. From that day forward all the people who knew him understood that he was a special child. This was important so that he would grow up with the understanding of the purposes of God and not become sidetracked by selfish desires. Children are very impressionable and often live much of their lives fulfilling the desires of their parents or other influential adults. Sometimes this is a good thing, but often it leads to disappointing lives. In this case it was important that his parents understand the mission of John so that they could counsel and direct him in the proper way of life. They would not be alone in this endeavor, but would be helped by divine wisdom.

As the people were reacting to what was taking place, Zechariah who hadn't been able to speak throughout the time of Elizabeth's pregnancy, began to speak and to prophesy. He said:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:68-79)

"And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel." (Luke 1:68-80)

## Chapter Five

### Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The

shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Jesus, God's one and only Son, was born in Bethlehem the city of David. It was God's purpose that he should be born in Bethlehem and to accomplish it God took advantage of the desire of King Herod to take a census on precisely the day of the birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph were not residents of Bethlehem, but were there for the purpose of the census. The fact that Mary was due to deliver didn't seem to be a legitimate reason for her to remain at home. As miserable as it must have been, Mary had to go. After a long and wearying day, they finally arrived at the town only to find that all available lodging places had been taken. They were able, however, to find shelter, perhaps in a stable, early tradition was that it was a cave, at any rate, there was a manger there and it became the first bed for Jesus!

Though Jesus had humble beginnings, it might be a mistake to try to read too much into his being born in a stable. Probably they were fortunate to find even a stable to spend the night in. Whose stable it was is not clear, it could have even belonged to the Inn. Perhaps the Innkeeper was moved with compassion for them when he saw how near delivery Mary was and decided to allow them to go to the stable. Some have suggested that if they had been important people, by human standards, he would have made room for them, perhaps, but that is a rather judgmental conclusion. In circumstances of this sort when towns are overwhelmed with visitors, business is usually conducted on a first come first serve basis.

They evidently arrived very late, which is understandable; Mary could have already been in labor as they traveled along the way. The journey was no doubt slower than was anticipated due to the circumstance of Mary's obviously uncomfortable situation. Finding any place that was private and a shelter was no doubt welcome.

Sometime during the time of their stay at Bethlehem, Jesus was born. Whether it was the first night or not, is unknown, but the story of the shepherds seems to suggest that it was at night.

It was at night that the angels appeared to shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks with the announcement that the Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. They told them that they would find the baby lying in a manger, wrapped in cloths.

The fact that Jesus was wrapped in cloth rather than dressed in cute clothes didn't mean that he was in some way deprived of what was needed. Actually, it was the way people cared for their newborn babies, and was probably a sign that he was being adequately cared for in spite of the fact that he was in a stable. That was probably the most unusual part of the scene. I don't think Jesus minded a bit. In fact, there probably are a lot of babies that would be just as happy if their mothers just wrapped them in cloths! I always have thought that fancy clothes were more for adults than babies.

It was a night of great joy, not only for Mary and Joseph, but also for all who knew of the event. There was great excitement in heaven as the heavenly host joined the angels who brought the message to the shepherds. The night air was filled with joyful songs of praise, as this was a great night for the inhabitants of the earth. This was the beginning of God's salvation plan being worked out on the earth. This hour had been looked forward to since the fall of Adam in the garden. Both men and angels had looked forward to this event with great longing and anticipation.

It is hard for us humans to understand the value of our soul to God. We are a unique and special creation. God has made all sorts of creatures including powerful angels, but only one creation was formed in the image of God, man. I don't think any of us has even the slightest idea how much God loved Adam. The love that God had for Adam was for the entire human race as well. When God made Adam he made us all. We were in Adam in the form of his reproductive capability. The genetic code for all the people on earth was in Adam waiting to come to development in the human family. Adam was God's masterpiece creation and he loved him. It was only because sin marred Adam that judgment had to come.

God loved us all so much that he was willing to take the form of man and come to be our savior. He didn't enter this world with a fatalistic dread of what was going to happen to him at the end of his life, but rather with a festive celebration of the angelic host. They were celebrating the coming salvation of man! I am sure if we knew the value of the salvation that has been so freely given to us, we too would celebrate!

In spite of the fact that we are so slow to grasp the greatness of God's love, he goes on loving us. This gospel was written to help us understand how much God loves us and at what cost he came to save us. This gospel is a celebration of God's love for all of us who believe. Let us join the angels in happy chorus and sing, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests". (Luke 2:14)

## Chapter Six

### Parenting

Luke 2:21-40

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

When Jesus was eight days old his parents had him circumcised as was required by the law. Parents are responsible before God to do the things that are in the best interest of their children spiritually. It was necessary that Jesus fulfill all righteousness while living here with us. At eight days old, it was not possible for him to make a decision regarding being circumcised therefore it was a parental responsibility.

Thirty-three days later they were to appear before the Lord with him to present him to the Lord with sacrifices. (See Lev. 12:1-8) He would thus be consecrated to the Lord much like Samuel was except they would take him home and raise him. The modern day equivalent is the act on the parents' part of dedication of children, or in some churches, infant baptism. I don't personally believe that infant baptism meets the scriptural requirement of baptism, as it is not done as the choice of the child, but rather the parents. Infant baptism in my mind is equal to dedication practiced in other churches. I have thus baptized a number of people who became Christians after having been baptized at their parents request. This later baptism was their choice and was a testimony to their faith in Christ Jesus. I do not criticize

those who feel content with infant baptism, because I see baptism as an expression of the faith of the individual. If they believe that their baptism was a valid one, who am I to say otherwise?

Parents carry a heavy responsibility before the Lord for the spiritual life and training of their children. I see some parents who fail to accept responsibility for training their children in good spiritual habits. They are negligent in church attendance and family prayers. They don't teach their children to be discerning in what they take in through TV or other forms of entertainment. They don't monitor their music or reading, and pay little attention to what is being taught in the school they attend.

The example that is shown to our children in the daily conduct of life is also of vital importance. If children see their parents arguing and fighting, they will grow up thinking that it is normal! This is also true of how we speak about others. If we are loose-lipped and quick to criticize the church and pastors, the children will also feel free to criticize those in authority. If we are careful how we voice our concerns, our children will also learn to speak with discretion. If we are always careful to speak respectfully of one another, they will learn to respect those around them.

Mary and Joseph were careful to do all that the law required of them as parents of Jesus and stand as good examples to all of us.

Luke tells us that they brought a sacrifice to the temple and cited the passage of scripture they were concerned with fulfilling. What he quoted was what was required of poor families, thus we are led to believe that they were poor.

Many today see poverty as the cause of crime. I do not believe that it is. If it were I am sure God would have found an affluent family to be the parents of Jesus. Poverty is no sin, but wealth is the source of many temptations! Money is viewed in the scriptures as an enemy of righteousness, not poverty! I do not believe that God wants people to be poor, if that were true why would he have paved the streets of the New Jerusalem with gold? Money or lack of money is neither good nor bad. Evil comes from the heart, as a result of the fall.

Whatever the reasons that go unrevealed to us, God selected Mary and Joseph to parent Jesus. It probably had nothing to do with the fact that they were poor, but it may have. It could have been one more way God had of showing kindness to a class of humanity that is often either neglected or belittled. Jesus followed up on this by saying, "Blessed are the poor." (Luke 6:20) If you wonder how a God who paves his streets with gold could possibly understand what you are going through, remember he too was poor!

Poverty has nothing to do with destiny. When Jesus was brought to the temple a man named Simeon met them there. He was a Godly man unto whom the Spirit had revealed that the Savior was about to come, and that he would not die until he saw him! When he saw Mary and Joseph and their baby Jesus, the Spirit revealed to him that this was the baby. He began to pray,

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32)

Mary and Joseph were amazed by what he had just said to them. Everything they knew about Jesus, they assumed, was only known to them and a few close friends, how could this man know these things? Simeon wasn't through, however; he had more to say to them.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:34-35)

This is the first mention of the pain that Mary would experience as a result of this event. The words the angel had spoke to them told about how great he was to be, and that he was destined to be king and sit on the throne of David, but now words were starting to come to them about his Saviorhood and the pain that would strike the heart of Mary. These were words that would bear more meaning in retrospect than

they did at the time. Mary heard them and remembered them but probably wondered many times, what could they mean?

After Simeon left, another of God's special servants came to them; it was the prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God speaking to those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Then Joseph and Mary having fulfilled everything required by the Law of the Lord, returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth where Jesus grew and became strong; as he grew he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

## Chapter Seven

### Children

Luke 2:41-52

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

We have very little insight into the first thirty years of the life of Jesus. Matthew only mentions the birth of Jesus, and then tells us about the visit of Magi, or wise men, from the east. He then moves on to tell us of the flight to Egypt and the eventual return to Israel and how it was that Joseph took his family to live at Nazareth. Neither Mark nor John gives information of his early years. Only Luke provides vital information concerning the circumstances surrounding his birth.

Other early writings about the life of young Jesus are not reliable being suspect of being fabrications and legends. Some of what is written could have occurred, but even if there was some substance to the stories, they were likely embellish and perverted to the point of being unreliable. Matthew and Luke stand as the only trustworthy sources of information from which I care to draw.

What was important for us to know about Jesus is related in the four gospels. The information given by Matthew was of a kingly nature. The selection of the Magi story was to show that he had a kingly birth. His flight to Egypt was to show that King Herod considered him a threat and his childhood being spent in Nazareth was to show how he was kept out of sight until his appointed time.

Mark didn't need to mention anything about Jesus' younger years because he was concerned only with the ministry of Jesus. John didn't need to mention anything because he was writing to show us his Godhood and he only needed to mention that "he, the Word" came to dwell among us.

It was Luke then who received the commission to give us details about the birth of Jesus. He wrote to affirm the fact that Jesus was indeed a man and as such had a normal birth and was a normal baby. He also speaks of the virgin birth so that we understand that although he was every bit a man, he was also the Son of God.

Jesus was a very special kind of boy, being the Son of God. His intellect was legendary as the story before us reveals. The full scope of his intellectual abilities are unknown to us, but legends tell of an enormous capacity to understand and grasp information on a variety of subjects, his knowledge going far beyond anything known to be true at that time.

We have before us a story of how Jesus, at age twelve, was taken to the temple. Those who were faithful to the requirements of the Jewish religion would go to Jerusalem for three ceremonial feasts each year—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Some families however, found this impossible to do, so they would try to at least go to the Passover feast. Jesus was now twelve years old so going to Jerusalem this year was especially important as a boy of twelve would become a "son of the covenant"; a custom continued in the present bar-mitzvah ceremony.

I find it interesting how that in the early stages of the life of Jesus, fulfilling all righteousness vital to his mission, was dependent upon the faithfulness of his parents.

Children are very important to God. Each child is an eternal being giving enormous value to each and every person.

I personally believe that God is still doing a creative work in all of us; that what we are is a creation in progress, and it is not yet clear what we are to be in the finished work. One thing is clear however; we will be like Jesus is, fashioned after his resurrected being. Yet as individuals, we are being developed in certain ways that seem to have more to do with God's eternal purposes, than this present life.

We are beginning to understand how every incident and experience impacts us from the cradle to the grave. Even the earliest experiences of life have an important influence upon the outcome of our life. Each event, each teaching, each experience; all the pains, problems and emotions we encounter impact us. Whether these have a destructive or instructive result has to do with how we learn to process these experiences. With this in mind, I think we can understand why God views sin as such a serious matter. Sin hinders and interrupts the creative processes. Sin has the potential of even destroying the souls that God values so much.

A child learns very rapidly in the first few days of life. Volumes of information begin to pour into the receptive brain of the newborn child. Probably the most important lesson the child learns is what behaviors are most likely to gain his desired result. Many child psychologists believe that children, who are catered to every time they cry, learn to whine to get attention in life. They also believe that children who are played with and shown affection will likely use their positive attributes of personality and resourcefulness to achieve their desired results. These tendencies are modified as life goes on and the processes of learning advance, but if the negative patterns learned are deeply embedded in their personalities, change can be slow and painful.

The most tragic condition on earth is the fact that multitudes of children are born into an environment of spiritual darkness. Even in this country where Christianity was the religion of choice for many years, darkness is now prevalent. Satan as master deceiver has done his dirty job well. Truly the sins of our fathers are being visited on this generation. Unless God mercifully sends a supernatural revival among the people of America, hell will reap a horrific harvest. Who will answer for this? I believe it will be everyone who knew better but failed to do anything about it.

Our children deserve to know the truth. Who among us will tell them? Parents? Teachers? Politicians? Preachers? We all share in the responsibility to do what we can. The value of each soul is so weighty because we are eternal beings!

# Chapter Eight

## The Ministry of John the Baptist

Luke 3:1-20

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked."

John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them."

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

After giving some historic data that helps the already confused scholars concerning the dates surrounding the events of the gospel story, Luke turns his attention to the ministry of John the Baptist.

John was of miraculous birth and his life from that point onward was also unusual. Little is known of John in his youth until he appears in his role as forerunner of Christ. At this point we learn that John was in the desert when God spoke to him concerning his mission. John was evidently twenty something when this occurred. It is believed that the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar was somewhere between AD 27-29. These dates are difficult to establish because there were no calendars, so dating was done by points of reference.

Since we don't know how long John preached prior to the baptism of Jesus it is difficult to determine when Jesus was born. We are led to believe that Mary conceived Jesus at about the time that she received the message from the angel. If that was true then Jesus was about 6 or 7 months younger than John. Luke tells us that Jesus was about 30 years of age when he was baptized in the river Jordan. Some scholars say that Jesus was born in 5/6 BC others say closer to 1 BC. The difficulty of determining with any certainty is obvious. Matters of this sort only become important when people are involved in trying to establish dates in order to set forth some theory concerning prophetic fulfillments. It is no doubt best to leave these matters to the scholars and console them in their dilemma.

At some point in the early years of John's manhood, he evidently went out into the desert. Some have speculated that he joined the Qumran community of Dead Sea scrolls fame. Perhaps his parents had died, as they were already elderly when he was born. He may have gone there to study the scriptures with them. We were told in chapter one verse eighty that he lived in the desert, but no mention is made of



where. It was while he was in the desert that he was summonsed by God to fulfill the purpose for which he was born. He then went forth fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'" (Luke 3:4-6 from Isaiah 40:3-6)

John was an interesting personality. One has to wonder why he was so successful as a young preacher.

First of all, he did his preaching in the Judean desert, and baptizing in the river Jordan. This does not immediately strike me as a very good location to have a revival meeting! Deserts aren't usually places where you find large crowds, especially in the days of John the Baptist. Yet the crowds came. In fact, people came from all over Judea and from Jerusalem. This meant a difficult foot journey down a very steep and rugged mountain road. This road was often dangerous, and therefore, coming to where John was preaching took real effort.

When they got there they found a rather wild looking individual, a man dressed in clothes made of camels' hair, and a leather belt around his waist.

All of this was hard to fathom, but what was most remarkable about it was what they heard when they got there. You would think that John would appreciate the efforts of the people and compliment them on their sincerity, but no, that is not what happened at all. Instead what they heard was a sharp rebuke for their careless and hypocritical living!

He would start his sermon something like this:

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Luke 3:7-9)

Maybe I'm missing something, but that doesn't strike me as a very good way to warm up to a crowd; would you say? Did these people come all this long way over a very difficult road, just to be put down like this? Who was John that he could speak like this? Was he a lettered man? Did he have some special credentials?

Only this, John was sent by God and it was God's Spirit at work causing people to come! You may ask; "How do you know that?" What other explanation is there? There had to be something about John that caused people to come and to repent and want to be baptized! It apparently wasn't his clothes. I doubt that anyone came to eat with him! If some of the people knew about his birth that might account for some curiosity, but I think being called a "Brood of vipers" would have been enough satisfaction to last a long time. I think if I did that, I would be preaching to an empty church, unless of course, God was in it.

God was in it, and John kept up his hard preaching. When asked how to apply his message to real life situations, he gave straight answers. He never beat around the bush nor did he care about who was in the audience. He never even held back from calling names! Even king Herod came to hear him, but John didn't even show respect for him! He told him to his face all about his sinful living, and told him his marriage to Herodias was a sin! This upset the king, but he still had to admit he liked John; nevertheless, he eventually had him thrown into prison and later beheaded.

As people gathered they began to wonder; was John the Christ?

John answered them all, 'I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. (Luke 3:16-18)

The message of John the Baptist was a powerful one. It was a message calling people to repentance and hope for a brighter future. He was truly a trailblazer. He lifted the consciousness of the nation concerning spiritual matters to a higher level than it had been for a long while. He also caused their hope of the coming messiah to peak just as Jesus appeared on the scene.

John's message was a probing one, calling for a righteous application of truth in the life of those who came to hear him. They came, the king, soldiers, tax collectors, and his fellow countrymen. He had a message for them all. He did not discriminate against those who had dominion over them.

When people asked honest questions, he gave straight answers. "Always do what is right," was the summation of what he taught them. After all, the best definition of righteousness is "right-ness". The righteous person is a person who always does what is right, simply because it is right. That is the motivation of the righteous! It's not, how will I benefit, or who will get credit. It's simply, is it the right thing to do or not.

There is a debate that rages in the religious community. When is wrong right? Or, is there ever a time when wrong is right? At the time of this writing, we are in the midst of a national debate concerning the issues of abortion and homosexuality.

A man has recently killed an abortionist doctor. He contends that he committed a righteous act because, had the doctor lived, he would have killed unborn babies. His point is not the subject of debate; it is a given that the doctor would have; but does that make it right to kill him? There are those who will side in with the man who did the killing. There are others who will take the view that it is not given to individuals to execute judgment, that it is the place of society to determine what is justice, and by what standard public justice will be served. Others will go even farther and say that "vengeance is mine says the Lord I will repay," and leave the ultimate justice to God.

Homosexuals are campaigning for what they consider to be their rights. This has ignited a furious battle over the application of the true teachings of righteousness. Those on the side of the homosexuals contend that they can't help the way they are, that it isn't the fault of the homosexuals; therefore, they should be treated with tolerance. They have turned to so-called science to substantiate their position and have taken refuge in some questionable conclusions concerning "predisposition thought". It is an effort to cancel the indictment of the scriptures that teach that it is clearly a case of sin. The logic either is, that the scriptures are irrelevant because the homosexuals can't help their behavior, or still worse, that the scriptures actually sanction their behavior, but that prejudice has caused misunderstanding.

Another voice comes into play on the subject of predisposition to sin, it is the fact that everyone has a sin nature and therefore has a predisposition to one form of sin or another. Do we sanction serial killers just because science says they have a genetic flaw that caused them to be that way? Do we use that same argument to excuse child molesters and domestic violence?

These are only a few areas where confusion has entered the discussion concerning righteousness. There are still more. When is it okay to divorce? Is it ever okay to remarry, and if so, on what grounds? Are couples who are living together living in sin even though they have an obvious commitment to each other and have parented children together?

The list goes on, and there often are no easy answers. At one moment an issue may look very simple, and the answer obvious, and then a case comes before us that challenges all we have ever understood about true righteousness. Those who deal with human behavior become aware that though the answers are simple, the application may be painful and complex.

We struggle with complex issues because we live in a world where the principles of righteous have been forgotten in the public debate. Allowances are being made for the sin natures that dominate fallen humanity. Sympathy for the weaknesses of sinful man has diluted the thinking, and love has come to mean understanding of weakness, rather than appreciation of righteousness. Understanding weakness has become a more dominant theme than personal responsibility.

The spirit of compromise also influenced the people who came to John. Tax collectors had rationalized that it was okay to collect more tax than were owed. Soldiers would sometimes take out their personal frustration on those who were subject to them. There were answers for these people, but they

were not easy. To the taxman, only take what is necessary. To the person in authority, only be as strict as is necessary to achieve order and carry out their mission, no more. When we go beyond the boundaries of righteous conduct, it is because sin is in our heart!

It was to this condition of sin that John preached. His remedy was repentance. The means of expressing that repentance was baptism.

Straight preaching offended Herod. Preaching a message of righteousness is not a popular message. Herod was offended and John was thrown into prison.

## Chapter Nine

### From Obscurity to Prominence

Luke 3:21-38

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda," the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God."

One day when John was preaching and baptizing, Jesus came to him to be baptized. Whether John knew Jesus or not is not clear from the story, but I think it is a fair assumption that he did. They were cousins, and Mary had been present with Elizabeth when John was born. They no doubt had met, at least as children growing up.

As Jesus approached, John began to object to the idea of Jesus being baptized by him. It's possible that John felt ashamed in the presence of Jesus. John may have committed some sin in his past that he knew Jesus knew about. These things happen to children when they are growing up. Someone of the group may get an idea to commit some sin and frequently they all get involved. With Jesus, it was no doubt different; he was the sinless Son of God. To be sinless meant that Jesus had to refrain from the sinful pranks that children sometime engage in. Standing up to peer pressure is not easy but it was necessary for Jesus. John on the other hand did sin, we know that not because we read of some sin he committed, but because we read; "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Even if they didn't play together and have some memory of this kind, he likely heard stories about Jesus. His parents may have spoken of what a nice young man he was. When Jesus came to the river to be baptized, according to other writers, John thought that Jesus ought to baptize him. Jesus didn't argue the point of who was worthy, but rather on the basis that it was necessary for him to fulfill all righteousness.

John consented to baptize Jesus, and as Jesus was coming up out of the water praying, heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him bodily like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven saying: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

It is not at all unusual for people to have powerful spiritual experiences while being baptized. Such things as habits being broken, healings taking place, and of course, being filled with the Holy Spirit are common.

This event was of powerful significance in the life of Jesus. It was here that the Spirit descended upon him, thus launching him into a life of ministry. Jesus was no less God's son before this experience, but there was a difference afterwards; Jesus moved from the private sector to a public figure. The coming of the Spirit upon Jesus in this way, was for the purpose of ministry, and marked the beginning point of his ministry on earth.

I don't think we could say that the Spirit wasn't with Jesus prior to this experience, just as we cannot say that the disciples didn't have the Spirit prior to the day of Pentecost. Yet there are experiences in God that come to us at the appropriate time in our lives.

There is confusion in Christian circles concerning when a believer receives the Holy Spirit, at conversion, or at an experience marked by speaking in tongues? The answer seems obvious to me, how can a person be born again without the Holy Spirit's power making it so? Yet, experience shows us that after a person has entered into what is referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit marked by the supernatural manifestations of speaking in tongues, there is a difference.

Some argue that salvation is the only gift God has for man, and therefore, the infilling of the Spirit comes at conversion. Perhaps, but all do agree that there are progressive experiences in the grace of God.

Salvation is a great gift with many facets to it. Salvation has to do with forgiveness of sins, the impartation of the Spirit of Life and the progressive work of sanctification, the guarantee that we will live forever in a glorified body that is free of all sin, sorrow, pain or disease. All of this has to do with the individual here experiencing portions of the gift in this present life with a promise of the fullness of the gift in our eternal destiny. The work of salvation is what is taking place in us preparing us for our eternal home. The gift of salvation doesn't stop with this present life; it is the down payment on our eternal destiny. When we realize the fullness of all that salvation is, the restoration of the whole man, we will be experiencing our eternal destiny. This is when we receive our incorruptible bodies free of disease or any impediments. This is when full fellowship is restored, such as Adam had in the Garden of Eden.

Clearly we do not immediately enjoy all that salvation is, the instant we first believe, in fact, very little of what salvation is, is immediately manifest. I have heard testimonies of great conversions where radical changes have instantly taken place, yet no one has ever received all that God has for them at that time.

There is a difference between salvation and the infilling of the Holy Spirit; it has to do with purpose. Salvation has to do with the redemption of man, whereas the infilling of the Spirit has to do with the great commission.

The Lord Jesus was no less God made flesh before his Jordan River experience than afterwards, yet his life took a drastic turn on that day. The difference was seen in how he lived his life. This experience of the descending dove had to do with service; it was not for personal benefit. The evidence of this was seen when Jesus was being tempted in the desert.

When we look at what is called the Pentecostal experience, what do we see? Isn't it enabling us for service? What is the purpose of praying in the Spirit? Isn't it to build up or strengthen the individual? Why is this needed if it is not for the purpose of enabling us for service? What are the gifts of prophecy, tongues with interpretation, faith, healings, miracles, discernment of spirits, words of wisdom and words of knowledge for, if it isn't to aid us in the great commission? Certainly these are not intended to entertain us, nor are they to be consumed upon our own lust for comforts or power. They are given to equip us and to display God's love and compassion. The Lord, without a doubt, wants to work salvation in us; at the same time he is using us to reach the world with the gospel.

The life and mission of Jesus was two fold: one part was living a life of righteousness so he could be our substitute sacrifice having fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law; the other was the mission of ministry, teaching us and demonstrating the character and love of God for us. The first part was concluded as the primary role with his baptism and the second part was launched with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him in the form of a dove. The first part of his mission did however extend all the way to his redemptive death for us. The second part merely became the more visible part.

## Chapter Ten

### Temptations

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.' "

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' "

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Jesus was the Son of man. As such he was subject to temptation in all points, just like all the rest of us. Throughout his life he faced issue after issue, each carrying its own unique form of temptation. We all must deal with temptation, sometimes all day, every day. There never is a letup. As the seasons of life change, so do the temptations. What is a temptation to a young person is not even remotely a temptation to an older person.

Life is full of changing situations that lead to the need to make decisions. The Prophet Joel said, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! (Joel 3:14) Where is the valley of Decision? Is it a place on the map? Perhaps, but more realistically it is life itself. This valley begins with birth and continues to death. There is nothing that we are better trained for than decision making. We begin to learn very early in life that decisions matter. When we make good decisions we get a good result and when we make bad decisions we pay a penalty. This is an unavoidable reality of life.

Some people think they can avoid a bad result becoming very adept at dodging blame and even guilt, but there are penalties that cannot be avoided. Outwardly they may seem to be okay, but they pay inwardly as self-esteem erodes. All people must give an account of themselves before God. Deeper than we can realize, there is an intuitive knowing concerning the condition of our soul before God. This sense of knowing often surfaces at the most unlikely times.

There is a sense of shame that hangs over humanity like a dark cloud. Someone may say something about heaven and another will reply that they are going to hell and they know it. Why is that? If they feel as good about themselves as they want everyone to believe, why do they realize they cannot face a holy God?

Something is wrong with us, so the best answer that modern therapists can manage is to try to assure people that it's okay to be less than perfect! "It's human to err," they tell us, so we feel better about ourselves, all the while knowing that we are less than what was intended. We cover our shame with self-deceit and go on our way.

Jesus too, faced temptation, but he remained blameless. How could this be? John tells us that he possessed life. The energizing power that was lost to us when Adam sinned was resident in the Lord Jesus. We are not told of it here in this story of his humanity, but John tells us because he tells us of his divinity. It was because God was his Father, not Adam, that he had the Spirit of Life. This was the source of his moral strength, the ability to stand up against temptation.

It is this Spirit of Life that was lost at the fall of man. This is what is returned to us when we receive salvation by faith. Once more the great enabler, the Holy Spirit has come to us to help us in our infirmity. This is God's gift to us and by his power we can now overcome Satan. The method is clearly stated.

Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:7-10)

When Jesus stepped out of the water at Jordan his enemy Satan was waiting for an opportunity to challenge him. Isn't that the way it usually is, whenever we take a step to do God's will, Satan is near by waiting for an opportunity to do us in.

God allowed Satan his chance to test Jesus. It was okay, no problem; God knew his Son was up to the occasion. Satan waited while the Spirit did what seemed to be the wrong thing. He led Jesus to fast! Oh yes, I mean really fast, no juices or vitamins; possibly water, but no food for forty days. Matthew says it was after that, that Jesus became hungry. Satan spotted his first opportunity to really tempt Jesus. He had the Spirit's power and Satan knew it. He was also hungry. For temptation to be temptation, we must first desire what is being offered. It was his human nature that made temptation, temptation. Had he not been both God and man, temptation would not have even been tempting to him.

Jesus was in the desert so we can assume that food was scarce at best. During the forty days he was no doubt being sustained by the Spirit's power, but when the fast ended that was no longer the case. He was now ready to eat. Satan knew just what to do, tempt him to use his power to make some bread. That seemed like a legitimate thing for him to do. What would be wrong with changing a rock into bread? What's wrong with eating when you're hungry?

There was something fundamentally wrong with what Satan proposed. It would have required using his supernatural gift to satisfy his own hunger. That in itself is not necessarily bad, but to do so at Satan's suggestion is wrong! Jesus always obeyed his Father, not Satan, nor his bodily need, nor his own ambitions. Before Jesus did anything in a ministerial capacity, he had to know it was in his Father's plan. Jesus didn't let the desperation of the moment change that relationship. He was under strict discipline and not even hunger would alter that.

There is a place for selfish prayers, "give us today our daily bread," Jesus said, instructing his disciples in prayer. (Matt. 6:11) It's proper to ask God for our needs, but having asked; it is also proper to leave the method and timing in God's hands. Jesus never used his supernatural power for his own comforts as a primary motivation. No doubt all the sustenance he and the disciples had, was provided by supernatural provision of the Father, but Jesus didn't go around turning rocks into bread. There is a fine line of difference between what is proper and what is not proper in reference to the use of supernatural power for personal reasons. It mostly has to do with motives. Jesus walked on water, calmed storms, and fed multitudes on supernaturally multiplied bread. He likely ate along with them, but the motive was to show hospitality and concern for the people.

I have on occasions asked for help in situations that were for my personal benefit, and received supernatural answers. These answers were not to satisfy covetousness, greed or pride. They were

answered because it was a real need at the time. I have also asked for things that had nothing to do with right motives and been denied.

I would see nothing wrong with Jesus asking his Father for something to satisfy his hunger. If there wasn't anything immediately available, perhaps God would have sent an angel with a nice meal all prepared for him. The Lord usually answers first by using what is available through natural means, and if that isn't sufficient, he will then use a supernatural answer.

The temptations of Jesus were designed to draw him away from the focus of his mission. If Satan could have gotten Jesus to focus upon his personal needs, he would have defeated him in his mission as Savior of the world.

Many fine ministries have failed to develop into the fulfillment of God's plan because they were sidetracked by personal problems. Financial problems, family needs, unwilling spouses, health matters and many other like problems, are the means by which Satan seeks to discourage God's people. If he can succeed in getting us to lose focus during times of stress, he can hinder God's plan, if not defeat it!

God's will, provisions and instructions must be our constant guiding light. Satan is always near the person who is doing God's bidding, seeking to magnify the problems we face. It is Satan's business to deceive us. He does this by making circumstances seem disproportionately larger than they really are. He likes to make us feel our personal needs so keenly that at a moment when we should be the most loving, cordial or compassionate, we lose focus causing pain and injury, rather than healing! It's the little foxes that spoil the vineyard; the Songs of Solomon declares. (Songs of Solomon 2:15)

Jesus had to face all the issues of life just like we have to deal with them. He was taken to a high place by the devil and shown all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. Then he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." (Luke 4:5-7)

In handling this temptation, Jesus didn't get into a discussion about whether Satan actually had the authority he claimed to have, or if he could deliver on his promise, all debatable issues. When Adam sinned, he surrendered some of his commission, but whether Satan ended up with any authority or not, is debatable. It seems more likely that Adam merely defaulted, and we, as members of this fallen race, are afflicted to the degree of our disobedience to God. We have a declaration in the book of Daniel that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men. (Daniel 4:17) Whatever authority Satan was enjoying was because he was deceiving and tempting them, and in so doing was causing them to follow his wishes. God didn't give Satan anything except the boot out of Heaven. His so-called authority is because men have relinquished their sovereignty to him making him their god either knowingly, or as the result of deception. Satan is a liar and a thief; this statement to Jesus was really an indictment to that fact.

Jesus didn't argue these issues or accuse him of false claims; he simply stayed on point and replied, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Luke 4:8) The issue was that Satan was trying to get Jesus to sin by worshipping him. Jesus would not consider such a thing. He thus demonstrated that he was not deceived for even a moment.

Next in order of presentation, not necessarily in order of how they occurred, was the temptation at Jerusalem. The fact that Matthew and Luke give these two last temptations in reverse order is in no way indicating an error on either part. It's entirely possible that neither man knew which came first—they weren't there. They reported what they had been told, which may not have included an actual sequence of events because it was not important to the story. It was probably left to be a simple writer's choice. Matthew was writing from a kingdom point of view, so likely wished to end with a kingdom emphasis; Luke on the other hand was writing about the manhood of Jesus and likely wanted to end showing Jesus triumphing over the temptation having to do with the spectacular.

When they got to Jerusalem, Satan led him to the highest point of the temple, and began his temptation with these words,

"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" (Luke 4:9-11)

In the previous temptations Jesus had defeated Satan by quoting passages of scripture, so it appears that Satan decided to use the scriptures in his temptation. I am appalled when I hear teachings running counter to the Biblical theme, leading people into erroneous doctrines with the teacher using scripture after scripture out of contextual meaning to justify the errors.

Jesus responded to this form of error by using scriptures in their proper contextual meanings. He stated; "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Luke 4:12)

It takes more than just a scripture to make an action a correct one. Higher laws always take precedence over lower laws; this is a case in point. Let me illustrate: If you take a ball and throw it into the air it will travel away from the earth as long as the law of thrust is greater than the law of gravity. When a balance of power is achieved the ball will stop ascending. The moment gravity becomes greater than thrust, it will begin to descend.

In the arena of real life activity there often is an interplay between conflicting divine principles. In such cases, the higher or more pertinent principle must be observed. In the kingdom of God, what makes a principle more applicable is not what we want the most, but rather what the Spirit is saying in the matter. It is often easy to find scriptures that will justify an action that may be directly contrary to what the Spirit wants. For example: Let's say a man catches his wife cheating in a marriage. In a technical sense he is justified in divorcing her. Now suppose he has been secretly carrying a torch for some other woman, does this justify him divorcing his wife and marrying the other woman? If that was in fact the case, he was harboring adultery in his heart, opening the door for the spirit of adultery to attack his wife. If he had attentively loved his wife, affirming her femininity, and seeking to develop her potentials, likely she would not have fallen into sin. In cases such as these, I find that what the Spirit's first priority is is repentance. After both parties have gotten their hearts right, counseling may very well bring about restoration.

It is the proper application of divine principles that must guide our lives. This can only be understood through an on-going relationship with the Holy Spirit. In the temple there were two great symbols of divine principle. In the Holy Place there was a table of shew bread and a candelabra. The table of shew bread represents the word of God and the candelabrum represents the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. When the believer goes to the word to read the scriptures, the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit makes it understandable and applicable. Jesus always stayed within the proper application in everything he did. He knew what this was because he stayed in constant touch with his Father. We do well to follow his example.

"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13) What could Satan do to trick a man so schooled in divine principles? Wait and hope; perhaps he could catch Jesus in a moment when his guard would be down. Jesus couldn't be tempted by evil, but Satan knew about the needs of his flesh—hunger, fatigue, pressure and such like, perhaps he could use his humanity against him—he must wait.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **Jesus Returns to Galilee**



## Luke 4:14-30

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus began his ministry in the district of Galilee. There he began to teach in the synagogues and everyone spoke well of him. He then returned to Nazareth after he had been ministering for a while.

Note: Matthew and Mark both report this incident at a later date, but Luke gives us some additional information about what took place. The gospel writers didn't seem to feel that chronology was always important when they wrote their gospels. They moved from event to event observing the actual sequence of events unless the need to make a point took precedence. The gospel writers were message driven and therefore were not overly concerned with sequential accuracy. As Luke leads into this story, he gives us a statement that can be taken to be a fast forward past several events that he will come back to later in his gospel. When comparing one gospel against another we should always bear in mind that the ministry of Jesus happened in a period of about three and a half years, enough time for several events to have happened that were very similar in nature. This no doubt accounts for some stories being told quite differently by different authors, simply because they were different events. In writing this gospel, I feel that Luke wanted to place this story about Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth ahead of some other events so as to use it as an introduction to the ministry of Jesus.

When Jesus went to Nazareth, enough time had elapsed for stories to precede his coming. Though Luke doesn't mention the miracles of Jesus in Galilee, the remarks of Jesus indicate that he had been healing the sick prior to his coming to Nazareth. It was this fact that gave Jesus an opportunity to explain why he wasn't doing more here in his hometown.

The first message about this visit that Luke wants us to consider is the message about the mission that Jesus had come to fulfill.

A new era had opened; healing was now top priority. The loving heart of God was now ministering to all the ills that had come upon mankind as a result of the curse of the law.

Justice demands penalties, but love finds a way to forgive even what mortals consider the unforgivable. The blessings of the law could only be visited upon the people when they were obedient to its demands. Unbelief brought about judgment and since all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, (Romans 3:23) there were a lot of prisoners, poor, blind and oppressed.

The state of being in prison is not always a matter of being placed within a literal prison. There are many forms of prisons.

Sin itself is very enslaving. Sin also finds victims to enslave—one sinner enslaving another human being. Jesus came to provide a way for us to escape our prisons.

Prisons are largely a state of mind. As long as a person believes that he is a victim, he will remain a victim. Let me illustrate. Suppose I am taken to a prison but I am not told that it is a prison. Suppose I

am told that it is a hospital or a rehabilitation clinic or something else that would be believable and I am not told that I can't leave. Would I be in prison so far as my consciousness is concerned? It wouldn't be until I wished to do something that would take me beyond the closed doors, walls or fences that the realization that I am in prison would occur to me. Once I realized that I could not do as I wished to do, I would begin to feel like a prisoner. To be a prisoner then is to feel confined and deprived. The feeling is intensified when demands are placed upon the prisoner to perform some task against his wishes. Being a prisoner then, is to some degree a state of mind.

Suppose I am in prison and I do not wish to be. How can I get out? Plotting an escape would not be wise.

There were two fellows in the Bible that were cast into prison. They were Paul and Silas. One day while Paul was preaching a girl began to cry out "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." (Acts 16:17) She kept this up until finally one day Paul cast the evil spirit out of her.

She was a slave who was being exploited by her owners who were making money as a result of her ability to predict the future. When they saw that she could no longer foretell the future, they were very angry and had Paul and Silas severely beaten and cast into prison. They were put in the inner cell and their feet were placed in stocks. Things looked rather bleak for Paul and Silas, but they were at peace.

About midnight Paul and Silas began to "have church", that is they began to pray and sing hymns. I contend that Paul and Silas understood that Christians are very special kinds of people. First of all, we are never alone. The angels of heaven always attend us. The Holy Spirit is always with us, and for Paul and Silas to begin to pray and sing hymns is no surprise to any Christian.

What did they say when they prayed? I do not know, but I do not believe that they were even thinking about getting out of jail that night. I believe they did what any Christian who is in love with the Lord would do when praying and singing hymns, they worshipped the Lord.

When we begin to worship the Lord, things happen. God's presence begins to change things. First we are changed. The other inmates of the prison began to listen to these men praying and singing to the Lord. Though it doesn't come right out and say it, there must have been something very special in their voices. Weeping and wailing would have only irritated the other prisoners. The tone of the story indicates that they were moved by what they heard.

Suddenly, God began to manifest his mighty power in that jail. The very earth began to shake violently, shaking the foundations of the prison, and the doors all popped open, and everyone's chains fell off.

The jailer woke up, and seeing the doors of the prison open, was about to kill himself with his sword when Paul shouted to him not to harm himself that everyone was still there.

Now here is how this story plays out. Paul and Silas began to praise God. When people pray and praise, God listens. God got excited; here were two men in dire circumstances practicing what they preach. God drew close to them. Where men pray and praise, and God is present, you have a temple! This place was no longer a prison; now it's a temple! The inner cell had become the Holy of Holies, and Paul and Silas were changed. They had been bound, but God set them free! Actually, God changed everything about that place that night. Unheard of things were happening. Prisoners who would have killed to get out were in no hurry to leave. Why should they? They were in the presence of God! They were now free men! The jailer who was in charge of the jail realized that he was a prisoner in his own right so he wanted to know how he could get saved. So right there in the middle of the night, a jailer washes prisoners wounds, he and his family give their hearts to the Lord, and everyone in the house gets baptized, probably including the other inmates.

Prisons are all essentially the same. Some are buildings; some are circumstances. Jailers are sometimes friends, spouses, systems, governments, religions, cultures, clubs or gangs. They are all capable of beating us up and binding us.

Jesus came to set the captives free! This message that Jesus preached is capable of releasing those who are bound.

Looking again at our text, the first bondage recorded in the passage read by Jesus was the bondage of poverty. Poverty is a state of mind to some degree. Oh, I know there is real poverty, the kind where a person has nothing and no means of getting anything. That is crushing poverty. What I wish to focus on however is the form of poverty where people have an income, a place to live, and food to eat and yet are poor. This form of poverty has the ability to either be the school of moral and spiritual development or a prison of intolerable suffering.

Jesus came with good news for the poor. He came to show us that what is, is not what will be. He came to show us that real values are not what we accumulate in this world, but rather what we are able to lay up in heaven. The liberating truths of the gospel when believed and embraced release the power of God into our lives. The prison walls that held us captive are changed into temple walls. The doors once locked are now standing open. We are free to leave the place of bondage; the choice is ours. If we chose to stay, it should not be to return to bondage, but rather to linger saying thanks to the one who loves us and redeemed us from bondage.

Paul and Silas were not in a hurry to leave, but leave they did. They lingered long enough to baptize some new believers and to be escorted out of the community by those who unjustly imprisoned them.

Next the focus of Luke's report about Jesus in Nazareth is upon the circumstances of his visit. The setting was the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown church so to speak. Those listening to him were the people who had known him. They were a skeptical audience and he knew it. They were impressed with what he had to say and admired how he said it, but having known him as a young man, was more than their faith could overcome. It's human nature to downgrade the achievements of those we know well.

"He (Jesus) came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11) It's hard to believe in some one who is a family member. So Jesus said to them,

Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum."

"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown." (Luke 4:23-24)

Having said those words to them, he then began to expound his point.

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian. (Luke 4:25-27)

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town taking him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, they would have thrown him down the cliff, but he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-31)

The people of Nazareth understood the point Jesus made, and they were deeply offended! What Jesus said in effect was, "If the prophet is not honored first, the miracles will not follow!" The reason more miracles did not happen in Israel was that people showed contempt for the prophets!

How dare he! This upstart preacher who didn't even have credentials! All he was in their eyes was the son of a carpenter! They knew who he was, Joseph's son. They not only knew him, but they also knew his family. As far as they were concerned, he was a fraud.

For Jesus to become a human being not only had its advantages, it was necessary; yet it was a hindrance to faith. How could humanity accept that a man could also be God? Especially, how could his friends and neighbors, accept it? How could they accept that Jesus, a carpenter who grew up among them, could be God manifest in human flesh? It wasn't easy, yet it was a must if they were to have eternal life. If it was hard for the people of Nazareth, it was even harder for his own family. A short while before this event, according to Mark, his family had come to him and tried to force him to return home because they thought he had gone mad. (Mark 3:21)

If we are to progress in the kingdom of God, we must learn to accept God's anointed people in the light of the ministry they carry. I teach people that it is necessary to see me in the role in which I am at any given time.

I am a man of different roles in life. Sometimes I work as a carpenter. When I am on the job that is what I am. When I come home I am a husband to my wife. When I go to see one of my children, I am a parent. When I am with my grandchildren I am Grandpa. When I am with members of my church I am their pastor. To you who read this I am an author. As you read this you may even recognize that I am also a teacher in the church. I am also a son of God and a brother of all who are born into this family of believers.

For some this becomes a challenge. Since my family is also members of my church I am both pastor and husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather, or great grandfather. Since I sometimes work for my son in law, I am also an employee. If all of this seems confusing, it is in the arena of proper respect for the anointing.

This was the sort of problem Jesus faced when he went to Nazareth. He was no longer just Joseph and Mary's son, he was now functioning as God's Son, God incarnate. There was no requirement upon these hometown people to see him as God yet, but it was necessary for them to at least recognize that he was a prophet. If they could take that step of faith and open their hearts to him in this capacity, the miracles could then be released in their midst!

They took this to be an indictment, rather than a challenge and became furious. Why could they not receive this as instruction? Probably for the same reason the children of Israel couldn't receive the prophets.

The apostle Paul gave us some instructions on this subject,

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come...We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:16-17,20)

I submit that until we can see ourselves in this way we will never be effective witnesses for the Lord Jesus.

The people of Nazareth were not ready for this kind of approach to the ministry of Jesus, a sort of, take me this way or not at all, so they tried to kill him!

God's kingdom is serious business, and evidently God wants us to take it serious holding those who minister the word of life in highest esteem. It is evidently very serious to show contempt for the ministers of God.

I know of a church that split and it was reported that the reason was that people didn't like the personality of the pastor. I have to wonder, how did God view that split? If we don't like the personality of the messenger; does that give us the right to reject him?

There are so many challenges to our sense of righteous respect today that it requires constant vigilance to be sure that we do not reject someone for frivolous reasons. We are to examine the messengers making sure they are of God, but upon seeing divine approval upon them, we are obligated to receive them as a messenger of God. We are to listen to them searching the scriptures to see if the things they teach are really of God or not. Caution is commended in the scriptures, but frivolous rejection is condemned. We are to walk soberly before the Lord discerning who is speaking the words of the Lord.

## Chapter Twelve

## Capernaum

Luke 4:31-44

Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.

When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Having introduced the ministry of Jesus with the story of the visit to Nazareth; Luke now returns in his narrative to the stories of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee. Matthew informs us that Jesus moved his place of residence from Nazareth to Capernaum. This was a more central location where he wished to concentrate most of his ministry. The first matter of business was for Jesus to gather some disciples. He began with Peter and Andrew, and soon added James and John.

Jesus began teaching the people in Capernaum, and as was his custom, he taught in the synagogue. While he was there, a man possessed by a demon (an evil spirit) cried out at the top of his voice,

'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!'

Upon hearing this Jesus gave a stern command to the demon, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' Then the demon threw the man down and came out of him. The people were amazed at the teaching and authority of Jesus. (Luke 4:33-36)

This book is about the human side of Jesus, but we soon discover that though he was every bit a man, he behaved very differently from most men. Men have egos, often very large egos. Egos like compliments. Here was a man saying wonderful things about Jesus and he turns to him and commands a demon spirit out of him!

Jesus was just getting started in his ministry. You would think that advertisements of any kind, especially good reports, would have been desirable. This demon was calling Jesus the Holy One of God!

Jesus didn't operate in the methods of the world. The Holy Spirit has his own way of advertising and he doesn't need Satan's help. All too often this kind of advertising only results in clamor. The kinds of people who respond to this sort of advertising are people who are seeking the sensational. Jesus didn't come to display how great his power is; he did that in the creation of world. He came to minister life to the hungry and thirsting. What he did, he did out of compassion, not to attract a crowd. Jesus never advertised a healing or deliverance meeting; these events followed the ministry of Jesus because he had compassionate love for people.

I have dealt with demon spirits, but I can honestly say; I do not enjoy it. I don't think Jesus did either. I have the feeling that Jesus disposed of the matter as quickly as he could in his ministry. I fail to find a time when Jesus engaged a demon in conversation, or made sport of the event. Rather, with dispatch he cast them out and would not suffer them to speak. It wasn't that they didn't try to speak, and in some cases, did speak, but it was not what the ministry of Jesus was about. Wise men of God do not play with

demons. Encouraging conversation with demons is to make sport of this whole matter of deliverance from evil.

There is a rising interest in this generation in communication with spirits and departed loved ones. The problem with all of this is that most people who are doing these sorts of things do not understand that they are dealing with evil spirits. The Law of Moses commanded, "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:31) If these spirits weren't evil spirits, how could they defile a person? (This verse in Leviticus is referring to the practices of calling up loved ones, fortune telling and all such practices.)

After the synagogue meeting was over, Jesus went to the home of Andrew and Peter where their mother was sick with a fever. Jesus rebuked the fever, took her by the hand and helped her up and she immediately began to serve them.

It's interesting to note the difference in the account of the gospel of Mark and the gospel of Luke. Mark wrote about Jesus the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest, who ministered as a servant. Mark was sensitive to observed the things he did, such as, his taking her by the hand and helping her to her feet. Luke wrote about Jesus as a man. People communicate with one another. He noticed that Jesus rebuked the fever and that it left her. No mention is made of him helping her up. These are subtle little differences that spring from the spirit of the reporter. What we hear or what we notice have to do with where we are in our spiritual development.

What I am saying in preaching takes on meanings as those hearing my words mix them with their own thoughts, and at times arrive at a different meaning than was intended. This is not always a bad thing, because it is often the result of the Spirit's work in the heart of the hearers. After all, it is the Spirit who is the teacher, my role is to yield to his influence and say what he puts in my heart to say. He then takes those words and applies them as he sees fit.

Advertisements or no advertisements, the crowds came and sought out Jesus. They brought their sick to him and he healed them. Demon afflicted people also came and he drove out the demons. Some of the demons came out shouting,

"You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ. (Luke 4:41)

At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea." (Luke 4:42-44)

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **Peter Meets the Real Jesus**

Luke 5:1-11

"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

The story before us was not likely the first meeting between Jesus and Simon. In both the books of Matthew and Mark we are told of a meeting where Jesus came to Peter and Andrew and invited them to follow him. They left their nets and did just that. The Lord then went on from there to where James and John were, he also invited them and they likewise left their nets and followed the Lord. It is not clear, however, if that meant they never went back. It is quite possible that they did go with Jesus, but since they lived in Capernaum, and their fishing business was there, they likely went out fishing from time to time. Most of their fishing was done at night, so it is entirely possible that in between services they continued to fish.

I take the position that this was an incident that came sometime after what was reported in Matthew and Mark. Although there are some similarities, I believe this was when Peter made a decisive decision to follow Jesus. What was done in the other accounts lacked the ingredient of a persuasive revelation that was necessary for these disciples to commit their lives to Jesus to the extent of forsaking their livelihood and following him.

One day as Jesus was encountered by a large crowd, and looking for a solution to the problem of how to manage them in a small space; he did the logical thing; he asked to use Peter's boat to push out away from the shore. This solution turned out to be an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate his power to these fishermen in a way they would never forget.

When Jesus concluded his teaching, he turned his attention to Peter and asked him to do something that seemed totally irrational. He asked Peter to put out into the deep water and to let down his nets for a catch of fish. Peter was obviously tired as he had worked hard all night, and even while Jesus was teaching the word, was tending to the chores of cleaning the nets. Did he hear right? Was Jesus asking him to go out and do it all over again? I feel sure that if Peter hadn't had a healthy respect for Jesus he never would have obeyed, but because it was Jesus, he took his nets and went back out, albeit, reluctantly.

To everyone's astonishment, Peter caught more fish than he could handle! What a difference it makes when we do something because Jesus commands it. Fishing the night before was Peter's idea, but Jesus commissioned this trip out! This was great for Peter to experience, but the lesson was not through yet, the nets began to break and he and Andrew needed help so signaling James and John his partners, he asked them to come help him. They filled both boats so full they began to sink.

When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said,

"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:8-11)

It was settled, at least for now, these men were committed to following Jesus, they pulled their boats out of the water and off they went following this man, whoever he was.

# Chapter Fourteen

## Lord, Make Me Clean

Luke 5:12-16

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, 'Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.'

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Leprosy was a disease that rendered a man unclean. This was because, in the Old Testament times, leprosy was a type of sin. In some cases, people were struck with leprosy as an act of judgment. To have leprosy was a fate almost worse than death. Those who had leprosy would have to cry "unclean" wherever they went. They were outcasts of society and anyone who touched them became ceremonially unclean.

When this man came to Jesus, he was no doubt filled with fear that he would either be rebuked or ignored. It would have been a simple matter for Jesus to turn his back on the man, and no one would have cared. After all he was not a pretty sight to behold. People don't usually spend much time looking at lepers; our instincts are to shun them, which brings out the worst in us.

Jesus didn't come to this world for his personal edification. It was for men like this that Jesus came. The leper represented a large segment of the human population who are afflicted with sin. This man was important to the ministry of Jesus.

Leprosy is a disease of the flesh or skin. Actually, the word for leprosy was used for a wide range of diseases of the skin. Flesh, as used in the New Testament scriptures means, the fallen nature. A diseased fallen nature would represent conditions of sinful bondage that render the individual a hazard to society. There are sins that are very contagious and destructive in nature. This is why it is so important for a society to control what its members are allowed to indulge in.

The fact that this man had leprosy does not mean that he was an unusual sinner. As far as I know, this disease was not contracted from sinning. He was, in the Biblical sense merely an illustration of people who have a sinful condition from which they need to be cleansed.

There are many forms of sin that attach themselves to the lives of people in such a way that they could be described as having a disease.

We have classified alcoholism as a disease. We also understand that if a person never exposes himself to alcohol he will never become an alcoholic. Is it therefore a disease or a sin? In the end result, I am convinced; it is both. One may use alcohol for years and not become an alcoholic, or some people may have a predisposition to the disease that makes them so vulnerable that it seems they become an alcoholic almost from the start.

Sexual sins also are very debilitating. There is a host of diseases that associate with sexual sins. The primary means of transmission from one person to another is sexual activity that brings people into intimate contact with infected persons. When we look at the potential dangers of sinful sexual activity, it is not surprising that God has given us very strict guidelines to follow in our lives.

Another effect of sexual sins is upon the soul of man. Sex, alcohol, drugs, and sensual conduct are all ingredients in Satan's recipe for the destruction of the soul of man. Some people think that it is the recipe for fun and frolic, but one has only to look at the result of this kind of activity to know how deceptive and destructive that conclusion is. People become intoxicated, or addicted, to this form of behavior in a way



that exceeds chemical dependency. With drugs and alcohol the addiction to the chemicals can be overcome much easier than the addiction of the soul to the sinful activities that are associated with the use of drugs or alcohol.

Sexual perversion also invades the lives of individuals who yield to lustful spirits. Humanity has been blind-sided by demonic spirits that afflict lives as a result of innocent seeming, lustful activity. Lust and love are as different as day is from night. The character of love is giving, sharing, caring, protecting and providing for the well being of the object of our love. Lust is selfish, self-centered and cares nothing for the well being of the object of its expression. Both may have passion but how that passion is expressed is quite different. Love is patient and kind and always operates within the limits of God's law, whereas lust cares nothing for God's law, and urgently wants its gratification.

Sexual lust always leads to some form of perversion. When sexual lust is traced to its most vial forms, the expression becomes violent and sadistic. Actually, lust is a derivative of hate. Lust cares nothing for its object. Lust, in the initial stages, uses a seducing spirit to capture its prey. The individual who is infected by this condition will appear to be very caring, considerate, generous and protective, but once his object has been secured may become very possessive, jealous, and cruel. Domestic violence often has its roots in lust.

How does lust get its hold on a life? I'm sure the methods are far broader than this brief writing can explore, but one of the more obvious is pornography. This, for the purpose of this writing, includes all forms of materials that are designed to excite the sexual urges of an individual. I am sure that this definition is far too broad for common usage, but we must consider the effect of what we are exposed to on a daily basis. Anything that is of a sexual nature has the power to affect a person in a sexual way. Not all people are affected by everything that is sexual, however. The reason is that, just as the human body has an immune system to deal with germs; the soul of man also becomes immune to sexual stimulation. It is commonly understood that what stimulates a teenager does not stimulate older people. The more a person is exposed to a form of stimulation, the less impact it has upon them. It is for this reason that those individuals who derive their sexual stimulation from lustful encounters soon need to find other situations to excite them, thus they move on to others forms or objects. The web of bondage grows ever deeper and stronger until the only remedy is a deep work of healing and restoration from an experience with the Lord Christ Jesus.

What must happen is nothing short of a miracle. Whether the problem is homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual, all forms of lust are sin. All sexual activity that is not sanctioned by the Holy Spirit is essentially lust. Love begins with God who is love. It is interesting that the stimulation derived from true and pure love remains constant and is enriched by the righteous experiences of life. People who walk hand in hand and heart to heart experience an ever-deepening love. The less sinful attitudes are allowed to color their relationship, the richer the relationship becomes. Whereas, lust is ultimately an enemy of loving relationships, pure love is the very fabric of relationships!

Even fallen humanity is not totally deprived of the ability to love, but without God as the centerpiece of their lives, usually find that even their love can become mixed with sin and lust. There are individuals who love their mates, but at the same time lust after them expressing obsessive control, jealousy, and perverse activities that threaten to destroy the love they share. Love can be a passionate experience, but the expression of that passion within the marital bond, is tender, caring, considerate and is more interested in the enjoyment and fulfillment of the partner, than it is with their own.

Untangling the web of confused motives and responses, due to the intrusion of lust and sin, requires a revelation of truth from the only source of hope for fallen man, the Holy Spirit.

When this man who was hopelessly a leper came to Jesus, he came with the right mind-set for help. "He fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'" (Luke 5:12) This man believed that Jesus could heal him! There can be no healing, in matters such as we have been discussing, without that kind of faith. The web of lust and deceit is too complex to yield to counseling alone. This man did believe, and all that was in question was; would Jesus soil his hands in

the healing process? Would he touch such a man as this; would he care? Jesus could cleanse him, but would he?

The answer is a resounding "Yes!" If you are reading this and see that you have become a victim of lust, alcohol, drugs, or any other sin, for that matter, and you want to be cleansed, do what this man did; fall on your face before the Lord Jesus in earnest fervent prayer. Ask him to cleanse you; all of you, your thoughts and attitudes about things, what you seek out for pleasure, emotional responses, and the manner in which you deal with life, and those you love. He is more than able to help us; he is our creator. Yield to his corrections and instructions. Healing will come to you.

## Chapter Fifteen

### Healing Paralysis

Luke 5:17-26

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

In the last chapter we discussed some areas of sin that could be described as going beyond the normal expressions of the fallen nature. Sin is sin, this is true, but there are some conditions that are so corrupted that they could be described as a disease. The disease of leprosy, as used in Biblical texts, seems to be a descriptive way of communicating that truth. Paralysis seems to be a continuation of the theme of leprosy but with a different side.

We now have before us a story of faith, friendship, and again, a disease with a remedy. We also see skeptics who are ready to criticize at the slightest hint of irregularity, as they perceive it.

First, I want to consider the disease with its remedy. The disease we have before us is described as paralysis. The sins described in the previous chapter were sins that I term, sins of commission. These sins are of such a nature that they hurt others in some way. There is also a whole class of sinners whose sin, though not as aggressive; are sins nonetheless. The effects of it are just as devastating and debilitating as the others described, and perhaps in some cases even more. These sins can be contrasted as "sins of reaction."

The sins of aggression, I characterize as sins such as adultery, molestation, violence, imprisonment, hostage taking, stalking, larceny, and lying. These are all unprovoked actions by someone, who, in doing so is injuring someone else. In other words, the sinner just goes out and sins without regard for those who will be hurt by it, either directly or indirectly. I personally take great exception to the thought that there

are victimless crimes or sins. The victims may, in some cases, be remote, but they are victims nonetheless.

The sins of reaction on the other hand, are sins such as jealousy, hate, anger, rage, murder or resentment, and result in feelings of bitterness, self-destruction, low self-image, fear, or revenge. Wounds once inflicted can heal, but if infection sets in, deep scarring can result. Books have been written on the subject of the healing of wounded hearts. We cannot over-emphasize the depth to which a human spirit can be wounded by the actions of another. What we need to realize is that no matter how badly we are hurt, sin is still sin and that one sin does not justify the commission of another. Before we can be healed of the wounds inflicted by someone else, we must be cleansed of our own sin. Sins of reaction are just as damning to the spirit of a person as sins of commission.

How tragic it is to see an individual eaten alive by the cancer of bitterness or paralyzed by fear, resentment, unforgiveness and hate. Many people have been traumatized by acts of aggression upon them either sexually or through physical or psychological abuse. Often abuse is all of these rolled into one bundle of pain. The person so abused is locked into a prison of fear, suspicion, distrust and confusion. They are indeed paralyzed and unless someone has compassion on them and goes to their aid, they will pine away in isolation.

In our story we see a man who had four friends who were willing to help him. I do not know what happened to this man, his story could have been one of a thousand possibilities; your story, reader, could possibly have been his story.

I speculate that this man had been a productive man in his community. I base that on the fact that four men carried him to Jesus and at great effort lifted him to the roof and after removing part of the roof, lowered him in front of Jesus suggestive of a loyalty established during years of productivity

Something happened to the man that caused him to be paralyzed. It's always tragic when a person loses mobility. It's especially difficult for people who are active and outgoing. For a person who has always been independent to suddenly become dependent is a tragic adjustment.

This man literally dropped in, or should I say, was lower into a situation that had nothing to do with him. This room was filled with people, a good number of which were Pharisees and teachers of the law. They had come from all over Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. Their purpose was to "check out" Jesus. I don't know what their mind-set might have been when they came, but I speculate that some were curious, some were excited at the prospect of seeing a miracle, and others may have been skeptical looking for something to prove him a fraud.

If the atmosphere wasn't already charged with uneasy expectation it soon was. When this man appeared, Jesus was amazed at the faith of the men who brought the paralytic, and it provided a perfect opportunity for him to demonstrate a point of truth that would expose the hypocrisy of these men, and at the same time demonstrate a divine truth.

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" (Luke 5:20)

Healing was one thing, but forgiving sin was quite another. Yet there is a link between the two we cannot ignore. Throughout the Old Testament human suffering is linked to man's separation from God. Sin has caused that separation and therefore forgiveness of sin is part of the healing process. When Jesus forgave the man's sin, he cleared the way for him to receive restoration of fellowship and healing.

No matter what the paralysis is, whether it is psychological or physical, dealing with the sin question is of primary importance. Before progress can be made in the healing process, the mental and spiritual roadblocks must be removed. Even without the intervention of divine healing power, those afflicted are best served by getting rid of all bitterness, anger, rage, resentment or any such attitudes, because; without a pure heart, even what remains will soon be lost from the moral paralysis that associates with the disease.

When Jesus said to the man to take up his mat and go home, the man had a decision to make—would he put forth the effort to try what he knew in his mind was a wasted effort based on past history, or would he place his faith in the word of Jesus and begin to do what his body would permit.

This is where miracles seem to begin, when we put the past aside, and begin to try what has always been the impossible. With our hearts fixed on the commands of Jesus, all things become possible to them that believe.

This man who had to be carried into the midst of these men by his friends, found that his body was now capable of doing what he could not do before Jesus gave the command. I think this man upon hearing the word of Jesus must have pondered; one side of him probably was saying, doesn't he know I can't do that? The other was pondering what he had heard about Jesus. Wasn't this why he was here? He may have reasoned, "What do I have to lose?" So he did what he was capable of doing, he tried.

We don't know if he felt anything before he put forth the effort to get up, perhaps he did. Some people feel heat in their bodies as the healing power of Christ enters them. Some people feel nothing, but discover that they can do what they couldn't do before.

When we come to Jesus, we find that he has the answers that set us free. Yet the choice is ours, will we walk out of our prison with him, or will we remain and wait for the jailer to return, and lock the doors once more. No one can make that decision for someone else. The friends of this man could carry him to Jesus. They could make a hole in the roof and lower him down, but upon arriving in the presence of Jesus, it was between Jesus and the Paralytic. He alone could give the command to his formerly paralyzed body to obey the Lord and stand up.

How often I have felt helpless in the presence of people who would ask me some question, and who, upon hearing the answer, would want to apply the truth of God to their lives, and yet would not. Like a person who has lived in jail so long that leaving seems unnatural—like leaving an old friend, a security that, once removed, requires them to face responsibilities associated with liberty.

There have been many other times when the same scene has been played out, but the result has been very different. Those seeking have seized the word of the Lord, believing in their hearts and willingly taking the risks involved in obedience, have received mighty miracles of healing and deliverance. The difference is faith, not in me, but in the power of the Lord Jesus to do what his word declared.

That's how it happens. The truth comes to us from the words of Jesus; we believe in our hearts and whatever that truth demands, we do; the result is then up to Jesus. We then see hard hearts softening, forgiveness being given, love reinstated, and the tangled web of wounded emotions coming to peace.

When healing comes first at the spirit level and then the mind and body respond, everyone is amazed and praises God. Jesus is the healer of the whole man. Before the paralytic could receive complete wholeness, he needed to have the sin problem solved. We don't know if there was a direct connection between his disease and sin or if it was simply that sin was preventing him from coming confidently to God in faith, but no matter, Jesus forgave him first, then healed him. The legalists objected, but the miracle softened their hearts.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

### **Whosoever Will May Come**

Luke 5:27-32

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. "But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

In the book of Luke we have a collection of stories that are loosely connected as far as their actual sequence. What seems to dictate the order in which they are reported is more what suits the message than historic considerations. I do not believe that Luke was trying to give us sequential historic data but rather he set out to verify the accuracy of the accounts themselves. There are differences in the sequence in which stories are related in the gospels, but this didn't seem to be an issue. I have heard it speculated that in the beginning these were merely collections of stories that when translated and copied, were edited into the present form. If that were true, then some of the statements such as "next," would likely have been editorial additions. In translating from Greek to English, for example, the translators have to decide on the proper punctuation and capitalization as the Greek language uses little or none of these.

In this sequence of stories, I see a common thread, either intended by Luke or more likely, directed by the Holy Spirit. This common thread has to do with the problem of sin in several different forms and degrees.

In the story of the call of Peter we see the problem of inadequate revelation being corrected by the Lord in the fishing miracle. The result was, Peter confessed his sinful condition and asked Jesus to leave him, whereupon; Jesus called Peter to become a fisher of men. He then pulled his boat out of the water and followed Jesus.

In the story of the leper and the paralytic, we have seen, first sin that has become diseased, and second, sin that has paralyzed its victim.

Now we have the story of sinners who need saving, and a Savior who will save them.

One day Jesus came to where Matthew was collecting taxes and said to him, "Follow me" and he got up and followed Jesus. Just like that, according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. None of the writers give us any more information. Why did he follow Jesus? I am struck with the over-simplification of this story. Had Matthew (Levi) been hanging around where Jesus had been preaching? Or did he just hear stories about him? We may never know, but I have to wonder. What made men drop what they were doing, and get up and follow him?

Well, they all say that Matthew (Levi) threw a dinner party, and had all his friends over for dinner to eat with Jesus. They all say the same thing, the guests were "sinners" and "tax collectors" and that the Pharisees didn't like it! Somehow that doesn't surprise me. Religious people seldom associate with sinners! It's much easier to ridicule sinners than it is to reach out to them!

Some churches demand that people dress in fine clothes to attend their church. People come to my church dressed in a variety of styles, whatever they feel comfortable wearing in public. We believe that people ought to dress modestly and respectfully, but what that means to each individual varies, thus we have some men who wear suits and some who wear jeans. I allow this disparity because I feel that it's important for us to be the kind of group that can make all people feel at ease no matter what their financial or cultural background might be. The fact that it is this way does not reflect any effort to make it so, but rather I think, we have been gracious to people of all economic and cultural types. It has pleased me that people who either are not comfortable or can't afford suits, would come in what they are comfortable with, or can afford, and not staying away feeling uncomfortable in our midst, or unwelcome.

Jesus was not ashamed to be at a dinner where sinners were. He never hesitated to mingle with people who needed him. I think it is important to note however, that Jesus didn't go here to fellowship with their sin, but rather they came to fellowship with him. Jesus didn't make close friends with sinners, but he did make close friends with former sinners!

The difference was positional. They came to Jesus because they needed what he had. Jesus didn't go to them because he sought what they had. No one had anything that Jesus needed. He was complete in every way. He came to lift us to a higher plain of living. He did not descend into our sin, except at the

cross, as our substitute sin offering. He was our best friend, but demanded that we come to him, and obey his commands.

When Matthew encountered Jesus, the requirement of fellowship was clear, "Follow me." Matthew did just that; he left his questionable occupation and followed Jesus. The result of that change was that he became one of the inner circle, a disciple and an apostle, a high position for a former tax collector! When Jesus reached out to Matthew, I doubt that Matthew had even the slightest idea what the implications of that decision to follow him, would be.

When Jesus bids us come to him, he alone knows what the outcome will be.

I believe in limited predestination. That is to say that, I believe that until a person comes to Jesus, choice is paramount. The will of the Father is clear, he is not willing that anyone perishes, therefore he sent Jesus. I believe that the call goes out to whosoever will; that all may come to him in repentance and faith.

I believe in the foreknowledge of God, meaning; I believe that God does, in fact, know the outcome of each person's life. I further believe that foreknowledge does not in any way effect the outcome of our lives, but merely means that there are no surprises to God.

When I speak of limited predestination I speak of what is outlined in the book of Ephesians:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:11-14)

The meaning of this passage seems clear enough. The moment we believe we are included in everything that God's predestined plan includes for the body of Christ. The real nature of predestination is best expressed in this passage:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)

Then we see the relationship of foreknowledge to predestination in this passage:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— (Eph. 1:4-5)

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Rom. 8:30)

How can this be that he would choose us in him before the creation of the world? This is where foreknowledge comes into play. Having the advantage of foreknowledge, God is able to chart the course of history in advance. He is able to select individuals to fit into the scheme of things according to their willingness to obey and act out his will. Again foreknowledge does not force an outcome, but allows for selections to be made in advance, based on a known outcome!! If this were not true, if predestination forced an outcome, then the call to whosoever will becomes null and void. (See Rev. 22:17)

Matthew was chosen by the Lord on the basis of the foreknowledge of God, just as all the disciples were. Having answered the call, they were then predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus by the will of God, just as all of us are. All men are predestined to the plan of God, but some men, many, I am afraid, exclude themselves through unbelief. This is no surprise to God, but it is not according to his desire.

It was in the spirit of this love that Jesus went to Matthew's house, and sat with sinners of the most hated sort. And it was in the spirit of this love he said,

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32)

The gospel message is a message of love, God so loved this world that he gave us the very Son he loves, so that, any sinner, no matter how vial, may come, and receive pardon and cleansing from sin. We cannot come unless we listen to the call and respond to it. It is by choice we come, but after we have answered the call, he reveals to us that we were indeed chosen.

Matthew was chosen for special service, but not all tax collectors were so chosen; yet all could come and believe. No one was excluded from God's plan. All that was required was a believing heart. What a gift! What great love!!

## Chapter Seventeen

### Old Wine Skins

Luke 5:33-39

They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

He told them this parable: "No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'"

How religious are you? Do you meet all the demands of those who are experts in proper Christian conduct? The Pharisees had just observed Jesus eating dinner at Levi's house with tax collectors and sinners, and now they have another complaint. Apparently, they had observed that Jesus' disciples did not go on fasts like John's disciples did. They evidently had strong feelings about this, and required their disciples to fast.

Fasting is a form of mourning, an expression of need. The need may be to draw closer to the Lord, or it may be a heavy burden upon the heart of an earnest seeker. It doesn't matter what the reason for the fast, it is acceptable to the Lord as a valid spiritual activity, however there are times when fasting should give way to feasting. Feasting is an expression of celebration and is associated with happy occasions. Who ever heard of a man inviting a young lady to go on a fasting date? A meal shared provides an opportunity to get better acquainted with someone special.

The disciples of John were looking for their Messiah to appear. Fasting was an expression of anticipation. Jesus, however, was the object of that anticipation to those who loved him. He was the Messiah and he was here; there was no need to fast.

Religion doesn't give way to change very well. The longer a religious form is in place the less pliable it becomes, like a piece of leather, it loses its elasticity; or like a piece of cloth that has been worn and washed, each time losing some of its strength and beauty.

What should be done with that which is old and filled with decay? There are sometimes places for some of the old. I live in a house that was once condemned. The church I pastor bought it, and I went to work preparing it to be lived in once more. Some people said I should get a bulldozer and clear the lot, but because I have experience in construction, I could see some value in leaving some of the old structure. So what I did was, I removed all the interior trim that could be used in the finished product and stored it, I

then removed all the old plaster and hauled it to the dump. I also tore out any wood that was decayed or broken along with the old plumbing and wiring and anything else that was out dated and needing to be replaced. I then began to repair and rebuild. Starting with the foundation I removed all that was no longer needed or broken. I leveled the house and checked it for plumb. I added on sections to expand its functional abilities. I replaced the obsolete wiring with new wiring, and the troublesome plumbing with new pipes and fixtures. I added a heating and cooling system, and began to replace the interior. In the end, we now enjoy a home that is a blend of the new and the old. What was retained was because it had value or charm. What was replaced was because it was obsolete, broken or decayed. This is what Jesus did with the old religion of the Jews, but in the process he was very careful not to stifle the new church with old worn out rules, laws and traditions.

Much of the old religion was hauled to the scrap heap, right where it belonged; however, the truths taught were retained. The old had served a purpose, but change was of God.

Man was about to receive a new religious wardrobe. New wine (Holy Spirit power) was about to be poured into new wine skins (A new form of worship). A new religion of the heart was being given birth, and it required a form in which to dwell.

There still remained a problem that must be dealt with; people. Jesus was human, and understood human problems. He was about to give new wine to the world, but people like old wine better. Would they be willing to forsake the safety of the traditions they were accustomed to, for a personal relationship with God?

Change would come, but the process would not be easy. There is a tension that exists between those who want to cling to the past and those who want to progress in their pursuit of God. Some people are not comfortable with this tension. They see it as a source of conflict, and often it is, resulting in hurt feelings, division and separation. It is true that the old and the new cannot co-exist when those involved are not willing to examine the proposed changes to see if the source is truly the Holy Spirit. In the case of the new church of believers and the old religion of the Jews, coexistence was not possible because those in authority were unwilling to yield to the Holy Spirit's direction.

In many cases however, changes that need to come into the family of believers are far less radical. Some people resent those whom they view as, dragging their feet, for hindering the progress of the church. Within the valid body of Christ there are checks and balances, just as there are in any organism. Those who are reluctant to get on board with new plans are often instruments in the hand of God, preventing excesses that would bring harm to the body of believers as a whole.

In the transition between the old religious order, and the new church, structure could not be abandoned as a principle. A new structure with flexibility was needed. This was symbolized by the reference to new wine skins. God was not opposed to structure, only stiff and unbending structure.

In the church founded on the day of Pentecost, structure was slow in coming. This church was filled with optimism and love, but was also somewhat lacking in long term planning.

The thrill of the moment overshadowed reason, and sin soon surfaced. The incidence of Ananias and Sapphira lying to Peter and the Holy Spirit, resulting in their immediate death, brought about a fear of God that was the foundation of church government. This early church needed a reality check because they were losing their way, being carried along by high emotion and success. God was manifesting his mighty power in their midst, but as is often the case, fear of God was lost.

Yes, the skin is necessary to contain the wine; we must never forget that. Just as it takes the bones of our bodies to hold us erect, so the church needs those who say wait, let's pray some more about that, and then make a decision.



# Chapter Eighteen

## What is the Real Sabbath?

Luke 6:1-11

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Imagine, your walking along a path when upon seeing some wheat growing near by, you decide to go pick a few heads of grain and rub them together to loosen the chaff from the grain. Then you eat the kernels. Did you perform work? "Are you kidding," would be the likely response, yet, this is what the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of doing. In their narrow, legalistic mind-set this constituted work and therefore they concluded that the disciples had broken the Sabbath, which was to them a serious violation.

What about the Sabbath, should it be observed today? Some churches and even denominations say we should. But what do the scriptures say?

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a *Sabbath day*. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Col 2:16-17 emphasis mine)

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*Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands*, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did (The Israelites of the Old Testament); but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. *Now we who have believed enter that rest*, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'(Israel)" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. (The "day of rest" is an eternal day, once entered into, one should remain in it.) For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." (Those who would not live by faith.)

*It still remains that some will enter that rest*, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again *set a certain day, calling it Today* (indicating eternal), when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.* *Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest*, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Heb 4:1-11 emphasis and explanations mine)

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Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Gen 2:1-3)

The scriptural treatment of the Sabbath is an interesting study. First, we note that the Genesis account of the creation week started each day in the fading light of a previous day. Even the first recorded day

began in the fading light of a previous day, suggestive of a preexisting earth in chaos. Genesis 1:1 begins by telling us who made the heavens and the earth. Verse 2 then tells us of a chaotic condition that had come upon the earth resulting in darkness. In the account of the creation week each day is noted as having an evening and a morning until the arrival of the seventh day that has neither, suggesting that the rest into which God entered was an eternal day preexisting and post-existing the work of creation. Thus, creation was a sort of parenthesis, rest being set aside for a while, allowing God time in which to could accomplish the task of creation. Having completed it; he returned to the rest from which he came.

When sin entered the world, man was assigned the task of working for his living. (Gen. 3:17-19) During the era between the fall of man, and Moses; there were no commandments. It wasn't until God gave the commandments to Moses that humanity was commanded to keep the Sabbath. However, it is not known whether they kept it previous to this or not. It is assumed by many that they did, because God blessed the day and made it holy. If they did keep it, it was not by a recorded command, as no commands existed in that time period. (Rom. 5:12-14)

All during the time the Israelites were in the wilderness after receiving the commandments, the Sabbath was strictly enforced, but upon coming into the land, no Sabbath is recorded as being kept until after the conquest was completed. We especially note this during the conquest of Jericho where the Israelites were commanded to march around the city for seven days, and then on the seventh day, they were to march around it seven times, and then blow the trumpets and shout; the rest is history. Somewhere in the course of that time period a Sabbath had to have occurred, possibly it was the seventh day of the march. Does this mean that they did not keep the Sabbath during this time period? Of course not, but if they did, it was not mentioned. Why bring this up? Simply because all of these events were types to be studied and learned from.

In Colosians and Hebrews we learn of the significance of these events. They spoke to us of Christ, and our part in him. When the Israelites entered the land of promise, they were symbolically entering into Christ. They did not enter into rest however; they entered into conflict. Entry into the land should have been their entry into rest, and it would have been, if they had truly believed. It would have been their entry into the eternal day through faith, but they fell short of it through unbelief, therefore the scriptures teach us about a new Day, that Day is Jesus. When we are born again, we enter into him who is our rest, just as the Israelites entered into the land of promise, which was to be their rest. We too, must do conquest with the wicked inhabitants of the land, just as they did. Only the inhabitants aren't people; they are sinful ways and attitudes, which must be driven out of the land of our soul. This can only be accomplished as we embrace absolute faith in Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is by faith we rest from our struggles. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest." (Heb. 4:9-11) Thus, it is by resting from the self-struggling of the flesh by putting our absolute faith in Jesus; no other method will do. Joshua could not give them rest, because he was a man like them. Jesus, however, not only can, but does, as we enter into a relationship of faith in him.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The disciples did not break the Sabbath because picking grain was not a violation of their relationship with him. Nor is our struggle against sin a violation, so long as we struggle in faith. "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience." (Heb. 4:11)

When the Pharisees challenged Jesus and his disciples about the Sabbath day, they didn't seem to have a clue about what the Sabbath represented, or how it was to be fulfilled. Their focus was upon any method they might use to discredit Jesus. Seeing what they deemed to be a violation of such an important command, was seized upon and used as an occasion to accuse Jesus of violating the Sabbath. How silly it is in our eyes, but to them it was serious; any violation of the Sabbath was considered serious to them, unless, of course, it suited their need.

The real issue at stake here was; is it ever okay to violate the law? Jesus then sited some incidences where, what seemed to be violations of the law, were not as a result of a higher more compelling consideration coming into play.

God is not knit-picky; he is not looking for reasons to condemn us as people. If God declares something to be a violation, it is because he has a very good reason for doing so. We are God's most treasured creations; yet we are the source of his greatest pain. God wants people to turn to him with a whole heart filled with love. He doesn't want us to view him as a heartless vindictive authoritarian who cares only for obedience. When it becomes necessary for God to execute judgment, he wants us to see that there is a tear in his eye for having to do so.

On another occasion Jesus was teaching on the Sabbath when a man with a crippled hand came to him. The Pharisees were nearby waiting to see if Jesus was going to heal on the Sabbath. Why they deemed this to be work is beyond me, but they did. Jesus, however, was not intimidated by their nonsense, and healed the man anyway. The Pharisees were furious and began to discuss what they might do to Jesus.

Isn't it odd how people can stumble at such minor issues, and commit such gross violations while doing what they deem to be the right thing? Which is a sin, to heal on the Sabbath, or to contemplate how to destroy the healer? One is a righteous act, and the other an unrighteous act; but which is the righteous one? How you determine that will depend on your heart, and that depends on how you see God. If you see him as a God of love and mercy, you will know that it is right to heal on the Sabbath. But, on the other hand, if you see God as only concerned with his law being obeyed and you deem healing to be work, you will justify contemplating what to do about the healer.

Many people, in an effort to defend some principle they thought was important to God, have destroyed the lives of people for whom Jesus died. Churches have cast people out of their fellowships because of some violation that was an embarrassment to them. I have heard of pastors refusing to do weddings because the couple sinned prior to the ceremony. How sad that we will do violence to those who sin, thinking that we are protecting God's standard of righteous conduct. Isn't it more important to show love and mercy, than to protect something that doesn't even need protecting?

Some people are so worried that someone will use our acts of kindness and love as an excuse to sin, that they will destroy someone who probably has already repented. We have a strange idea in Christian churches, that if a wedding, or some other service to people is granted, that it, in some way, is saying that we approve of the individuals, and what they are doing. What nonsense! How can I as a pastor decide who to approve, and who to disapprove? Why do we think that we have to approve, to love? I have made it a ministerial policy to give my services without regard to approval (Legal matters excepted). The reason being, I believe if I will officiate at funerals, perform wedding ceremonies, and such like, for people who turn to the church in times of need, perhaps they will also turn to God for forgiveness of sins and salvation. I have preached to more sinners at funeral and weddings than I have in regular church services. Jesus was not afraid to stain his reputation by ministering to sinners; I don't think we should be either.

## **Chapter Nineteen**

### **Sermon on the Plain**

#### **Part One**

#### **Instructing New Apostles**

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

The time had come for Jesus to select the twelve disciples who would become the Twelve Apostles; Judas Iscariot excepted. Jesus didn't rush into making these appointments. He first consulted with his Father in prayer. It is not revealed what was the content of the prayer. We are only told that he prayed all night. No matter, when he gave his choice publicly, he was ready for the occasion.

These men would suffer persecution while carrying the message of the gospel to the world, and in the end be martyred for Christ. John, however, would be spared a martyr's death, though an attempt was made to kill him in boiling oil. And then of course, Judas Iscariot would hang himself after betraying the Lord to the Sanhedrin. Most likely, all of this was on the mind of Jesus that night as he prayed to his Father. Jesus was not looking from afar in distant eternity anticipating events that would happen someday, but rather, they were real events happening as he was living out the plan of salvation. These men were real living people, friends he loved, and what would happen to them must have weighed heavily upon him. He must prepare them for the events that would both challenge and shatter, their comfortable lives. The prayer he prayed went on as hours slipped by, which of them would be his final choices?

Having made his selections of apostles; we see Jesus standing on a level place ministering to the hurting people who had come to him. Power was flowing out of him, healing the sick, and casting out demons; then looking at his disciples, he began giving what some have called, the Sermon on the Plain. This wasn't just another version of the Sermon on the Mount. Anyone who follows a minister around knows that there are certain sermons that he will repeat, sometimes several times, each with slight to major variations of thought. Even though the sermon may contain essentially the same material, yet to different audiences, the whole sense of it can be altered. This seems to be the case here. This sermon has some of the same features as the Sermon on the Mount, but the emphasis and meaning are quite different. Luke is presenting Christ as the Son of Man who has a special sensitivity to our humanity. We particularly note this sensitivity in this sermon.

He began, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20) Luke chose this sermon because it reflected the special sensitivity of our Lord to what we suffer. He followed up this statement in verse 24 saying, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort." I find this statement most remarkable in the light of some current teachings regarding the "blessings" received as a result of one's faith in Christ. I have personally questioned, what gospel it is that promises all these earthly blessings? Each of the "Blesseds" has its counterpart "Woe." Each places value upon what humans by nature abhor. Jesus didn't just teach them that he was sympathetic to their plight, but rather, taught them to value difficulties as being of great eternal value.

The natural nature of man does not value what is called, "Blessed." If we were to express our hearts as natural people we would likely say, "Blessed are the rich, for they are able to be independent, wanting for nothing. Blessed are the well fed, for they are satisfied; blessed are those who laugh, for they are

indeed happy, and blessed are you when all men speak well of you, for this makes you feel successful and secure."

However, if we could understand what is being said here, perhaps it would revolutionize how we view life, and what we experience in it. Jesus taught us about the pitfalls of being rich in this life, almost as though he pitied the rich. He saw how easy it is to live one's life by the wisdom of the flesh, rather than seeking to know the will of God: That, the sense of need is what drives us to seek more in our lives, and when we discover that life is set against us, we cry out to God for intervention; thus, a relationship with God begins to develop out of need. Those whose need can readily be met by human effort, seldom pray, since that is the last thing they want to do, feeling self-sufficient.

How can a rich person ever learn to trust God for his daily bread when his money will buy more than enough bread? Jesus said, "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied." (Luke 6:21a) When will he satisfy the hunger? Now? After this life? When? In Matthew Jesus taught us that our heavenly Father knows what we need, and will supply what is needed, because we have value to him. It is safe to say that he is well able to satisfy us, both in this world and in eternity.

It is also safe to say, that it takes desperation to create a desperate seeking after God. Can it be that it takes desperate circumstances to cause many of us to forsake self-reliance, and to transit into a life of reliance on Christ? This is, without a doubt, what Jesus was preaching that day. When all is going well for us in this world, we are in a desperate need before God, forgetting who the giver of all things is, and trivialize life and our relationship with God.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." (Luke 6:21b), joined with, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep." (Luke 6:25b), combine to complete the thought that the weeping experienced by the poor and poorly fed, was the result of harsh circumstances of life, resulting in blessings being bestowed in heaven, compensating for their present sorrow. In the Book of James we see that some of the inequities imposed upon the poor was the result of the actions of the rich, resulting in the rich being stripped of their comforts on the day of retribution. On that day, there will be a reversal of the roles, the righteous enjoying fullness, wealth, and laughter; but not as the result of evil conduct, but rather, as a result of their patient endurance. Just as God laughed at those evil men who crucified Jesus, turning their mockery into triumph (Ps. 2:1-12), so we too will see our sufferings dealt to us by a sinful world, turned into great triumph on the day when the righteous are rewarded by the Lord. It is the exercising of the spirit of the over-comer that brings about this triumph.

The section dealing with blessedness and woes is concluded with a precept that is very similar to the section in the Sermon on the Mount that deals with persecution. Luke says, "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." (Luke 6:22-23) This too joins with, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." (Luke 6:26) As in the Sermon on the Mount, special emphasis is upon sufferings that are the result of our association with Christ, as evidenced in the expansion of the dialog. We also note that it is in heaven, that our reward awaits us.

No one enjoys being ostracized from his peers, or being belittled for his beliefs in Christ. Persecution comes in many forms and Jesus mentions some of the most common. Not all persecution is violent in nature. Some is silent contempt, merely being shunned and hated for no apparent reason. Christians have a different spirit, and the world knows it. Christians make them feel uncomfortable, convicted and ill at ease, thus they would rather just exclude us justifying their actions by saying "I just don't like them." Sometimes persecution is expressed by someone saying something like, "What are you, holier than thou?" Meaning, I recognize you have something I need, but I am resisting it for all I am worth, and staying around me makes me miserable.

When we are spoken well of by the world we have to wonder; are we really good ambassadors for Christ? Is our spirit really standing in contrast to the world? Or, are we just like the world, seeking what they seek, being entertained by what entertains them? Is the focus of our pursuits in life upon the Lord? If so, it will show. If we are full of light, the light will shine from us, we can't help that; and the world

will hate us for it. Being a light may bring pain, but eternal rewards await those who are faithful witnesses.

I see far too little value being placed on eternal rewards in our preaching and in our daily dialog. It is so easy to get caught up in the need to survive that we lose sight of eternal values. What we get now we can use to make life here and now, nicer and more pleasurable; but what of eternal values?

## **Chapter Twenty**

### **Sermon on the Plain**

#### **Part Two**

#### **Love and Rewards**

Luke 6:27-35

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them." And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."

Although, the opening verses of this section are connected to the last "blessed" of the previous section of the Sermon on the Plain, the emphasis shifts to the theme of love. In the previous verses of this sermon (Luke 6:20-26), the emphasis was upon valuing the eternal over the present, and valuing what we by nature abhor, poverty, hunger, sorrowing, and rejection/persecution, as being of great and lasting worth, worthy of eternal reward. Now the emphasis is turned to the quality of spirit from which our benevolence flows; giving it value.

This section is not intended to be understood or appreciated by everyone; Jesus said it was for those who heard him. What do we draw from that statement? I feel sure that people in Jesus' time were just like people today—they listened to the words, but did not hear the message. The message, in the message, was of such value I am amazed that it has had so little impact on the history of the behavior of people. This message is a challenge to live lives with eternity in view, yet few, very few, have even noticed the value of the message. This sermon was designed to take our thinking from the principles and precepts of the kingdom, and to focus them upon real activities of daily life. It's easy to miss the practical application of a teaching, while conceptualizing spiritual truth. The prevailing message being taught all through this sermon emphasizes eternal rewards as being of great value; values often neglected in the rush of life. It's so easy to be distracted from what is truly important, whiling away the energy of life on frivolity. There really is a heaven to be gained, and there really are rewards awaiting the righteous. Jesus wanted us to live our lives in the expectancy of those rewards.

What the Lord begins to say here is hard to hear if you are involved in the sort of real life experiences that these teachings apply too. It's one thing to conceptualize "Love your enemy," but when you are faced

with a real enemy who means to do you harm; it's a word from the Lord that strikes the fallen nature like a bolt of lightning, or a piercing sword dividing soul and spirit.

Again I say, many people will not receive this message. If this is a revelation of what it means to love with a pure Godly love, then we must learn to act in a manner that is exactly opposite to what we as natural human beings will do when our human natures are free to act unrestrained. We have instincts of self-preservation that cause us to fight back when attacked. We have instincts to protect what is ours that causes us to cling to our possessions. When we hear the Lord saying,

Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. (Luke 6:27-30);

We want to respond that, that is not how it is in this world. Had Jesus gone mad? Is it practical to look to the needs of others, even ahead of your own needs? The message of Jesus does not make sense to a lost world. Its wisdom can only be appreciated when viewed in the light of the hope of eternal life, and a home in heaven that is real.

The wisdom of the world says, "Love those who love you, lend to those who will pay you back, and if someone strikes you on the cheek, strike him back, unless of course, he is bigger than you, and if you can't win in an honest fight get help so you can win." However, the message of Jesus was not about what makes sense in the light of this present world, but rather, what will result in the greatest rewards in heaven. Not only that, but Jesus also said, "You will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." (Luke 6:35) Now we are given the real reason for changing our thinking; this is how our Father conducts himself. We, as children of God, are being called upon to emulate the conduct of our Father! The greatest compliment a Christian can receive is to be called a child of God based upon how he conducts himself. Christians are to be representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven, and as such, live by the rules of that kingdom.

Jesus was addressing his disciples with rules that do not apply to the ungodly. Nor was he addressing the general congregation he had just ministered to, though they no doubt were listening. It seems that there are some people in the Kingdom of Heaven who will be recipients of the inheritance of believers based wholly upon grace, while others being challenged to pursue excellence, walk with God so as to receive blessings above and beyond what is the inheritance of all saints. Rewards are not a part of the grace package; they are a response from our Father to our conduct that especially pleases him. Jesus was talking to disciples, twelve that had just been selected to be apostles, but his remarks were not limited to them. Being picked to be an apostle may have seemed like a special advantage, but I do not believe that God picks out certain people to receive such a call without considering the choices they either have made or will make. The crowd of disciples to whom Jesus spoke, all had an equal opportunity to gain rewards, and all of them were being challenged to live godly lives, and were assured of rewards for doing so. It is my belief that everyone will be rewarded based on his obedience to the will of God in his own individual life, and not on the greatness of the call. If that is true, then, anyone who fulfills God's purpose for his life could receive great rewards based on his obedience and loving service; not just apostles. In fact, it is conceivable that some of the most rewarded people will not even be considered great in this world! (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15)

As Jesus lays out the teachings of this sermon, he is calling upon Christians to exceed the righteousness of the ungodly. Yes, even ungodly people can act in godly ways, and often do. However, knowing what is a good and righteous conduct, and doing it, does not necessarily result in eternal blessings.

The judgment seat of Christ is for those whose salvation was based upon the life and death of Jesus, and not their own acts of righteousness. Once we have become a part of Christ, our actions that flow out of that relationship are worthy of reward, because we are showing our love and worship through them. We do not earn rewards, if that were so, they would cease to be rewards; they would then be wages. This is a love thing. As we express the love and heart of God through our conduct, we stir desires in the heart

of God to reward us. However, not all behaviors are worthy of reward, therefore; our works will be put to a fiery test. Only deeds done out of right motives will be rewarded. I think a lot of Christians will be very grateful when those wrong attitudes and behaviors are consumed in flames, never to be seen again! I don't think that will be a sad day at all, disappointing perhaps, but not sad. Disappointing in the sense that we wasted so much precious time upon frivolity; having been deceived by wrong thoughts about what is important; wasting time and even doing hurtful things; sometimes thinking we were doing God a favor, only to find those deeds to be hay, wood or stubble. There is no substitute for a relationship with God, because out of it flows our deeds of eternal value.

## **Chapter Twenty-one**

### **Sermon on the Plain**

#### **Part Three**

#### **Be Merciful**

Luke 6:36-42

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

In real life situations the words of Jesus may seem impractical, however; they are not because we believe in Jesus causing the entire Kingdom of Heaven to be at our service. Thus, Jesus concludes his sermon with an admonition to apply his teachings as the only sensible thing to do. As children of God we are greatly loved, and when obeying him; we live in his care. We who know the Lord are very rich people. In fact, we are so rich that we can well afford to give up everything the world has to offer.

We don't deserve the salvation God gives as a free gift. However; all that is required of us is the acknowledgment of our sin in repentance before God, accepting his forgiveness and by faith receiving the gift of life. Having done this, we are then given new birth into Christ, our sins having been disposed of once and for all; we receive mercy from God.

Thus we are admonished, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36) Having received mercy we are to show mercy, emulating our Father's heart of mercy. God's love reaches out to this lost world with a call, "Come to Jesus." His mercy is found in Christ.

We are living in a world under curse; a truth supported by evidence testifying to that reality. All of man's efforts to improve his life and the environment of the world; have been to no avail. Scientists having given us pesticides to kill insects eating our crops, and chemicals to improve our living conditions, now worry that they are doing mortal damage to the environment. Likewise, the United States government has spent billions of dollars on the war on poverty only to have more people unable to care



for themselves today, than ever before. And so it goes, one effort after another ends in futility, because this planet is destined to destruction.

In all the madness of struggle, a call is heard, "Receive Jesus," but why? How can he help us? We live in a condemned world where struggle is our way of life. All our attention is required to make life on earth a little better. Day after day we struggle on, sometimes searching for employment, and at other times searching for another client, a higher salary, or better benefits. We struggle climbing the ladder within the occupation in which we are employed, or to gain a better education to improve our standard of living. At other times the struggle is with our health, or troubles within our homes; or at times it might be with misunderstandings within our relationships. Still other struggles are with evil members of our society, thieves, villains, or a government that is set against us. We all struggle in some way because that is what living under a curse means. This world is cursed; the evidence exists within the life of every person. Jesus said,

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Luke 6:37-38)

We are all in this cursed world together, struggling, groping, doing our best; trying to make something good out of the madness that has seized us. Because there are so many difficulties, it is easy to start looking for someone to blame, someone to point the finger of accusation at; surely it's not our fault that misery haunts us every day.

We get relief on those days when we feel good and the weather is right, money is available and we have a happy relationship with a friend or spouse. We find enjoyment in some amusement, some form of relaxation and for the moment we may forget the struggle looking at a sunset, or breathing the crisp morning air at some mountain resort, but all too soon reality returns, who is to blame?

It doesn't take much, when pressure is upon us; just a cross word or an unnecessary demand; accusations begin to fly and tempers rage. "It's your fault I feel this way! You're the evil one." And so we judge one another, sometimes condemning the innocent. In fact, most of the time it is the innocents who are condemned! If we were at peace, we would not even notice what has irritated us about another's behavior.

People act the way they do because they live under the pressure of the curse. Survival of the fittest is the law of life. Each person must develop a means of survival. Sometimes it is made easy when everything is orderly around us, a secure family, a stable government, a healthy society and a good educational system. When each person is doing his part, all giving support to one another, the struggle is not nearly as great. Times of peace become times of tranquillity. Jesus said, do not judge, do not condemn, give to one another, and in the end you will receive much more than you gave.

Why are we so hard on each other? Isn't it because we need peace within? Where can we find it? It is Jesus who came to help us, saving us from the guilt of sin and giving us the fathomless gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. With Christ Jesus as our Savior and the Holy Spirit within us, we can now smile at those around us, forgiving them, and giving to them, not even thinking about what it is costing us to do so, because we are rich; co-inheritors with Jesus.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (Eph 1:13-14)

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." (Eph 1:18-21)

It isn't until we have peace within that we are able to see through eyes of spiritual understanding. When Jesus said, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39), he was using natural blindness to illustrate a spiritual truth. Spiritual sight is the result of an awakening of our spiritual natures, resulting in the ability to see in spiritual perspectives. When two individuals begin to communicate about their destinies and how to arrive at goals while being ignorant of eternal implications, they are groping in the darkness of spiritual blindness. How can anyone make right decisions without spiritual guidance from the Lord who knows the end from the beginning? If you are needing help to get your bearings in life while not understanding spiritual matters, should you seek the counsel of a counselor who doesn't understand spiritual values? That person is also blind, and if you follow him, the two of you will fall into a pit of confusion.

We all have teachers, and students emulate their teachers when fully trained. Who are our teachers?

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps 1:1-6)

The impact that teachers have upon us should never be minimized. Many parents are concerned about which teachers are teaching their children in public schools, and rightly so, because; even though the subject matter may seem unrelated to spiritual truth, it is not. All teaching flows from the value base of the teacher. No information can be given without the shadow of the values of the teacher being cast upon it. When Jesus told us that he was truth, he was rightly claiming that position since he is the creator of all things, and, therefore, the origin of all truth. Thus, excluding him from our thinking is to enter into error. All secular teaching that is not Christ based is therefore error.

What board of education ever uses spiritual criteria when considering an applicant to be hired to teach in a public school? It is currently illegal to do so; yet, hiring a teacher who is ungodly to teach our children is nothing short of a morally criminal act. It's equally troubling when parents must send their children to schools with godless teachers, yet I recognize that placing them in public schools is necessary for many parents. However, we should be aware that they are being subtly influenced in ways of rebellion against God as a result of the teacher's spiritual rebellion. Many prayers and much vigilance are necessary to offset the work of Satan through these teachers.

For society to allow such a condition to exist is to guarantee that children will become more and more corrupt. Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." (Luke 6:40) Although this is taken to relate to the relationship of disciples to Jesus, it is also true of any teacher student relationship. A teacher cannot lift the pupil to a higher scholastic level than he is occupying.

We are, I'm afraid, people of blurred vision. We have been subjected to so much thinking of the world that our judgment has become distorted. We find it difficult to look upon one another compassionately, only seeing flaws in a needy person's life. We want them to fix what is wrong, and then maybe we will help them. Granted, there is responsibility on the part of the giver not to support an errant life style, however; when that idea is being used as an excuse, it is our hearts that need fixing. This is the sort of thing Jesus had in mind when he told us to first get the plank out of our own eye, and then we would be able to see more clearly to remove the speck out of our brother's eye. When we have a plank of greed in our eye, we will find it difficult to not see reasons to help others.

# Chapter Twenty-two

## Sermon on the Plain

### Part 4

Luke 6:43-49

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

"No good tree bears bad fruit," a truth so simple we almost pass over it. What we are will be manifest; we cannot prevent that. It is what we have stored up within that will determine what will be seen in our lives. Just like a fig tree that bears figs, so we manifest either good or bad based on what is in our hearts.

What is it that our thoughts are upon? Modern computers are so much like our brains, what we program in, governs what comes out. When we have learned the ways of the Lord, our thought life will be a reflection of his presence in our lives. We cannot please the Lord when our thoughts are upon what pleases us without regarding the Lord in our lives. In the book of James it is said this way,

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Good and evil originate in the heart of man, but it is in the mind that sin germinates and grows until actions result. If we have chosen Christ in our lives and accepted him into our hearts, then we are to dwell upon those thoughts that result in Godly behaviors. If we continue to harbor evil thoughts in our minds, then our behavior will also be evil. What comes from God is always pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, and full of mercy and good fruit. It is always impartial and sincere. (See James 3:17)

God wants us to be peacemakers. Those who carry war in their hearts are all too common. Many people are at war with their spouses, employers, the government, or life in general, and everywhere they go they sow discord, strife and unrest. Unhappiness is the result of choices we make and most of those choices have to do with what we allow to go on in our minds. If our thoughts toward someone are full of love and forgiveness, kindness and patience, our behaviors will reflect this. But if we are irritable toward them in our thoughts, we will be bad company to those around us. Almost without exception, those who carry war in their hearts feel very justified with their feelings. Whether thoughts are good or evil is evidenced by the behaviors that follow. If the tree is good the fruit will be good.

I once heard a friend describe what he called a mugwump. A "mugwump" is a person who sits on the fence with his mug on one side and his wump on the other; and since we aren't a bird that is very uncomfortable. It's very difficult to be comfortable as a Christian when you long for what the world has to offer instead of longing for the manifestations of the kingdom of God.

It isn't until we truly pray, "not my will but your will be done," that we are at peace with God. Once the kingdom of God and its success becomes our first and only priority; we begin to live in peace. We can then be peacemakers having first tasted of the fruit of peace in our own lives. Good trees bear good fruit, therefore; peaceful people spread peace! Those who themselves are fully committed to the kingdom of God, will spread the same commitment to others. Equally, when we are living lives of duplicity, we will spread confusion. James, in his book wrote to people who had forsaken a life of single-minded commitment to the Lord, and questioning the validity of the law put themselves in the position of judging it! Isn't that where fallen Christianity ends, questioning even God?

If we want to do a reality check on our own lives, we have only to look upon what our life produces. Is it peace? Do we settle arguments or do we stir new ones? Do we speak of what God wills, or do we speak of what we will? Whose values govern our speech, God's or the world's? For a Christian to live by values of the world is to be a spiritual adulterer. We can't have it both ways, either we will love the Lord and all that he stands for, or we will love ourselves and the ways of the world.

When we love the Lord, and meditate on his laws, we are storing up good things in our hearts. When Christians meditate upon the world and what it has to offer; confusion and evil will grow in their hearts.

One cannot be a good tree, without first growing up a good tree. That is to say, we are what we are by nature, and since we are born in sin and out of fellowship with God, a new birth is required.

James must have felt what Jesus felt when he said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46) That's a perplexing question. How is it that we can use a title to refer to God, or Jesus, such as Lord, without realizing that the use of such a title implies subservience to the one to whom it is applied? Using the title Lord when addressing God, and disobeying his revealed will at the same time is to speak fraudulently. It is hypocritical to say we are Christians and to then live as though there is no God. We will all be called into account for the way we live, whether here in this world, or in the hereafter.

Jesus speaking of those who hear but don't practice said,

He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. (Luke 6:48-49)

Such words can only be uttered by God and be meaningful. No one else can say; my words are a foundation to build a life upon. All purely human words are flawed and inadequate, but when God speaks, we are to listen because; they are words of life and wisdom.

## **Chapter Twenty-three**

### **Great Faith**

Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Faith, when it exists, finds expression in a variety of ways. At times it causes people to move forward at great risk, reaching out to touch Jesus and thus receiving a miracle. At other times, faith enables the believer to wait patiently for God to answer, and still at other times, faith is what provides great courage enabling those who possess it to persevere in dire circumstances.

Luke introduces us to a centurion who according to the word of Jesus, possessed great faith. What is interesting about this man is not so much that he possessed great faith, but rather, how that faith found expression in his life. The story is all the more remarkable when we realize that the centurion was a gentile. This fact in itself is not unusual, since Israel was under the authority of Rome and his army was a gentile army.

What is remarkable in this context is that the centurion does not display any of the arrogance that so often manifests when there are exchanges between those in authority, and those who are subservient to them. I think it is a safe assumption that the centurion could have required Jesus to come to his house and heal his servant. If that is so, his conduct is all the more remarkable since the centurion acted humbly, sending some of the elders of the Jews to him to request Jesus to come and heal his servant.

The elders made an appeal to Jesus, insisting he really ought to go since this man had been very kind to the Jews even building them a synagogue, having love for their nation. Jesus responded by going with them.

As they drew near the house where the centurion lived, the centurion sent some friends to Jesus to say to him,

Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it. (Luke 7:6-8)

If the first delegation revealed the humility of this man, certainly this second one revealed much more, however; it was his concept of authority that is the remarkable feature of this story. This man had authority because he was under authority. He was sent there by the powers of the Roman Empire. He, no doubt, had orders that regulated his conduct. He was free to give orders so long as he stayed within the parameters of his orders. To violate those parameters would no doubt lead to a reprimand or dismissal from authority.

The centurion must have reasoned that what Jesus was doing in his ministry had something to do with authority. He must have seen Jesus healing sick people with a mere command. If Jesus could perform a miracle by his words, then there must be unseen subservient forces doing the work. Thus, he rightly concluded that all that was needed was the word of Jesus and his servant would be well.

What a lesson. It was true that Jesus was under authority throughout his ministry on earth as he explained in this passage of scripture,

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. (John 5:19-20)

If Jesus always acted according to what the Father showed him, how much more should we remember that we are not free to act or speak without authorization from the Holy Spirit. Much damage has been done to the reputation of Christianity because too many Christians have presumed to be spokespersons of

God without the Holy Spirit being the source of their inspiration. If we will first learn to listen before we speak, we will save ourselves, and others, hurt, confusion and pain.

## Chapter Twenty-four

### An Answer for John the Baptist

Luke 7:11-23

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

John the Baptist had been sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord. The commission was given before his birth to his father Zechariah. In obedience to the call John had preached his message of repentance. All Israel was touched by his message, but not all repented and were baptized. In the course of John's preaching anger was stirred in the heart of Herod's wife, Herodias. John was soon arrested and put into prison. While sitting in prison John began wondering if he had erred in his identification of Jesus as the one for whom he had been called to prepare the way. When John sent two of his disciples to Jesus to make inquiry concerning this, Jesus was already preparing his answer to be taken to John. Isn't that typical of our Lord? Before we ask, he is already answering our prayers! The answer had to do with what Jesus was doing in the course of his ministry.

As Jesus approached the town of Nain, he encountered a funeral procession coming toward him. A young man had died, the only son of a widow woman. Now, we need to understand that in those days a widow woman with a son was a very fortunate woman. In that culture, women were not generally active in commerce, and employment was scarce. Women were dependent upon their husbands for sustenance, but a son could also be counted on to provide for his mother.

When Jesus saw this woman weeping, he felt compassion for her. How Jesus knew that this was her only son is not clear from the story, but there are several possibilities as to a source of information. First, he could have received the knowledge supernaturally. Second, he could have heard the widow wailing in mourning saying, "My son, my son, my only son," or perhaps someone came and told Jesus the circumstances of the death. The important thing is that Jesus not only felt compassion for her, but he also did something really special for her, he returned her son to her alive!

When John the Baptist's two disciples came to Jesus they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." (Luke 7:20,22-23)

While this was going on Jesus was curing many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and giving sight to many who were blind. The text is not clear whether the story of the man being raised from the dead was connected to the coming of the disciples of John the Baptist, however; clearly Luke wanted to establish for his readers that Jesus did raise the dead. We assume that if the disciples weren't present at Nain, they at the least believed the testimonies about the event. What they saw certainly made the story believable even if they weren't eyewitnesses. Thus, the story of the restoration of the person to his mother alive was part of the evidence cited by Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist.

This story is a story about the compassion of the Lord Jesus for two separate individuals for very different reasons and yet whose lives were interrelated by their roles in the story of the kingdom of God. There were others as well, who were part of the story, verifying the message to John though less directly connected because what they received from Jesus was a common occurrence in the ministry of Jesus.

We learn two wonderful lessons from this story, one is that the compassion of the Lord for needy humanity was ever present in the ministry of Jesus, and that God always uses events in an interrelated way to effect different purposes. It doesn't matter what we are going through in our lives; the compassion of Jesus is upon us. It is impossible to be in the presence of a believer and not have the love of God as a constant companion.

Everything that happens in our lives has the power to produce spiritual growth. It occurred to me on an occasion that if a condition or event of life doesn't have the power to hurt us, or even to destroy us, it lacks the power to bring about spiritual growth. That is to say, that some events that occur force us to make decisions of whether to believe God, or to give up, give in, or resort to unwholesome conduct, to achieve an answer to the event or condition. If we chose the way of faith, we will grow, but if we resort to the methods of the flesh we will suffer spiritually.

John the Baptist was like all men of God facing spiritual crisis, wondering if their ministry is effectively accomplishing God's purposes. There are no exceptions; all come to this point of introspection sooner or later. Jesus was not insensitive to John's struggle for affirmation; he reminded him of the evidence, and even reinforced it with an outstanding display of power. Affirmations are not always so promptly given, but I have found on a personal level, that if I will listen to the voice of the Spirit and not the voice of the flesh, I will receive a spiritual affirmation.

There are times when we long to see outward evidence of a job well done. God is often gracious to us and allows a testimony or a word of encouragement to help us. I have to admit that when I preach a sermon that I think was better than my average sermon; I like to hear that someone else also appreciated it. There have been times when I have left church feeling a need to be affirmed, and none was given. I am beyond allowing it to discourage me, but it sure helps to hear a kind heart felt word now and then. We should not fear words of affirmation, we all need them, but we should always remember that what we are told by way of encouragement is only a very small part of the impact our life has upon those around us.

## **Chapter Twenty-five**

## How Great was John the Baptist?

Luke 7:24-35

After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. "This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.'" For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

Rejecting God's servants is a precursor to rejecting God himself! The Pharisees and experts in the law had rejected the admonition of John the Baptist to be baptized in the baptism of repentance, thereby missing God's purpose for them.

John the Baptist was an important part of the plan of God, so important that is, that the prophet Isaiah foretold his mission. There was a problem, however, John proclaimed the need to repent, and the Pharisees and elders of the people didn't see their need to repent. Since repentance is a prerequisite to entry into the kingdom of God, they unwittingly excluded themselves from God's purposes, and in doing so set themselves up to reject the only source of eternal life, Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist was an extraordinary prophet. All Israel was attracted to his message. He wasn't a very attractive person in his outward appearance, he was a rather wild looking man, with an abrasive way of dealing with people; yet, his message was convicting and many people went to him to be baptized.

How easy it is to stumble at outward appearances. I am struck with the appeal that large beautiful buildings, stained glass windows, and well-organized programs have upon people. It seems that to be successful, these are a must if one is to attract a large crowd, unless of course, you are a John the Baptist. The crowd's that came to him were evidently, for the most part, the hungry and the thirsting after spiritual truth. Yet, there were many, perhaps even more, who refused his message. It was to this class of people that Jesus spoke.

There are many reasons why people reject God's messengers. Some people reject them because their proclamation emphasizes the need to separate from the world proclaiming strict rules about the use of alcohol and other such practices. This seems to them to be and irrelevantly extreme teaching and so they reject God's messenger. Then one comes along who is more liberal and he is accused of being worldly. Such was the case in Jesus' day. John came neither eating bread (mixing socially), nor drinking wine (table wine), and yet they accused him of having a demon, and Jesus came both eating bread and drinking wine and they accused him of being a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Truth is; the kingdom of God does not consist of either and neither is a prerequisite to favor with God! Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. I have chosen the stricter life style, not because I think it makes me more holy, but rather, because I recognize that in our present society alcoholism has taken a toll on many lives. As a minister that is involved with people coming out of destructive life styles, a standard of separation from what has negatively impacted their lives is necessary.

I once heard a man give his testimony about how he went into a gas mart where he was accustomed to buying his gas and discovered that a rack of pornographic magazines had been installed. He then went to the proprietor who was at the counter and told him that he would not be able to buy his gas there any longer. He then explained to him that it was because of the magazines. The proprietor apologized for



offending him, to which he replied, it wasn't that the magazines offended him, but rather, it was because he was a recovering sexual addict and liked looking at them. Wisdom demanded that he buy his gas elsewhere.

It was childishness on the part of the Pharisees to reject the message of Jesus based on such trivia as who he ate dinner with or what beverage was served to him. Actually, it is doubtful that they would have accepted him no matter how he presented himself. When self-interests and greed dominate the way a person thinks, change is not easy. For the Pharisees, it was evidently beyond them.

## Chapter Twenty-six

### A Sinful Woman is Forgiven

Luke 7:36-50

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Each of the four gospels has a story about a woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. However, the story here in Luke, while containing some of the features of the other accounts, is somewhat different in content. It is therefore, possible that this is a separate story with only coincidental similarities. If, however, it is the same story then we must expand the story considerably by merging all the accounts.

This is how the story would play out. First we note that Luke's account comes at a completely different point in the ministry of Jesus; explainable on the basis that Luke apparently didn't follow a strict chronological order in his writing, a point we made earlier. Secondly, the home in which the banquet was held was the home of Simon the Leper, who would also be a Pharisee. The woman who anointed Jesus was Mary, who although the text does not say for sure, must have been Martha and Lazarus' sister. (John 12:2-3) However, many believe that this Mary in Luke was Mary Magdalene from whom Jesus cast out seven devils. We then learn that she had been a notorious sinner, a point more likely to fit Mary

Magdalene. If it was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus who was the notable sinner, it is not verified in any other Biblical writing. Next we note, that the dialog and controversy over what she did run in two distinctly different veins. In Luke the objections were concerning the character of the woman, and in the other accounts it had to do with the value of the perfume and the apparent waste. It is, of course, possible that all of this did, in fact, take place as part of the same incident. If that is the case, then Luke took it out of chronological order and recounted the part of the dialog that pertained to forgiveness of sins. He would have done this as a result of his desire to interject this teaching about forgiveness and love, at this point in his gospel. I personally favor the idea that these are two distinctly different occurrences having some similarity.

Setting all the debate aside, I will simply focus upon what is reported in Luke's gospel. Jesus the Son of Man is the focus of this gospel. What is written demonstrates the humanity of Jesus and how he related to our humanity, both in teachings and in examples.

In our story in Luke, we see Jesus reclining at a dinner table, the customary posture when eating. This put Jesus' feet behind him, accessible to the woman in the story. The woman in our story entered the room where Jesus was reclining, apparently recognizing her spiritual need, although she was a known sinner. Her behavior seemed to demonstrate either a desire to receive something spiritual from Jesus, or it was an expression of gratitude for what had been previously done for her. Gratitude seems to be the most likely scenario if this was Mary Magdalene, as some speculate, and if Jesus had already encountered her and cast out evil spirits.

The story is filled with expressions of strong emotions. What this woman was feeling obviously was very intense emotion. The emotions were not even remotely associated with sinful thoughts. She came in weeping, an emotion we associate either with sorrow or gratitude. As she stood behind him she may have noticed that his feet had not been washed, a task normally assigned to a servant. Since she was weeping, tears provided a sufficient supply of moisture to wash his feet! Then having performed the task, she completed it by using her hair to dry them. In the emotion of love and gratitude she kissed his feet again and again, and anointed them with perfume.

This troubled the Pharisee. Apparently he was still debating in his mind concerning who Jesus might be. If he was a prophet, he reasoned, he would not allow this woman to touch him. The Pharisee knew what kind of sinful woman she was, and reasoned that if Jesus were a prophet he would know it. It was the theology of the Pharisee that was at issue here. The Pharisee was of an apparent skeptically friendly but distant mind-set toward Jesus, however; he had an honest question arising from his religious training. Needing instruction, Jesus gave him a parable that demonstrated why his behavior toward this woman was appropriate and then went even farther, forgiving her of her sins!

Christianity stands out above all other religions in how it deals with sinners. The object of Christianity is to prepare people for eternity. Religions are for the most part; present life directed. Or, if they do have eternity as a future hope, heaven is seen as a reward for righteous conduct. In our story, Jesus grants forgiveness based on the demonstrated love of the woman alone, no verbalized repentance, no commitments, only love. Sorrow for sins may have inspired her tears, but only she and Jesus would have known that for certain.

Forgiveness of sins is the prerequisite to a relationship with God. Without forgiveness, sin separates God and man. This woman demonstrated the kind of emotion associated with a person who has received forgiveness for many sins, a point suggesting a previous encounter with Jesus. Perhaps the point about forgiveness needed to be expressed to her. If Jesus had cast evil spirits out of her, she could have been left with haunting remorse for the sins she had previously committed. This incident provided Jesus with the opportunity to take the redemptive work one step farther, to the healing of the soul. She needed to hear those words so full of wonder. To a sinner, there are no words like them. "I forgive you," are words that bring hope of restoration and healing.

## Chapter Twenty-seven

### Make Sure Your Faith is Active

Luke 8:1-18

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

His disciples asked him what this parable meant. "He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

Jesus and his disciples traveled from village to village preaching the good news of the gospel. When they arrived in a village their numbers attracted attention, sixteen people are named, and an undisclosed additional number of women. The women are particularly mentioned because they were the support base for the ministry. Jesus didn't take offerings that we know of, but insight into how he was cared for is given here.

Luke has just cited a number of incidences where Jesus acted compassionately toward those who have needs, however, attention must be given to what he taught lest what he did overshadow them. It's like when we receive gifts on a special occasion and a card is enclosed; to which do we give the greater attention? Children pay little or no attention to cards, but they love the gifts. The more mature individuals spend time with the cards, even though the gifts may win out in the end. For the Christian who hungers to know the Lord, it's the messages that are the most instructive, yet the miracles also teach us, seeing the character of God in action.

Jesus often taught in parables, and the one in this chapter is one of the most instructive. The parable of the sower and the seed, is unique in two ways; first because it is profoundly instructive about why many who hear the gospel and believe, will not continue in the faith, and the method of interpretation Jesus gave us, leaves no doubt as to it's meaning. It thereby became a model of proper Biblical interpretation of parables.

When Jesus finished delivering the parable of the sower, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 8:8) Indeed, if we are serious about entering the kingdom of God we must listen intently to what Jesus says, taking it to heart.

I know that there are a lot of folks who believe that once you are "saved" that there is no further fear of being lost. Fine, no problem, believe what you want to about that. Nevertheless, when you breathe your last breath of air, and your heart has stopped beating, whether or not your name is written in the

Lambs Book of Life will be what counts. What I have said about it, or what Calvin, or your pastor said about it, will not matter; it will be between you and the Lord Jesus Christ who died for you. Jesus said,

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:11-15)

The meaning is plain; the seed is the word of God. Faith in what the word of God teaches is the primary requirement for salvation. There are some who hear, but before anything of spiritual substance can take place, the devil comes and takes away the word of God. The second group is seen as those with rocky soils that receives the word with joy and do well for a while, but when the time of testing comes, they fall away. The third group hears, "But as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." (Luke 8:14) Then there is the last group where the seed falls on "good soil that stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." (Luke 8:15)

You may say, "Now what does that have to do with the doctrine of eternal security?" Let me point out that the really secure believers are the ones who, after reaching heaven, find that their names are written down. Whatever you have to do to make that issue certain, beyond any shadow of a doubt, is what you ought to do. If you have a noble and good heart, you will search the scriptures to find what it is that pleases God and do it, persevering in your pursuit of God; not thinking for one moment about whether your salvation is secure or not, that is a distraction. In other words, what difference does it make, after all, if you are living your life in active faith, persevering and producing a crop of righteousness? Where there is true faith, there is relationship with God, and where there is relationship, there is salvation.

Those who walk in faith, persevering in righteousness, will be a light, and;

No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him. (Luke 8:16-18)

## **Chapter Twenty-eight**

### **Hear Well**

Luke 8:16-21

No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

"He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

"Consider carefully how you listen," Jesus said. Indicating that we hear what we want to hear, or we hear what we hunger to hear. I find it interesting how differently people hear messages, sermons, or discourses. What is manna from above to one is rubbish to another. This is a constant challenge to pastors, evangelists, and teachers. We have individuals in the Christian community who have what the Bible calls "itching ears" always wanting to hear some new thing, some new revelation, or some new teaching.

Some of these are of a group that are closely related to wolves in sheep's clothing, having an appetite for fleshly teaching because flesh is what they like to eat! In the scriptures we find plays on words such as "flesh" used to mean that that pertains to the fallen nature. In the context of wolves eating flesh the meaning would be that the wolves have an appetite for what natural fallen man desires. When a wolf/Christian hears a message that pertains to the spiritual/eternal he will not eat it or he will not hear it, because it is not on his menu. When a sheep, a born again Christian, hears spiritual truth, he will eat it because it satisfies his hunger.

There is another group of Christians who are called carnal Christians in the Bible because, even though they have been born again, are still living after the flesh, not having deemed the old nature dead. In other words, they are still living as the world lives, trying to be of the world, and of the kingdom of God at the same time. These individuals sometimes hunger for preaching that satisfies their spiritual needs and at other times they want to hear what will satisfy their fleshly natures; thus bring confusion upon themselves and others as well.

Spiritual preaching is like turning on a bright light in a dark place; it reveals what could not be seen in the dark! Ladies, have you ever cleaned a room and then had bright sunlight reveal dirt that you missed? It's that way in our lives; we may think we have a clean heart until the light of God reveals otherwise. Spiritual teaching can be devastating to individuals whose hearts are not right.

The reason people who are "carnal" don't want strong preaching of the word is that, it is to revealing. Everyone who comes to the light sees his sins eventually. They may not notice all the sins in their lives at once, but as their eyes adjust to the light, they see them. It can be devastating, so, in some cases, rather than repent, they lash out at the preacher, or simply never come back to church.

There are also those whose eyes have been blinded by the god of this world, and for that reason, cannot see the light of truth, that is, they cannot hear the spiritual part of what is being spoken. It is as though the message was never given. Jesus said, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen." Indicating that we have control over the process of what we hear.

If we take possession of what the Lord gives us, he will give us more. Jesus said, "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him." (Luke 8:18) Does that mean that those who have received salvation, but continue to reject instructive light will ultimately lose what they thought they had? If that is true, judgment day will be sad indeed.

To further illustrate the point of the difference between the natural and the spiritual, Luke reports an incident where Jesus' family came looking for him. They told him that they were outside wanting to see him. "He replied, 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.'" (Luke 8:21) That is, not only hear the word, but take possession of it expressing it in their lives. Once we are born again we become a part of a new family. Old relationships lose the importance they once held. The tie that binds us to one another as Christians is a spiritual bond that transcends color, race, gender, or denominations. When we are in Christ, we are one in the Spirit, and one with Christ Jesus. The old is gone; the new has come.

# Chapter Twenty-nine

## Jesus Quiets Tempests

Luke 8:22-25

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. "As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

In chapter eight of Luke, we find a series of stories beginning with the story of a woman who needed forgiveness of sins. Her love for Jesus and how she expressed it started a storm of controversy as we discussed in the previous chapter of this book.

There are storms that are natural physical storms, but there are also storms that rage within people's lives. Luke gives us a series of such storms to contemplate in this chapter. Each has its own lesson to teach, but a common cord binds them all together. There is turbulence in each of them, and each ends in peace.

Storms are a natural phenomenon in the world in which we live. Most people would rather not experience them, but also recognize their benefit. In the part of the country where I live, storms are very important. Storms bring rain in the valley and snow to the mountains. Farmers cannot survive without a good supply of them. Skiers need the snow they bring, and city folk need the water they provide. However, too much of anything is not good. If the storms linger too long, or if they are too fierce, the results can be devastation. We seem to have a love/hate relationship with them, and so it is with the difficult experiences of life.

It's not hard to see that there are benefits to be gained from those experiences of life that could be characterized as storms. Like storms, however, if they are too fierce, or if they linger too long, we weary of them. There are lessons to be learned from storms, and we need those lessons to enrich our lives.

Some storms are from God; they aren't meant to harm us, only to enrich us. Some storms are from Satan, as in the story of Job. It isn't always easy to know the difference, and in the case of the storms that hit Job's life, God had granted Satan permission to send them.

Isaiah chapter 54 has some instructive words about storms and storm like experiences. In it light is shed upon the question, "Who is to blame when storms come?"

Without question, God admits and takes responsibility for storms. Like all the conditions we face in life on earth, God's part was set in motion when the curse that resulted from the fall was put into effect. The entire planet was subjected to the conditions we are so familiar with. God established this present order with interplay between forces that demand survival and accommodations insuring that survival. This condition demands constant effort and vigilance. Storms are, for the most part, active participants in that interplay. They often threaten us, but they also bless us. Most of the time, in my opinion, God is not directly and individually determining each and every twist and turn of storms. In fact, Jesus taught us that the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike, suggesting, if not substantiating, this truth. There are times, however, when God is very surely involved as a result of a desire to either punish or bless people of the earth. Frequently, if not constantly, God was involved in the affairs of the nation of Israel. He states both his actions that resulted from disobedience, and his determination to never repeat it again. God's desires to bless and establish his people are also expressed in the following verses.

"In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer. "To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you. "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace. In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD. (Isa. 54:8-17)

Zechariah also expressed the same theme in the language of a poet describing the methods used when God becomes involved with the affairs of his people.

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.  
Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.  
I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim.  
I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.  
Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning.  
The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south, and the LORD Almighty will shield them.  
They will destroy and overcome with slingstones.  
They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.  
The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people.  
They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.  
How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.  
Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds.  
He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone. (Zech. 9: 11-10:1)

When Jesus and his disciples set out to cross the lake, a storm arose. Was it an attack of Satan designed to destroy them, or was it merely the result of atmospheric conditions that cause wind? Some interpreters see it as an attack upon them, an effort by the demonic forces to keep Jesus away from the demoniac on the other shore. I suppose a case can be made for that possibility, however; assigning that much power to Satan is a stretch, I would think. It seems to me, that giving Satan too much credit plays right in his hands, as he likes to cause people to fear him. If we are to fear, we should fear God who has the power to cast body and soul into hell.

The story about Jesus in the storm does not focus upon the origin of the storm, but rather upon Jesus and the disciples and how it affected them.

The storm resulted in great danger. Their little boat was no match for this kind of weather. Jesus, however, was asleep in the bow of the boat. Either he was unaware of the storm, or he was not concerned about it.

It's our lack of faith that causes us to fear when storms arise! We become alarmed about many things, but no storm could sink the boat Jesus was in. The disciples worried about the danger while Jesus slept. When we learn to trust in God's provisions and his loving care for us, we too, can rest in the midst of storms! It's our knowledge of what storms can do that worry us. That was the problem with the faith of the disciples. They had encountered storms before; they were fishermen. When storms arise on this lake, the safe place to be is on shore. The idea that God was able to calm a storm was outside their realm of experience. Could they be expected to believe for what they had never seen? Yes, they should have been able to; they had Jesus with them. He was God made flesh and dwelling among them, however; it was the hardness of their hearts that kept them from seeing him for who he was.

We too, have God dwelling with us, as is expressed in Col. 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." With this knowledge of the abiding presence of the Lord, we are enabled to believe for divine intervention when we face the storms that come against our lives.

## Chapter Thirty

### Jesus Encounters a Demon Possessed Man

Luke 8:27-39

When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Jesus, the Son of man, is seen in this story of the deliverance of the demoniac as relating to the need of a man who is helplessly demonized.

This story brings to mind a young man I encountered while visiting India. While visiting and holding a gospel meeting in a small village, a request came from a nearby village to come and pray for a young man who was demon possessed. He was causing trouble in the community, killing chickens and in general exhibiting strange behaviors. When we arrived they had him tied up, lying on the ground between two stakes. He was quite agitated and aggressive. Some of his agitation was quite normal, caused by being tied. The people of the community were very concerned with his condition and desired to see him set free. I was one of several ministers and Bible students who went to pray for him. We began to pray, but no result was immediately evident. As we prayed I felt led to request the interpreters to ask the people if they were willing to commit themselves to the Lord and receive Jesus as their savior. They expressed a willingness and desire, after which they were led in prayer for salvation. Having thus established the authority of Christ within the community, we were able to pray effectually and he was soon quieted and then they released him and gave him a bath.

We left and returned to Dungarpur, but a few days later a group of people arrived from the village. This young man was with them and came to the evening service at the mission station. Although he was much better than he had been, he still displayed some strange behaviors. A few days later we went to the



local river to baptize some of the village people, and this young man was there. He too, wanted to be baptized. This resulted in a discussion among those officiating at this baptism. They asked my opinion, to which I asked if he understood what baptism was about. He didn't know so we decided that he should wait until he received more instructions. He was already in the water and was quiet anxious to be ministered to, so Brother Abraham prayed with him after which the young man lowered himself down into the water. He stayed down for quite some time, then emerged and came up on the bank of the river. As I looked into his face I could plainly see that he was a changed man. The next day some of the workers went to visit with the village people and they testified to the remarkable difference there was in him.

Some time later, Abraham Johnson visited us here in our home, and I asked him about how the man was doing. He said that he was serving the Lord and witnessing in the villages in the area where he lives.

Jesus came to demonstrate God's love to us. He did it by living among us, ministering to us, and delivering us from the power of the Devil. The man in the tombs was helplessly bound by demon spirits and was unable to function within the normal life of his community. His behavior was unnatural and bizarre. Demons, though spirit beings, can act upon people giving them unnatural strength. Such was the case with this man. He was no longer in control; demons controlled his every action and even his speech. He was naked, alone and living in the place of death. To all practical purposes, he was dead.

Jesus came to bring him life. To do it he must cast out the demons. The demons knew they must obey Jesus. How they knew this is not clear from the text. Jesus came into this world in disguise, but in the realm of spirit; he was well known.

Can demons cause atmospheric disturbances resulting in storms? I don't know the answer to that, but in the book of Job, as a result of a Satanic attack upon Job, a mighty wind (probably a tornado) struck the house where his children were having a party killing them all. Did Satan cause the tornado, or was it just there that day, and being without divine protection, they were struck by it? I don't know for sure, but all other scriptures seem to indicate that forces within God's exclusive control cause storms. However, if demons can cause storms, they probably were responsible for the storm on the lake prior to his arrival.

The demons that possessed this man were very agitated upon Jesus' arrival on their side of the lake. They were in a gentile region and probably felt safe thinking that Jesus would only minister to the Jewish people. His arrival was taken to be a threat to their well-being. Eventually all demons will be cast into the Abyss—another word for hell. They evidently thought that Jesus had come to cast them there now, a fate that struck terror into them.

Jesus didn't come to torment demons; he came to minister to people, all people, regardless of race, color or creed.

The territory that Jesus would minister to was described in Matthew, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Mat. 4:15-16) The east side of the Lake was a gentile region known as the Gadarenes or the country of the Gerasenes. A prominent city was nearby called Gerasa. Jesus was requested to leave this region and there is no record of him ever returning. However, the man from whom the demons were cast out was sent back to his town to proclaim what God had done for him.

When Jesus arrived, the demoniac was in torment; the condition of all possessed people. In the beginning stages of demonic encounters, demons do not appear to be demons. They come disguised, appearing in the realms of thought as ideas, thoughts of sexual situations, or remembrances of wrongs done to one's self, just to mention a few. Many people receive these flirtations not recognizing them as such, or that this is preliminary to taking over their life. The demons pose as friends, as a means of obtaining power, excitement, money or insight. Demons are seductive beings, having a power to excite the emotions. We call this temptation. Demonic spirits work to make sin look enticing, exciting, and adventuresome, with some immediate pleasure as a reward. They try there hardest to keep people from the truth about the consequences of sinful living. They use every trick they can invent to distract their victims from the torment that they will eventually bring to them. Satan wants people to sin; this gives

him an open door to possess their lives and make them slaves to his desires. Spirit beings need willing bodies through which they can do their evil work. Satan wants you, friend, but not for good. He wants to use you to destroy others around you.

Jesus also wants you, but his purpose is to bless you, heal and deliver you from all evil. His desire for you is that you be restored to all that God intended for you when you were created, a person in the image of God.

In our world today, many people are being seduced into the world of the occult through innocent sounding commercials on TV about the benefits of talking to a psychic. Others are being enticed by the teachings of cults that don't believe that Jesus is God made flesh who dwelt among us. These cults and false teachings present what appears to be wisdom, but it falls short of the mark because they depend on human behavior for salvation rather than the blood of Jesus.

## **Chapter Thirty-one**

### **Quieting the Storm of Grief**

Luke 8:40-42,49-56

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.

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While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher any more."

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep."

They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

When Jesus returned home, a crowd of people was waiting to welcome him. Soon a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. Jesus began walking toward the home of the ruler of the synagogue but was delayed by the press of the crowd and a woman who received healing by touching him.

While this was going on, someone came from Jairus' home informing him that the girl had already died. Jesus, however, was not deterred. He encouraged the man to believe and continued his journey. When he arrived at the house where the girl was, people were wailing and mourning for her.

Death, to those who lack the understanding of what happens to the departed souls of the righteous, is a tragic event. Mourning with the customary wailing was a way of showing love for the departed. The greater the love and respect, the more intense the wailing and mourning would be. Jesus, however, was not impressed with this display of sorrow.

He took Peter, John and James, along with the parents of the girl and went into the house. Jesus spoke to the people who were wailing incessantly instructing them to stop because the girl was not dead, but asleep.

What is death? Does it mean to be non-existent? Did the words of Jesus indicate that when people die they are in a sleep like state waiting for the day of resurrection, or did he simply mean that the dead don't cease to exist. The key to understanding is found in the words of Jesus, "She is not dead," thus indicating that the girl was merely not occupying her body. This is the foundational concept of the Christian view of what death means to a departed Christian. When Jesus spoke to her to get up, obedience to the command required a reuniting of soul and body; thus, the fundamental concept regarding the nature of resurrection.

In the resurrection, the soul and spirit of a person are once again clothed with a body. In the following passage, the body is referred to figuratively as a tent, and after resurrection, a house. This selection of terms was probably to show that what we live in now is temporary, but what is received at resurrection is permanent. The reference to nakedness is to show that we have a need to be in a body to feel complete, like having clothes on makes us feel comfortable and presentable. The heavenly clothes are much more suitable, therefore; we desire the eternal body over the present form.

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Cor 5:1-4)

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: (1 Cor 15:51)

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."  
"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"  
(1 Cor 15:51-55)

The subject of death and departed souls was a subject that needed to be cleared up. The teachers of the people were confused about what happened at death so Jesus had to address the subject in his teachings. To be dead doesn't mean to cease to exist, or to be in a state of non-awareness. It means to be out of the body, living in the realm of spirit with the Lord. The concern that people have with death is that, once the body dies, communication and interaction are no longer possible in this realm. To those living in human bodies, death is an enemy because it takes our loved ones from us. The apostle Paul had this to say concerning this subject:

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Cor 5:6-10)

This is the correct Christian view of death. Death means to be away from the body. The body is surrendered and returns to the elements from which it came. The real person goes to be with the Lord; however, on the day of resurrection we will once again receive a body similar to the one we presently occupy. The new body is described as being immortal, incorruptible, and therefore invincible. Freedom from diseases, pains and sorrows are all guaranteed to the righteous.

Jesus was attacking the misconceptions about death when he went into that house that day. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. (Luke 8:52-53)

What a difference it makes, when we understand death! This girl was not dead as pagans see death. To them to be dead is to cease to exist. To the Christian, death is to be away from the body. Understanding this point releases us from much of the grief attached to the subject of death. There will always be sorrow when dear loved ones die.

In the case of Stephen, one of the first martyrs; after his death godly men buried him, and mourned deeply for him. (Acts 8:2) What was seen in his case was not wailing as was being practiced at the house of the little girl, but rather deep emotions that result from experiencing a loss of a loved one, a normal experience. We should never be ashamed of the emotions of grief. Grieving is necessary, but life must go on. Say good-bye for now to the departed loved one, shed tears, but vow to see them again. We live by faith and not by sight, therefore; we have hope of a grand reunion with them and with our Lord.

Jesus came to quite the storm of our grief. There is peace in knowing the truth. On that day, Jesus returned the girl to her parents alive. He had told her father he would heal her, thus indicating that raising the dead is part of the healing ministry. This kind of gift of healing is not always seen, and perhaps, rarely seen, but I have heard many testimonies of people being restored to life in response to prayer. Whether the Lord grants a restoration of life to a departed person at this time or not, he has assured us we will meet again. What a day that will be. All weeping will cease and we will all be together once more, forever; never to be separated again.

## Chapter Thirty-two

### Quieting the Storm of Suffering and Pain

Luke 8:42-48

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

The village streets were narrow and the large crowd that followed Jesus was pressing in upon him in an effort to remain close to him. It was so crowded, we are told, that Jesus was nearly crushed by the people. How a woman, weakened by the loss of blood, could make her way through this crowd to Jesus is nothing short of remarkable. Right there in the midst of all the pushing and shoving, she touches the edge of his cloak. Jesus' attention was immediately upon what had happened. This woman had touched him. No, it wasn't like the rest of the people who were shoved up against him by the crowd. This was a different kind of touch.

Faith is like a hose connected to a faucet. It carries the water from the source to the need. Oral Roberts popularized the concept of a point of contact. A point of contact is a point where we are able to conceptualize the availability of healing power, and reach for it. When we see a healing ministry in

action, and we have a need for healing, and we reach out in faith, it is like connecting our hose to the faucet so that the healing power can flow to us.

The woman in our story had heard about the healing ministry of Jesus and conceptualized that if she could just touch him, she would be healed. She did, and she was healed. Does that mean that everyone who touches the Lord through a point of contact will be healed? Questions like these are unanswerable questions. Who can know the mind of the Lord? There is one question that begs to be asked, weren't there likely many people in that crowd who were also sick and pressing to touch him? Did they not also believe that Jesus could heal them? Isn't it a harsh judgment to say that they had belief, but not faith?

Have you ever connected a hose to a faucet and still did not get water from it? The water must be turned on and the pipe must have water in it. The question that has caused much debate among those who believe in the healing ministry in the present day church is; is healing an automatic when faith is present? Is it always God's will to heal without regard for time, special dealings, or grander purposes?

Perhaps the question defies simple answers. I have witnessed people who, apparently being healed, have then left the place of prayer, only to have the sickness return. Were they healed, or was it some form of hypnotic state? Some would say, definitely they were not healed, while others would contend that spiritual healing is when the power of God overrides the illness, and that if faith is not maintained; the sickness will sometimes return. I have lived long enough to know that healings do occur among believers. I have known people who have had cancers, tumors and many other forms of sicknesses or diseases that have been healed have remained healed for the remainder of their life. For me, healing is a part of my faith. I have experienced healing both in my own life and in the lives of others I know too well to doubt.

The woman in our story is an example of successful faith for healing. The Bible doesn't explain the failures or analyze the reason why people fail in their faith. The Bible was written to guide us into a relationship with God that will result in success stories and points to sin as the problem that plagues humanity. Sickness, disease, addictions, deficiencies and demonic afflictions are all the result of sin. As the sin issue is being dealt with, faith, hope, and love, take the place of sinful ideas, practices and attitudes that were the cause of many of our problems. As we fellowship with God, we become the recipients of his love, and since his nature is wholeness; we begin to experience wholeness as well.

We cannot concern ourselves with the people in the crowd who, though touching Jesus, didn't receive healing. The story is about a woman who did receive healing and the reason why she did is clearly stated. It was her faith. Others touched him, but it was the pushing and shoving of the crowd. In all of that frantic commotion there was one touch, be it ever so slight, just the edge of his cloak, not sufficient to even be felt in all that press that yielded a healing result. Jesus wanted us all to know about it, so he called attention to it. Shoving people into Jesus does not result in a healing touch.

Everything in the Christian experience that has healing, and life giving power in it, is the result of a condition of faith that comes from hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Those who pursue God with all their hearts will be healed, body, soul and spirit. Sometimes parts of the process are abrupt and powerful, other parts are worked in us over a period of time, but all will be completed when on that glorious day we see him as he is. On that day, we will finally be changed to be completely like him, ever to remain in his presence. Healing will then be complete, as will all other deficiencies that resulted from the fall.

## **Chapter Thirty-three**

### **Learning to Obey**

## Luke 9:1-6

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

The disciples needed some hands on experience. They would be left with the task of evangelization of the world. They needed to learn some lessons in faith and the use of Kingdom of Heaven power.

This gospel deals with human issues. Luke didn't report as many of the instructions that Jesus gave the disciples as Matthew did; his concern was with how they went out, and what they did when they were out.

Learning to be totally dependent upon the provisions of God though the hospitality of people is a hard lesson for able bodied, hard working men to learn. Matters of pride can interfere. When Jesus said, "Take nothing for the journey." he was cutting to the quick. It's much easier to plan a trip, collect enough cash to pay for travel, food and lodging, make reservations, and schedule an itinerary. We like to know where we are going, when we are to arrive, how long we will be there, and where we will be next. When Jesus sent his disciples out, they were required to set all these ways aside, and totally trust on the leading of the Holy Spirit and what he would provide for them along the way.

He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. (Luke 9:3) To start on a journey in this manner would be to identify with the poorest of the poor. When the rich would travel, they would wear extra clothing so that on arrival they would have changes of clothing. These fellows looked more like someone going for an afternoon walk, than travelers.

Learning to depend on the provisions of God is not an easy lesson. Faith comes from hearing, but I think we all agree, faith is strengthened by good experiences. Shortly after Jesus would ascend into heaven, these men would be left with the responsibility of a young church with poor people, widows and orphans to care for. They needed to have their faith strengthened, lest they be overwhelmed. Before David was sent out to fight Goliath, he faced a lion and a bear. It was his success in defending his flock of sheep that prepared him for the greater challenges of defending the kingdom of God.

What these men had been hearing and seeing was now to happen through them. They were going to heal the sick, cast out devils, and perform miracles. Jesus wasn't going to be there; they were on their own. Can you imagine the excitement they must have felt when the first sick person was suddenly made well? Nothing ignites faith like success. They could quote scriptures, and make bold statements about God's healing power, but until the first person said, "I'm healed," it was only potential.

Most of what I learned in school has been forgotten long ago. But I do remember a lesson I learned in science class. The subject had to do with energy. The instructor explained the difference between potential energy and kinetic energy. I don't know why that stuck with me, but perhaps it was because it is an important parallel truth to the subject of faith. Potential energy is any energy fuel that is in a dormant state. Kinetic energy is energy released into an active state. Wood, for example, is potential energy. Fire is what converts it into kinetic energy. Heat and light are the energies that are released.

When the disciples spoke of God's love and healing power, their words were potential energy. Their faith caused them to reach out and touch the sick, but the Holy Spirit had to provide the spark to convert it into healing power. Once success was experienced they were emboldened to continue. How do I know? I know because it still the same today.

Let's look for a moment at the ingredients of success. First, we see that they were commissioned to do what they were doing. They were going under the specific orders of Jesus. Secondly, they went in obedience. There is no record of anyone sneaking a loaf of bread just in case, or any other violation of orders. Thirdly, when the time arrived to return, they returned. No one had to be sent out to find any of them.

It's so easy to get carried away with success. If this lesson would be learned by all of us in the church, I feel sure, we would experience more success as the result of faith.

## Chapter Thirty-four

### Messengers of the Gospel

Luke 9:7-9

Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" And he tried to see him.

To those who are resistant to the message of the gospel, seeing spiritual activity among God's people, is disturbing.

Herod considered the religion of the Jews to be a religious option, something to be believed in, if that's your thing. John the Baptist had crossed the line, he taught that even Herod was accountable to God, implying that all men are accountable to God, regardless of religion or race, that; no person can say, "But, I'm of a different belief, therefore, what you say doesn't apply to me."

Christianity is for all people everywhere, regardless of religious teachings, national origin, or cultural backgrounds. No one is exempt from accountability to the God of the Bible. The only prerequisite to accountability is that a person is of the human race. Every person on planet earth is a created being, therefore, accountable to God. This is the reason why some people are so intent on disproving God. They feel that belief in God requires accountability, and since they are in rebellion against authority, disproving the existence of God, releases them from God's laws. They are trying to accomplish what cannot be accomplished, therefore; they strike out against all those who remind them about God.

Playing the ostrich game will not prevent the coming day of judgment. To people of different religious beliefs, to encounter what seems to them to be intolerant attitudes among Christians may be disturbing, however; being offended doesn't change the facts. We didn't invent God and his laws, nor are we the ones trying to impose them on humanity; we are the commissioned ones, carriers of the message. We are merely striving to warn a lost world of the coming judgment; thus, proclaiming the love of God to them.

The problem that Herod faced was not John the Baptist, prophets, or Jesus; it was his own sinful heart. They only served to remind him. He must either repent and be saved, or face the judgment of God. Rather than repent, he had beheaded John; now here was Jesus.

It's a futile effort on the part of the ungodly, though they kill all Christians; the truth of the Gospel they proclaim still remains. If humanity was to successfully purge the whole world of all Bibles, Christian literature, and Christians, they still have to face God. It isn't the message that is the problem for the ungodly; it's their sin. Everything they are fighting against, are expressions of God's love. When they hear the message of the gospel being proclaimed; it is God's love in action, calling to them to escape the judgment. God doesn't want any person to perish, therefore; he sent his Son that he loves, to save lost humanity. When we are sent to tell them, it's God's love that sends us.

# Chapter Thirty-five

## Stepping Out in Faith

Luke 9:10-17

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here."

He replied, "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish--unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." (About five thousand men were there.)

But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

How much bread does it take to feed a multitude? Five loaves and two fish will do, when Jesus is the blesser. Otherwise, it takes a lot of bread and fish. It's always better to have less with God's blessing, than it is to have more without his blessing. One of the mysteries of tithing is that those who give to the Lord's work always seem to be the ones that do best in the long run of life. Tithers are seldom among the richest people on earth, but what they do have seems to bring them happiness and their lives are filled with the joy of the Lord.

It takes faith to announce that you're going to feed people when you know that what you have is not enough food for them. To the natural mind Jesus had gone too far this time. How could he possibly hope to feed so many people on so little?

I heard someone speculate, who obviously didn't believe in miracles, that what happened was that people were holding out, and that they had food but weren't willing to share it until Jesus attempted to feed them with so little bread. Feeling ashamed they then shared theirs and in the end there was a surplus of food. Do you really suppose that if that was what happened that all four gospel writers would tell the story? Would people who were accustomed to seeing real miracles settle for that and call it a miracle? I suppose we could call it a miracle, but there isn't even the slightest hint that anything even remotely like that happened. Why attempt to explain away, what God does?

The account says that Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven, and giving thanks, broke them, giving them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. That's what all four writers say, they tell that part of the story almost verbatim, though John separates the blessing of the fish from the blessing of the bread, they all agree on every detail of what happened there that day. Even where slight variations of style occur, no hint is made of any other bread being eaten than that that came from the hand of the Lord.

Friend, God is able to take care of your every need.

Once when I was visiting a church preaching some special meetings, I was given a turkey to take home to my family. It was close to thanksgiving time and we always have a number of people to feed. The Turkey was a miniature, but meaty variety, however; no matter how you slice it, 10-12 lbs of turkey for a large number of people just isn't adequate. My wife prepared it, and we all ate all the turkey we could eat, with turkey left over. My wife has told the story relating how she just kept slicing and slicing



and there was still more to slice. If you are a Christian and you have been in similar circumstances, no doubt you have your story to tell as well. Books could be filled with testimonies of this sort. People paying their tithe when doing so would leave their families with insufficient funds, only to discover that God has provided for them in some unexpected way. It is unbelief that prevents people from experiencing the miraculous provisions of God. When unbelief and selfish greed are in a person's heart, faith in God is nowhere to be found.

Before a parachutist steps out of a plane, he is willing to fall. He believes the chute strapped to his back will open and carry him safely to earth. Without that hope he will never experience the thrill of the chute opening.

Faith in God is a lot like that, if we are not willing to risk failure, we will never experience the joy of seeing God work in miraculous ways. Many Christians stand on the ground looking up at those sky divers, some thinking, "I wish I could do that," others thinking, "Look at those crazy people." Now when it comes to skydiving, I admit, I'm among the spectators, and quite content to be, I might add, but where it comes to God; I want to be a participant.

The disciples were willing to be participants; they did what they were told to do, and witnessed a great miracle.

## **Chapter Thirty-six**

### **Take Up Your Cross**

Luke 9:18-27

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

It was time for the revelation of who Jesus really was to be brought into open discussion between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was, without dispute, a man. His link to humanity was real and comprehensive. He was living in a real body with all bodily functions. He had relatives and friends. He was educated in the same manner as all other Jewish boys who were his peers. He himself referred to this fact by using the terminology Son of Man. In the book of Luke we see Jesus as the Son of Man, not only by this reference but also by the general content of the message. Yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that he is God incarnate. The revelation of his divine nature was not fully understood by those closest to him, even when they spoke of him as being the Christ.

Not only did they have difficulty understanding the full measure of the meaning of being the Christ, but also the subject of the redemptive plan of God fully escaped them. They were fixated upon this present world; therefore, Jesus needed to teach them more on the subject.

In his teachings, Jesus plainly predicted his death, burial, and resurrection, yet the disciples were unable to grasp the truth about the eternal nature of the kingdom of God. When he spoke of a self-sacrificing way of life, they were not disturbed. Any soldier that goes to war puts his life on the line for the country he represents. These men apparently had a revolutionary mindset, thinking that the kingdom of God was about to appear. They seemed to assume this would mean that a battle of some kind would occur.

The popular prophetic view in Jesus' time seemed to be that a great leader would appear to Israel with a divine commission and restore Israel to independence and prosperity.

The teachings about redemptive death were viewed as symbolic, and therefore, not taken literally. The knowledge about the lost condition of heart and soul of humanity was not taken to be something that required a remedy beyond obedience to the law and traditions of the fathers. Heaven was viewed as the just expectation of good people who, in their lifetime, made an effort to do what was right, a view popularly held by many people in our day.

These beliefs held in a person's heart from youth do not yield quickly to new concepts. Life is viewed as a condition that exists between two unyielding boundaries, birth and death. The eternal nature of man's existence is only vaguely understood. Often that vague understanding takes on strange concepts by unenlightened souls. Those deprived of divine revelation have fallen victim to Satanic lies, such as, reincarnation, ideas about eternal marriages and populating some planet somewhere, or that departed souls linger around and about, either where they once lived, or where they are buried.

Jesus Christ came as the personification of truth. What he taught was correct, both by authority and actuality. His concepts were not inherited from the teachings of the elders; they came by the revelation given to him by an ongoing relationship with his Father. His words were carefully crafted by God so as to communicate divine truth in its purest form. The deepest truths were often couched in parabolic language awaiting the tutelage of the Holy Spirit who would be given to them later enabling them to understand. The disciples, however, were taught in plain language, yet they could only grasp vaguely what was being presented to them. It wasn't until after the Holy Spirit was given that their minds became focused on the purity of the truth they bore.

In Luke's gospel, these events about the death and resurrection of Jesus and the willingness of his disciples to lay down their lives are given in rather matter of fact terms without any of the drama reported by Matthew. In Matthew, the confession of Peter is underscored by Jesus talking to Peter about him being a stone and is followed closely by Peter rebuking Jesus for speaking about dying. Luke treats this passage in a much more causal manner, focusing rather upon the demand of the gospel upon the followers of Jesus.

It wasn't until after the resurrection of Jesus, that the disciples began to understand what it meant to lay down one's life. Jesus was not speaking of dying in the literal sense nearly as much as he was speaking of a style of life that is self-sacrificing.

To lay down one's life in the sacrificial sense, is to experience a total adjustment of values, from valuing the present, to valuing the eternal. Many natural minded people live sacrificial lives when that sacrifice will benefit either their present life, or the life of humanity. That view of things is not what Jesus focused upon in his teachings, however.

To Christians, the present world is living under a curse of death, and everything that exists is temporary in nature. Only that which is given to us by God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is of an eternal nature. We are willing to lay down all affections for the present, in view of the future glory we will enjoy as occupants of the eternal city of God.

Jesus taught us to live a daily life of crucifixion as the only acceptable life style of a Christian. The meaning of death to self can take on different forms, however; to the apostles it often meant living with the constant threat of death upon them, as one already condemned to die a martyr's death. To others, the need to live sacrificially for the kingdom of God sake is the meaning of taking up one's cross.

Jesus linked this reality to the future judgment, indicating our need to boldly stand without shame lest he be ashamed of us on the Day of Judgment. The holding of eternal views regarding Jesus Christ and

salvation are becoming more and more unpopular in America today. We are experiencing the immigration of people from countries who do not accept Jesus as the only authoritative source of truth and salvation. The need for boldness is being felt like never before. This condition, if allowed to continue, may one day result in a very present and real treat of death. I think it better to lay down our lives attitudinally now than to wait until we must do it in fact.

## Chapter Thirty-seven

### Transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

We have two themes presented to us here in this passage. The first has to do with what Jesus was experiencing, and the other was how disorienting spiritual experiences can be to people who aren't accustomed to them.

When Jesus went to pray, he sometimes took his disciples. They would soon tire of praying and would go to sleep. This prayer time evidently started out like most, Jesus praying while the disciples slept. At some point, the disciples awoke to find Jesus starting to glow and two men suddenly appearing whom they recognized to be Moses and Elijah. They had come to Jesus to talk to him about his departure (exodus or decease) that would take place at Jerusalem.

Death was spoken of in this case as an exit, or literally exodus. Jesus would not cease to exist, therefore; death is not viewed in a pagan sense. They were evidently explaining what would take place in detail so that Jesus would be fully aware of what to expect.

Although Jesus was God, when he came to this world he laid aside some of the attributes that are characteristic of God. He was man in every sense except without sin. When he had knowledge of what was happening around him, it was evidently the result of the operation of the same spiritual gifts that are described in first Corinthians chapter twelve. Prior to his baptism, he had to learn and grow in knowledge just as other children do. Jesus, however, was evidently drawn to prayer and study of the word.

There are some stories or accounts from non-Biblical sources that are probably more fable than reality, that suggest that Jesus had an enormous intellect, understanding a wide range of subjects. This is believable to me, because the evidence I see of the intellectual ability of fallen humanity suggests that we are unable to function even close to our real potentials. It seems we are living in some kind of fog that dulls our senses and only occasionally allows us to see or think clearly. We call such moments "flashes of brilliance".

Unlike us, Jesus lived without the fog that was the result of the fall. Prior to the fall, Adam was able to think on a creative level that we are not able to begin to approach. God brought all the living creatures to Adam, who gave them names! This required the ultimate in creative thinking. When we give names, the names are derived from past experiences or other names.

Jesus was not under the curse that resulted from sin, therefore; his intellect was not hampered. Jesus often communed with his Father, sometimes all night. What took place in those prayer sessions is not revealed, except for the comments Jesus made about receiving every word he spoke from his Father, and doing only what he saw his Father do. When did he hear him? When did he see him? Perhaps it was in those prayer sessions. Here on this mountain, the disciples were allowed to witness the remarkable visit of Moses and Elijah, but to Jesus, perhaps this was just another experience with heavenly beings.

Regardless by what means Jesus received his instructions, he was always in command of every situation. The power of the Kingdom of Heaven was always available to him, and nothing took him by surprise.

The disciples, on the other hand, were always in the dark. Try as they would to understand; their intellect was dulled as a result of sin. It wouldn't be until after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit that the fog would begin to lift. Even then, they were not fully restored.

The Holy Spirit is the greatest teacher man can experience, yet our minds are still clouded as a result of the fall. We need all the help we can get to begin to understand spiritual truth. There is an exodus coming, however, that will release us from all the limitations we now experience that is the result of the fall. We will all be called to the presence of the Lord, where we will be like him for we will be able to see him as he is. In that moment, we will experience a change that will result in a joy and worship that will last forever.

The glory the disciples saw for a few brief moments will be our eternal joy that will never end.

Peter didn't know how to handle such knowledge; should it be memorialized? Knowledge is not given to Christians to be memorialized. This experience was given to prepare, both Jesus and the disciples, for what was yet to come. When we receive great knowledge from the Lord, it is not for our personal enrichment, but rather, because the knowledge is needed in the body of Christians. If we worship the messenger, we lose the benefit of the message.

What happened on the mountain was not to be spoken of at this time. They were to file it away for future reference. After all was fulfilled they would understand.

## **Chapter Thirty-eight**

### **Is the Demon too Much for You?**

Luke 9:37-42

The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

"O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

Jesus had been in the presence of his Father on the mountain, and now upon returning to those who are always to be found in the lowlands where life is normally lived; he encountered the sort of problems that exist there. First he encountered suffering and those who would help, but cannot; and second, he encountered the reason for the difficulty.

Parents who love their children suffer when their children suffer. The man at the foot of the mountain was desperate, he only had one son, and he was a tormented child.

There is no form of human turmoil quite like trying to live with someone who is tormented. Many parents can empathize with this father; they too have children who are difficult to handle. Torment comes from many sorts of conditions. Some parents struggle with children who are merely self-willed and stubborn. There are many personality problems that can disrupt the peace of a home until the parents are able to bring the child into a more civil mode of living.

Training and discipline are of vital importance to a peaceful life. Parents who neglect discipline and training are setting themselves up for sorrow and lives of turmoil. Every child born into this world has a nature that must be trained in civil behaviors. The secret of any orderly society, community, or home is the ability of the powers that be to enforce a system of law upon every member of that social group.

Not only do we have a nature that tends to selfishness, but we also have an enemy that is bent on making life on earth hell. Turmoil comes from many sources, greed, selfishness, unresolved anger, resentments, envy and the like, and also from hunger and disease. The father in our story was not negligent in his parental duties; he had tried everything. An evil spirit was tormenting this child.

I heard a minister comment one day that he had learned an important lesson as a pastor/counselor. He learned that you cannot cast out the fallen sinful human nature, nor can you successfully counsel a demonized person. Nothing is more frustrating than to try to reason, discipline, train or counsel a person who is demonized.

The great debate we encounter on this subject is, what is attributable to demons and what is nothing more than a chemical disorder, or a stubborn willful unyielding human spirit? The condition this boy had has all the symptoms of epilepsy.

I once knew a dear lady who was an epileptic. Her condition was diagnosed as a disease, yet she had suffered from the implications of this passage of scripture. She had encountered people who regarded her as demon possessed, and therefore someone to be shunned. She was extremely sensitive and defensive, to the point that she was resistive to prayer. Whenever a person is ill it is well to remember; they are still a person.

Many well-meaning people, who believe in prayer, have done more damage to the sick than all their prayers can heal. These disciples at the foot of the mountain were very fortunate that Jesus arrived on the scene. Had he not rescued them from their ill-fated attempt to cast the demons out of the boy, the father and the boy would have left with even greater turmoil than they had when they came. The damage to their faith would have made any future attempt at ministry difficult if not impossible.

The woman I refer to was more tormented by the idea that she might be demon possessed, than she was by her condition. She had found refuge in the scientific knowledge of the disease of epilepsy, and she did not wish to risk any form of ministry that might dislodge her from her comfort. I understood this, and loving the woman; I ministered consolation to her. Attacking the condition would have meant damaging the person. The condition and the person are not the same. The person is far more important than a victory over the disease.

In cases like this, what we struggle with is our own ineptitude in the area of faith. Jesus never left a person in a half-healed state. He never attempted what could not be accomplished. It's easy for us to say, "Of course he didn't; he was Jesus." Yet, he seemed to indicate that the disciples should have easily handled this. They were not unaccustomed to ministering in the power of the Spirit, yet their faith was not adequate to the need.

In other accounts of this story, Jesus also instructed them that this kind comes out as a result of prayer. Since Jesus had complained about the unbelief he was encountering in this perverse generation, some have wondered which he was speaking of, the demon or the unbelief? I don't suppose it matters

really, prayer is the remedy cited. Jesus had just taken three disciples to the mountain to pray. Had he invited all of them, and only Peter, John and James responded? In all likelihood this was the case. Going with Jesus required personal sacrifice as climbing mountains is not easy. It likely was also sometime during the night. Perhaps their lack of desire to sacrifice in this way was what led to their failure to be able to cast out the spirit.

In this case, Jesus attributed the disease to the presence of a demon. Is that always the case? If you are going to minister successfully to a demonized person, it is essential that you know that it is a demon you are dealing with. Any doubt about either the true nature of the condition, or your ability to deal with it, will result in failure. Faith is the connecting link between our source of power, and the need.

Confusion in this area often leads to frustration of an afflicted person. A woman who had been in our meetings some years before visited my wife and me and having acquired a level of respect, she came to us with a problem. Though I don't recall the exact nature of her complaint, I do remember that the greatest burden she bore was that she had friends who had convinced her that she had a demonic problem. Upon hearing the details of what was transpiring we both came to the conclusion that what was needed was to simply be affirmed as a healthy, normal member of the body of Christ. I have encountered people who have so emphasized the demonic origin of problems that they have a need to be delivered from the need to be delivered! Just because we experience temptation or weaknesses in our faith, doesn't mean we are demon possessed. What we all need is a continual cleansing of the Spirit, and training program in how to live an overcoming life. There are however, problems that do require deliverance from evil spirits.

There was a remedy to the problem the disciples encountered; his name was Jesus. We humans frequently encounter problems that are beyond our knowledge, faith or experience. Jesus had words of instruction for all of us who stand in ineptitude trying to accomplish tasks that are beyond us. Bring him to me. I have learned that is the word of wisdom we all need to hear, and hear well.

We all have been given a measure of faith, yet life has a way of challenging our faith, and stretching it to its limits. We are able to function in faith, going about the routines of life with our ongoing relationship enabling us to meet the normal challenges of our days. There are, however, those incidences that challenge us beyond our spiritual preparation. What do we do? Take the matter to Jesus, that is what prayer is! When Jesus arrived on the scene, faith was also aroused. The disciples were always secure when Jesus was in charge. Put Jesus in charge of the problem that seems too big for you. If it's demons that are the problem, when we act in him, we can drive them away. If it's healing that is needed; he can heal. If he asks you to be a vessel through which he works, be obedient.

## **Chapter Thirty-nine**

### **Who Would Betray Jesus?**

Luke 9:43-45

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men." But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

As we begin to consider the text before us, we must remember what Jesus did that caused everyone to marvel. In the last chapter of this book, we saw Jesus cast a stubborn and violent demon out of a boy. The demon was resistive to the efforts of the disciples who had become accustomed to casting out

demons. Casting out demons was not a new experience for the disciples as they had been sent out on a previous occasion and had healed the sick, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. (See Matt. 10:7-8) Or, at least that was what they were told to do, and every indication is that they fulfilled their commission. Jesus was able to deal with this form of stubborn demon. Because he could, people marveled.

It was in this setting that Jesus spoke these words, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” Why would he say that in this context? The disciples didn’t understand it because it was hidden from them. In other words, their minds were blocked from grasping the meaning of the incidence; only the words were recalled. Later, after Judas betrayed the Lord, these statements were understood. Yet, knowing that it was Judas being spoken of doesn’t answer the question; why speak of it here?

Judas was standing right there listening and seeing what was taking place. The fulfillment of this prophecy required that the betrayer have a mindset conducive to betraying the Lord. Could it be that it was on this very occasion that the seeds of thought were being sown into Judas’ mind, and that Jesus was calling attention to it? Satan was at work preparing Judas to betray the Lord. When and how he did it is not known, but since we are not ignorant of his devices, we know that betrayal was not an instantaneous impulse. The seeds of sin are first sown in the mind, and later opportunity brings forth the actions. What is not entertained in the heart, does not find expression. Judas had to have held ideas in his heart that led to betrayal. Perhaps it was the realization of the enormous power that Jesus was capable of displaying that started his thought going in a direction that led to betrayal.

Let’s speculate that Judas was a political zealot with aspirations of revolution. This mindset was not uncommon in Jesus’ day. There was a desire in the heart of all the Israelis to be free of the domination of Rome. Perhaps Judas was standing there thinking, if all this power could be directed toward the overthrow of Rome, we could be free.

It is not uncommon for people to fall into the trap of using the manifestations of the power of God to promote their own agendas. It is this form of temptation that leads to Christians betraying the purposes of God. When Judas betrayed the Lord, that betrayal would not be the last time Jesus would be betrayed into the hands of men. Jesus is being betrayed every time the holy things of God are used to promote the agendas of men.

Isaiah spoke of this sort of abuse of Christ when speaking of his crucifixion, saying, “His appearance was so marred beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.” (Isaiah 52:14) Again, what happened to Christ at the time of crucifixion was not the last time he would be marred. The image of Christ is marred every time we as his followers act in a manner unworthy of our high calling. We are his representatives; thus our behavior affects how people see Christ and his church. If we are promoting our own agendas, we are presenting a distorted view of Christ. The physical beating that Jesus took at the crucifixion was nothing to the abuse he has taken from his own brethren, misbehaving Christians.

The world sees a very distorted picture of Jesus as a result of all the activities carried out in his name that have not been mandated by the Holy Spirit. Jesus has been betrayed when greed, egos, and other manifestations of fleshly desires are enabled to find expression as a result of the power of Jesus being manifested.

## **Chapter Forty**

### **A New Perspective**

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest."

"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

The name of Jesus belongs to anyone who will believe in him. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like children, regarding themselves as totally unimportant members of the human family, and at the same time regarding all others as important regardless of social status.

The people of the nation of Israel had an attitude of social superiority regarding their culture as morally pure and all others as corrupt. This resulted in racial prejudice. As in most societies, there was a sort of cast system, though not based so much on status of birth as on occupation or achievements.

Jesus was concerned that his followers adopt a different worldview and a different method of evaluating their own self-worth. What makes a Christian stand apart from the world is that he does not see himself in the same way as they do. Their self-worth is based on acceptance of their peers and achievements that their social order values.

The worth of a Christian is based on his ability to adapt to the principles of the Spirit. When we look at God we see a most remarkable characteristic that we are to emulate. When we look at the Father we see that he is a totally transparent being, dependent upon the Son to reveal him to humanity. When we look at the Son we see a totally transparent personality that only reveals the Father, and when we look at the Holy Spirit, we again see transparency, as he reveals both the Father and the Son to us. Greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven is achieved, as we become transparent personalities, revealing the Godhead to those around us through our conduct of humility and service.

Jesus used the symbol of a child to teach his disciples about a proper concept of their own self-importance. In adjusting their attitudes, he revealed two areas in which this principle applies, first they needed to see themselves correctly, and secondly they needed to gain a different worldview. The attitude of exclusiveness was not appropriate in his work. They would have to understand that they were not a closed group; that efforts to build social, political or religious fences were not consistent with the efforts of the Holy Spirit who wants all people everywhere to accept Christ.

This new attitude was to affect how they would extend hospitality, and how they would treat believers outside their own spiritual community. They must learn that people are not enemies just because they are not a part of our immediate fellowship. The new churches would have many people groups and inevitably have different cultural colorings. Differences of attitudes and teaching emphases would result, the reason for denominational differences, yet these differences should never cause us to disown a person just because he is, in some way, different from us. Thus, attitudes of self-importance or exclusiveness that interferes with the spirit of hospitality are inappropriate for Christians.

## **Chapter Forty-one**

### **What Spirit are You of?**



As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

Jesus has now arrived at a point in his ministry when his focus was upon the fulfillment of his mission on earth. The countdown had begun; his journey turned toward Jerusalem, the place of crucifixion. Resolutely, he began moving in that direction. His journey was taking him through Samaria, but along the way they encountered an unfriendly village. This disturbed the disciples to the point of wanting to call fire down out of heaven to destroy the place.

Why they were so aroused is not revealed, but when people experience success, especially where manifestations of the supernatural are involved, it's easy to get carried away. It is sometimes tempting to use the power to satisfy the desires of the carnal nature. They had no doubt heard or read the stories about how Elisha had used the power of God when he cursed some children for mocking him, after which two young mother bears came out and killed forty-two of them. And how he rebuked his servant Gehazi who deceitfully received gifts from Naaman the Syrian, and how Elisha then assigned the leprosy that had been upon Naaman, to come upon Gehazi.

Such manifestations are somewhat perplexing to read about, but there is no evidence that Elisha acted under orders in every case. A case can be made, however, that respect for God's anointed needed to be enforced, and therefore; he was right in doing what he did. It is also note-worthy that the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet and that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. It seems that when a person receives a supernatural gift from God, he is able to use that gift either to promote the kingdom of God or to benefit himself.

My wife and I once knew a minister who confided that she had on one occasion of her life left the ministry and was working for a living. While pursuing her line of work, she observed the gift that had made her a good minister was now working making her a good sales person. This alarmed and frightened her because she respected the anointing of the Holy Spirit and did not want to use it for wrong reasons. She later returned to an effective ministry. Could Elisha have acted out of his carnal nature and had the gift of God work for him? I think so, however; I am not charging him with doing so.

The disciples came to Jesus all fired up about the rejection they had experienced in the community in Samaria and asked if they should call down fire from heaven. Jesus turned to them and rebuked them because they didn't know what spirit was motivating them. Success creates a condition of heart in a carnally minded person that is receptive to temptation.

How easy it is, when experiencing success, to at once want to reward ourselves in some carnal way, as though we were responsible for the success we have experienced. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17) It is well to always remember who it is that has given us the gifts, anointing, and ministries.

The disciples may have felt justified in wanting to destroy the village on the basis that it was Jesus they were rejecting. They may have felt that they needed to defend his honor. Does God need man to defend his honor? Sometimes we do need to speak up for God, in doing so we are able to give a witness for him. The problem wasn't the fact that the disciples were concerned about Jesus being welcomed, but rather, Jesus discerned something else at work, a wrong spiritual condition in their hearts being manifested. They were not feeling God's indignation; they were feeling their own wounded pride. We are never to act out of wounded pride, pride being a part of the sin nature.

The disciples had to learn the difference between acting out of the carnal nature and acting upon spiritual directives. To their credit they brought the matter to Jesus before attempting some retaliation on their own.

## Chapter Forty-two

### How Committed Are We?

Luke 9:53-62

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."  
Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."  
He said to another man, "Follow me."  
But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."  
Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."  
Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."  
Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

The Book of Luke reveals that though Jesus was God made flesh and dwelling among us, he was a member of the human race. As such he understood our tendencies to put too much emphasis on that which is temporal. In the passage before us, Jesus is instructing us concerning putting the kingdom of God as primary in our lives, and showing that procrastination is symptomatic of the lack of a proper value being assigned to spiritual matters.

Saul of Tarsus, who later met Jesus on the way to Damascus after his resurrection, was going there to persecute Christians. Upon receiving a rebuke from Christ, he immediately turned from his former way of life and followed Jesus, never looking back. We know him as the Apostle Paul. The twelve disciples also followed obediently, though their lives sometimes reflected brief periods of wavering. Nevertheless, only Judas would fail, and after they were filled with the Holy Spirit, no further wavering is recorded.

There is a demand upon us if we are to follow Jesus. We, like the apostle Paul, are to forsake our past way of life, and begin a new life. This change may not require a change of career, but it does involve all the premises from which we work. Before our conversions, we were driven by goals that were self-centered in nature. Achieving those goals was the primary concern of our lives. All this changes after we receive Christ. Pleasing Christ with our lives becomes primary. Now we view our career as a possible means to that end. What determines our course of action is whether or not it is contributing to our goal of pleasing Christ.

Nothing is more important to us now than pleasing the Lord, therefore; allowances for delays are not permitted. If Jesus is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all. That is the requirement of becoming subservient. We get off the throne of our heart, and Christ is given that place. For some this is a difficult requirement. The price seems too high. Serving self is too rewarding to give up all at once. Therefore, there must be a change of values and a change of affections.

Whereas, following Christ may not require a change of career, it also follows that it may. In our scripture text, we see a certain man who wanted to follow the Lord. Jesus responded to his request by pointing out that the cost for him to follow would be to experience some rather harsh conditions. The very basic needs of life that we are so concerned to provide for would have to yield to other concerns.

Obligations to old relationships would also undergo some changes. If duties to old relationships come into conflict with the will of God in our lives, God's will must be obeyed. To be worthy of Christ requires that he be first in every consideration. Saying, "Wait, I have some things to tend to first," is not acceptable. This decision is so much more important than anything else in our life that waiting is not permitted. God is looking for people who will place the highest possible value upon pleasing him. They alone are considered worthy of the privilege of serving him in the inner circles of his love.

Which is more important, having a home, burying a father, saying good-bye to your family, or forsaking all, and following the Lord? If we understand the value return, there is no contest. What Jesus offers has eternal value. This transition should not be made in degrees. Death to self should be quick and

permanent. Turning from one's self-life in degrees is like cutting a dog's tail off a little piece at a time; it only prolongs the pain.

Once the decision is made to follow the Lord, turning back is to forfeit all the advantages gained. We are then held to be unworthy. Does this mean there is no further opportunity for us? It would be inconsistent with the message of grace to say that one cannot return to the Lord with a repentant heart and find forgiveness, however; what loss might have occurred only the Lord can restore.

The gospel is not written as a message of consolation for those who are wishy-washy; it is written to challenge us to the highest possible level of Christian commitment.

## Chapter Forty-three

### Go Forth Proclaiming

Luke 10:1-11

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road."

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house."

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."

The work of the kingdom is not limited to a select few. Jesus had selected twelve disciples who were also appointed to be apostles. This, however, did not in any way limit the work of the kingdom to these twelve men. Wherever Jesus went, crowds of people followed him. In addition to the twelve there were an undisclosed number of people who regularly followed him wherever he went. It was from this crowd that he selected seventy-two individuals to go forth and visit the towns ahead of him. The instructions were similar to those given to the twelve on a previous occasion.

These representatives were going forth to spread the good news that the kingdom of God is near, and heal the sick. They too, were to live by the hospitality of the people, and people were to respect and receive them. If a village would not receive them showing them hospitality in peace, they were to leave. They would go into the streets and declare to the village that they were wiping off the dust of their town against them. This would be a witness against them on the Day of Judgment, a serious matter.

Jesus instructed them to ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest field commenting that the harvest is great, but the laborers are few. This is still true today. The harvest is indeed great. The need has never been greater than it is today. This is what he told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!" First he told them to ask, followed by an immediate, "Go!" Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. We must do the same thing today, ask; not assume.

The task is a difficult one. Those to whom we are sent are characterized as being wolves while we are characterized as lambs. Actually it is the sin nature that is the nature of a wolf. The nature that we receive from the Lord at conversion is the lamb nature. It is gentle, kind, loving, pure, honest, easily entreated, and tender hearted. There is no violence in this nature, no warring spirit; this nature is peaceful and peace making. It is the nature of the wolf to tear and devour lambs! That nature is crafty, deceitful, vicious, evil and will go to war over any cause. It likes to wear the clothes of Christians, go to church, be active in church affairs because it is then able to receive validation as being legitimate, and after all; aren't the causes good ones? Some people think Christians are supposed to be fighters, "Onward, Christians soldiers" is their cry; but Jesus told Peter to put away his sword! We are not fighters; we are proclaimers, banner holders, examples of love, purity, and patience.

Satan has taken the people of the world captive, but in many cases, they don't know that. The sinful life they now live seems quite normal to them. It may only be that nagging sense of emptiness that causes them to even wonder if they are missing something. Others are downright miserable, their lives having been ruined by riotous and excessive living. In any case, for them to understand that Jesus is their answer takes a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

They were sent out to proclaim the gospel message and demonstrate the power of the Spirit. This is how the message of the kingdom overcomes the power of the deceiver. Without the demonstration of the Spirit's power, it is our word against the philosophizers they have already heard. The youths of our day are being told lies about God, Jesus and the Bible. Religion, as recognized by our government, is any belief in God. Therefore, it has become a multiple-choice question, where any answer is as good as another. However, it hasn't stopped there, all too often the attitude has been, any answer will do so long as it isn't belief in Jesus.

Jesus wants the world to know the truth. We are his witness. Unless we answer the Spirit's call to service, they will die in their sins.

## **Chapter Forty-four**

### **Cause for Rejoicing?**

Luke 10:11-20

I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

"Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths."

"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Jesus sent seventy-two disciples out two by two to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God being near and to heal the sick. He had instructed them to look for a receptive spirit in each town, and if they were not received, they should wipe the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. He then went

on to speak about the towns in which his mighty works had been done and how unrepentant they were. He compared them to Tyre and Sidon saying that if the miracles that he did had been done there, they would have repented in dust and ashes long ago. Even Capernaum, the central location from which he ministered, had failed to repent.

In this portion of scripture we see that, greater manifestation of God's power result in a greater responsibility to repent. God is not interested in entertaining people; he is interested in their repentance. The burden of the gospel message is that people awake from the slumber of indifference concerning eternal matters and repent. Repentance means to turn away from what has caused the slumbering attitude and to pursue eternal life.

When the disciples returned to Jesus from their ministry, they were excited about what had happened. Jesus had instructed them to heal the sick, but not only did they heal the sick, but demons also were submissive to them. Jesus then reported that he had seen Satan fall like lightning from the sky, indicating a wound to the kingdom of the devil.

Who wouldn't rejoice after a ministry of that magnitude? Yet, Jesus was quick to put all that had happened into proper perspective. As great as all of that was, what these disciples should be thinking about was their own heart's condition before God. Just like the towns that had received him because of his miracles, yet were unrepentant, the disciples were themselves focusing upon the miraculous rather than the important issues of repentance.

Miracles are not the message; the need to repent and believe in Jesus is the message. This is a hard lesson to learn. We are so prone to surface views. Miracles are a tool to attract the lost to Jesus. They are a witness to the lost that what is readily visible is not the whole story. We are then given the opportunity to tell them about the Lord Jesus. If they listen to us, they listen to him!

The availability of divine intervention should serve to humble us causing repentance. Any person having received a miraculous intervention in life and continues living in sin is placing themselves in a position to receive a greater judgment. Jesus said of such, "Woe to you." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God! Preventing that from happening is a matter of repentance. When God sees the condition of heart and soul that he is looking for, he writes your name down. When you have received the witness of the Spirit that it has been done, rejoice. God's purpose is now being fulfilled in your life.

## **Chapter Forty-five**

### **Divine Revelation**

Luke 10:21-24

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

One of the great miraculous functions of the Holy Spirit is the opening of the understanding of a believer. Without the aid of the Holy Spirit we are unable to grasp spiritual truths.

The realm of the spirit is a realm outside the realm of matter. Scientific instruments, for the most part, are unable to detect the existence of the spiritual realm. The spiritual realm is able to interact with this realm more readily than we can interact with it. There have been occasions when supernatural events have been detected by scientific instruments, but since these events can't be duplicated at will. We would have to conclude that they were initiated by spiritual beings and not by us.

One such event took place several years ago. A church in the town where I lived with my family was having special meetings when in a morning teaching session there was a very special sense of the presence of the Lord. The session was being recorded on audiotape, but when spontaneous worship came forth to the Lord, the recorder failed to record it even though it continued to run. After the worship ended, the rest of the service recorded without incident. When they played it back hoping to relive the wonder of the worship time, they found that part of the tape blank.

On another occasion some folks were recording some gospel music, when to their amazement upon playing it back, discovered they were accompanied by voices that were not their voices. They concluded that it must have been angel voices being picked up; voices their ears couldn't hear.

Events of this sort remind us that there is a realm that, for the most part, is outside the realm detectable by our normal detection capabilities. We have been given sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch to inform us concerning what exists around us. There is, however, another sensory system that goes largely ignored by most people. It is the ability to detect spiritual activity known as discernment. Some people are sensitive to spiritual activity as a natural gift, but without the aid of the Holy Spirit in their life will not be able to distinguish between good and evil. These people often get involved in occult activities, such as mind reading, spiritualist activities, psychic phenomena, and such like, all condemned in the Bible as demonic in origin.

When those who have been involved in activities that are not of God become Christians it is necessary for them to renounce all such activities and turn to the Lord as the only acceptable source of spiritual development or communication.

There is so much that the Lord wants to reveal to his people concerning himself, his kingdom on earth, and the eternal heavenly kingdom, but there must be a clear distinction between what is of heavenly source and what is coming from deceptive spirits of evil. It is for this reason that God has placed a special gift ministry in the body of Christ known as the gift of discernment.

The story we read in Luke chapter ten, of the disciples returning from their ministry assignment, reveals that they were very successful in ministering in the power of the Spirit. After Jesus gave them words of counsel concerning their attitudes, he demonstrates great delight in what has just happened. He states that he saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning, but what seems to bring him the most joy was knowing that the disciples had received a divine revelation of truth. The Father had revealed to them what could not be otherwise understood by the wise and learned, by the Holy Spirit.

This is the reason the people of the world mock the demonstrations of the power of God. They can't see what we see, they don't feel what we feel, nor do they understand what we have come to treasure. What is clearly understood by God's people is foolishness to the world. This is a protection that God places around the special relationship he has with his people. If God allowed evil people to freely comprehend spiritual truth, they would soon exploit God's power and all would end in confusion.

What was revealed to the disciples was a special treasure that the Godly people of old longed to see and hear. A special time had arrived and God was opening hearts to receive salvation and understanding. Never again would spiritual truth be out of reach to those who would seek to know their God. A new day had dawned, and it brought joy to the heart of the Lord.

# Chapter Forty-six

## The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Pride, selfishness, self-involvement, and prejudice are all part of the fallen human condition. It is easy to love those who love us. It's no test to reach out to those who are a part of our intimate family or circle of friends.

In our lesson text, we have an expert in the law testing Jesus with the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25) Luke presents the man as having a condescending attitude toward Jesus, as might be expected since he was an expert in religious matters. Jesus was patient with the man and replied by asking him a question.

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Luke 10:26-27)

This was a good answer reflecting a proper understanding of the law. There was, however, a problem; the man had a selfish heart and Luke informs us that he wanted to justify himself. The last statement he made about loving his neighbor apparently bothered him. Perhaps he had had some deep discussions with his peers about this very matter and wanted to hear what Jesus would have to say about it.

Who is our neighbor, the person living next door, people living in our community, or perhaps, those who are citizens of our country? How broad do we reach with our definition? Do we only concern ourselves with our close constituency?

Jesus answered with the now famous story of the Good Samaritan. In the story he references the tendency within humans to look the other way when confronted with a problem that might be inconvenient to them.

The story is carefully crafted to eliminate possible rationalizations to avoid the desired conclusion. Both the Levite and the Priest were men involved in religious activities, however; since they were leaving Jerusalem traveling toward Jericho concerns about the possibilities of becoming ceremonially unclean were not valid. Had they been traveling toward Jerusalem, it could have been argued that, if the man was dead or died while being tended too, it would have resulted in them being disqualified from their duties.

This was not the case. Their reason for non-involvement had to be something else. Walking on the other side of the road indicated a deliberate effort to avoid confrontation.

This is set in striking contrast by the Samaritan's response to the same condition. First, it is noteworthy that Jesus used a Samaritan to play the role of the compassionate one. The victim was going down away from Jerusalem on this very dangerous road. The road descends from Jerusalem that is about 2600 feet above sea level, to Jericho that is about 1200 feet below sea level, in about 17 miles. The road went through rough terrain with many large boulders along the road providing hiding places for outlaws. He was likely a Jew and the man showing the mercy was a Samaritan. Had the Samaritan left the man it would have been understandable since Samaritans were the targets of racial hatred coming from the Jews.

The Samaritan overcame any natural feelings he might have justifiably had against the man and extended loving care holding nothing back. The man was in need of assistance, and that was the overriding concern. He was his neighbor by reason of his need. He then took pity on him and bandaged his wounds, putting wine and oil on them, wine for cleansing, and oil for comfort. He then placed him on his own donkey and took him to the place where he could receive proper care. He then paid for the man's care with a commitment to pay more if needed; then he went on his way. All had been done that could be reasonable expected and more. He had demonstrated the true meaning of the command to love your neighbor as yourself.

There are many applications that can be drawn from this story. We could talk about the thieves who beat the man and left him naked and half dead, or about the man and how like him we are before Christ came to us to bind up our wounds. We could talk about how after being brought down to this level; even a Samaritan's compassion could be welcomed. We could talk about the wine being a type of the blood of Jesus and the oil representing the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Then we could look from another perspective and put ourselves in the place of the Samaritan who, though abused and hated, still reached out in love and how we ought to do the same. We could talk about going the second mile, as was demonstrated at the Inn as he paid for the man's care and then committed to pay more if needed.

But, what Jesus was teaching concerned a purity of heart that is a prerequisite to entry into eternal life. The expert in the law had failed to qualify because, though understanding the words of the law, lacked the application of its teachings.

Repentance then stands as the necessary prerequisite to entry into life, because without it we are hard hearted, proud, and self-centered. It isn't until we humble ourselves and admit our need for forgiveness for all the sin that has darkened our soul that we can begin to be healed.

The thieves who beat the man are like the struggles of life that come against us to rob us of our comforts. These thieves are not always our enemies. Sometimes they are our friends because without them we could never appreciate the love of a Samaritan. We would never understand that what was meant to harm us, blessed us because it was through these experiences we learned to receive the love of Jesus. Healing from the wounds of life begin when we see them as a blessing from God and begin to thank him for loving us so much that he allowed us to experience them. Real worship begins with a thankful heart, and the wounds of bitterness are healed when we see their cause as God ordained.

Humans are all plagued with a nature that resists what we need most. What we need is the Love of the Lord Christ Jesus without whom we can never inherit eternal life. Coming to the place where we can receive that love with open-heartedness, and without pretenses, is not easy. We are so self-reliant, proud, and selfish that we sometimes grasp for salvation because we see eternal life as an advantage. We add eternal life to the list of goals we are now pursuing, never having experienced real anguish of soul resulting from the shame of knowing we are offending God by our sinful life. The human spirit must be humbled before it can receive God and be healed.



## Chapter Forty-seven

### Mary's Better Part

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Martha was a servant type, a great homemaker and she was an extraordinary hostess. Mary on the other hand had an interest in the wisdom of the Lord. With intensity of concentration she sat at his feet, oblivious to the natural needs to provide for their guests.

There were a lot of preparations that needed to be made in the house that day. When Jesus arrived it wasn't just one person coming to dinner; he came with at least twelve others. Martha graciously opened her home to him, but when her sister Mary settled in to the conversation area leaving all the work to her, she became upset. When Martha complained to Jesus about Mary's lack of concern for what concerned her, Jesus responded by pointing out that Mary had chosen the better part. The order of things was apparently as it should have been. The two women had different natures. One had a nature that was hospitable, but her desire to please her guest was robbing her of her peace. Mary had a nature that desired to acquire the wisdom of the Lord, I suspect that she was often distracted from duty and was therefore a trial to her organized sister.

In the course of life, those who are unlike ourselves often irritate us. If we are organized, articulate, well groomed, and well managed, we have difficulty understanding those who are butterfly types. They flutter about always looking for some new and exciting adventure.

When we encounter those who take little or no concern for what is of utmost concern to us, we often react judgmentally, sometimes angrily, and if the condition continues we become bitter. It is hard for us humans to understand that differentness is a necessary part of the human equation. It's this differentness that drives us in varied directions resulting in a well-ordered society. We understand this in matters of career planning, but often forget it in matters of everyday life. It is not at all unusual for a family with several children to see very different talents, desires, interests and goals among them. Such was the case between Mary and Martha.

Martha was experiencing conflict because Mary was a very different sort from her. What Martha valued was a well-ordered house. People like Martha often provide a home with entertainment as an important part of their plans. They build houses with entertainment in view. They seek occupations that will enhance their ability to develop a social life. They like everything to have its proper place so that when company comes they will be able to serve them with ease. They take pride in being the ones that can entertain the most important guests. It was therefore Martha who invited Jesus to her home. What bothers the Martha's among us is when they have done all the planning, all the organizing, all the preparations, and then the Mary's among us plop down in front of the guests with no interest in even helping with the serving! I suspect that this was not the first time Mary had acted this way. Perhaps Martha felt that at last someone that Mary would listen to was now present. If she could get him to speak to her about this matter, perhaps she would listen. After all, wasn't she obviously right? Isn't it important for a woman to make one's guests comfortable before entering into conversations with them?

To a Martha, this is just common courtesy, but it isn't in the nature of a Mary to even notice what needs to be done!

Truth is, Martha's nature was to serve; Mary's nature was to listen. Mary was doing what her nature desired and was at peace. It was Martha who was lacking peace. She was the one who needed to come to terms with herself. Martha's often resent Mary's because it seems easier to plop down and listen than to peel potatoes, wash dishes, or cook meals. She may have left after being turned away by the Lord, thinking, "Great help you are, I invite you over and my sister misbehaves in your presence and what do you do; you give her support!" Martha had a choice to make, she could become bitter, and resentful of the presence of the Lord, or she could submit to his wisdom and go back to her duties.

Later in the gospel narratives, we see her entertaining Jesus again. The occasion was a special dinner for Jesus, and this time we see Martha serving, and Mary anointing Jesus; each was now apparently at peace with themselves and with each other.

Mary chose the better part; Jesus told Martha. Was it because she sat at his feet, or was it because she chose what brought her peace? Martha never became like Mary and Mary never became like Martha, except in peace. Each was a special creation of God, and peace came from accepting themselves and each other for who they were and what it was that God wanted of them.

Without devaluing the experience of sitting at the feet of Jesus, an experience of inestimable value, it is my conclusion that it was the peace that Mary found in it that was the better part. Perhaps Martha gained more blessing from the meeting with Jesus that day, than Mary did. There is no doubt in my mind that if we could all learn this lesson well; we would all be much more peaceful with one another.

## **Chapter Forty-eight**

### **When You Pray Say**

Luke 11:1-4

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

Prayer is communication with God. It is sometimes very simple; four sentences comprise the prayer given here. Yet, in these four sentences we have the format for prayers that last a lifetime.

Jesus began, "Father, hallowed be your name." What affection; what reverence!

To say these words without understanding their meaning is to lose the impact of what has been said. The name Father is equal to all the names of God combined into one affectionate term.

There are at least 35 different names and compound names of God in the Bible, some referring exclusively to the Father and some collectively of God. Each of the names of God speaks of some characteristic of his being. Some of the names of God as translated are: God Most High (El-Elyon, Gen 14:18), The God Who Sees (El-Roi, Gen 16:13), God Almighty (El-Shaddai, Gen 17:1), God Everlasting (El-Olam, Gen 21:33), God of the House of God (El-Bethel-El, Gen 31:13), God, the God of the Prince of God (El-

Eolhe-Israel, Gen 33:20), The One God (Eloah, Duet 32:15), The Great God (El-Gibbor, Isa 9:6), God of Hosts (Elohim-Saboath, Ps 8:7,14), Master, (Adonai Ps 114:5), and God with us (Immanuel, Isa 7:14).

Jehovah, a name for God that is an adaptation of the name of God called the tetragramation, YHWH or JHVH. It is called the unpronounceable name of God, believed to be too holy to pronounce. The Jewish fathers would avoid using that name and say JeHoVaH or YaHWeH instead. The use of the vowels that were found in the name Adonai made it pronounceable. English letter equivalents do not exactly match the Hebrew letters accounting for the confusion over which is the proper rendering. When translated into the English Bible, the name LORD is used where the tetragramation appears in the original Hebrew. You will always see LORD spelled with upper case letters and where the original name was Adonai, you will see it spelled Lord. Since both names are translated to be pronounced Lord, this is the distinction they use so the English reader can see which name it was in the original language.

This only applies to Old Testament names. The New Testament is translated from the Greek where the distinction is lost. The Greek word Kurios, Lord, is used for both Hebrew forms, Adonai or Jehovah. Kurios is also used as a common word meaning master, sir or owner; a respectful title used to show respect for someone of importance.

*Despotes* is also used meaning, a master, lord, or one who possesses supreme authority. *Despotes* is also used either for God or some important person depending on its usage. *Rabboni*, the name Mary called the risen Christ, was an Aramaic title of respect usually applied to the president of the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was a more respectful name than Rabbi, which means teacher or master.

There are at least 18 compound names using Jah, an abbreviation for Jehovah, or Jehovah as part of the compound name. They are translated into English as, LORD God (Jehovah Elohim Gen 2:4), LORD God of Hosts (Jehovah-Elohim-Saboath, Ps 69:6), Master LORD of hosts (Adonai-Jehovah-Saboath, Ps 69:6), the LORD will provide (Jehovah-Jireh, Gen 22:14), the LORD that heals (Jehovah Rapha, Gen 15:26), the LORD my banner (Jehovah-Nissi, Ex 15:26), the LORD who is jealous (Jehovah Kanna, Ex 20:5), the LORD who sanctifies (Jehovah Mekaddeskum, Lev 20:8), the LORD our peace (Jehovah Shalom, Judg. 6:24), the LORD is judge (Jehovah Shaphat, Judg 11:24), the LORD of hosts or, the LORD Almighty (Jehovah Saboath, I Sam 1:3), LORD most high (Jehovah-Elyon, Ps 7:17), the LORD our maker (Jehovah Hosenu, Ps 95:6), the LORD is mighty (Jehovah Gibbor, Isa 42:13), the LORD our righteousness (Jehovah-Tsidkenu, Jer 23:6) and the LORD is there, or ever present. (Jehovah Shammah, Ezek 48:35)

When Jesus said, "Our Father, hallowed be your name," (Luke 11:2) he spoke respectfully understanding every facet of the one to whom he was speaking. He wanted us to learn to also be able to speak to God in this manner. God is not the man upstairs, the great spirit, mother earth, or any other term that deviates from the hallowed-ness of his great name. When we use the name Father, as applied to God, it should always be in the most respectful frame of reference, hallowed by our very attitude.

When he said, "Your kingdom come," we are reminded that what is now present is temporary and will soon pass away, but what God brings to us is eternal.

Luke gives this version of the Lord's Prayer to us in the spirit of the theme Jesus, Son of Man, with both his and our humanity in view. Emphasizing the hallowed-ness of our Father, and the coming kingdom of God, reminds us of the fragility of our earthly being, and the enduring nature of God and his kingdom. We need to be reminded of those facts often. We are so like sheep that get lost easily. When eating they go from blade of grass to blade of grass, easily becoming lost because they never look up until they have eaten all they want. They seem to lose all sense of direction and can become isolated from the flock. Saying, "Your kingdom come," is a reality check in our lives. If we say it with understanding, we will see how we are doing in relationship to the eternal perspective. Have we become isolated and therefore vulnerable?

Jesus then said, "Give us each day our daily bread." This reminds us of where even our food comes from. Food is the provision of our Father. Asking him for our daily bread reminds us of our dependence upon him for sustenance. It's easy for affluent people to forget that it is God who makes the crops grow. In our society we have become accustomed to buying food either prepared already or at the super market. We may only occasionally think of where food actually comes from. Do we ever go thank a farmer for

the food on our table, reminding ourselves that it is a process of sowing and reaping that provides the food we eat? Do we consider the importance of our creator's role in providing the variety of foods we eat? When we pray, "Give us each day our daily bread," we are reminding ourselves of this truth.

Then Jesus continued, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." Man always has his part to play in dealing with God. What God can be expected to do is dependent upon what we do. Before we pray for forgiveness of sins, we must first forgive. Before we receive, we must ask. Always there is man's part, and then there is God's part. Matt. 5:23-24 says, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." When we pray, "forgive us our sins," we must be certain that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Failure in this matter will result in forfeiture of forgiveness on God's part. He is under no obligation to forgive those who do not also forgive!

Some may say, "How can I forgive, the crime committed was so evil." We humans classify sins according to the degree of suffering they bring on society, the victims, or upon us personally. We tend to overlook sins we deem to be victimless, especially if we gain some sort of pleasure from them ourselves.

I once read an editorial written by a woman reporter who was debating the issue of how hard society ought to be upon teenage girls giving birth to babies. In the article she cited the statistics that showed that most unwed mothers were not teenagers. She seemed to overlook that abortion upon teenagers is a very common occurrence in our society, at the time of this writing. It didn't seem to matter to her that these girls are being victimized by a society that allows such an evil practice. We as a society have overlooked sexual immorality with the excuse that they will do it anyway. As I read what this woman had to say on the subject, I was struck with the confession that as a teenage girl she had not done so well herself. Perhaps she felt that things had turned out all right for her, so why get all upset about what today's teens are doing?

It is my contention that we must return to the concept that sins of every sort are a cancer in our society, and therefore must be rejected. Standing firm against sin is not the same as failure to forgive those who have sinned. The Jesus way to deal with the problem of sin is to stand against it. Punishment for violation is a Biblical concept. Forgiveness is also a Biblical concept. Forgiveness offered to a violator must never be done by excusing the sin. Permissiveness only increases sin; it never cures it. Jesus taught us to forgive the sinner, but he also condemns sin. When we get it right, we forgive and love the sinner, but we hate and condemn his sin.

"Lead us not into temptation," reminds us that; we too are vulnerable to sin. We have a sin nature and therefore have a weakness toward sinning. Whatever the sin of your life is, it is there because you found some sort of enjoyment in it. This may be hard for some people to admit, but I am convinced that until we admit that fact, we will never deal with our sin successfully. When we own up to the fact that we like to sin, we are then able to take the next step and say no to sin.

When we can say, "It's not a question of whether I like sin or not, but rather it is not the right thing to do," we disarm Satan's plot against us. As long as the debate has to do with what we will or will not get out of the activity, we are going to fail sooner or later.

When we understand that sin hurts God, those around us, and ourselves; we are then able to say no to sin. Just saying "no," however, may not always be that easy, therefore, we pray; "Lead us not into temptation." We need God to help us and to order the events of our lives in such a way that we are not being subjected to circumstances that might overwhelm us. God is gracious and kind and does not want us to fail. If a loving parent takes a newborn baby and shields it from what it is not capable of dealing with, how much more will our loving heavenly Father shield us if we yield to his care?

# Chapter Forty-nine

## A Call To Prayer

Luke 11:4-13

Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Now that we know something about prayer, we are encouraged to use it. We are all capable of praying. Jesus encouraged us to pray boldly coming to God who responds to people of faith, who are confident of his love. By faith we know that God is willing to assist us in the affairs of our lives.

As in all matters of spiritual interaction, prayer involves man's part and God's part. It is man's part to ask, and it's God's part to give. In this passage we thus have three significant words describing what is expected of us, ASK, SEEK, and KNOCK. Each of these leads to a desired result. Who gives? Why do we find? Who opens the door? The answer assumes we know that it is God, and thus, we are encouraged to proceed, asking, seeking, and knocking.

In my younger years I struggled to make a living for my family. I worked in construction and as a result I worked at many short-term jobs. Job security was something I never enjoyed. Being laid off was a way of life for me. What do you do when everything depends on your occupation as a source of revenue? I asked, sought, and knocked.

I began my married life this way, though my wife and I were very young; we set out to live our lives depending on the Lord to meet us in our needs. The very first Monday morning after getting married and moving from Oregon to Santa Cruz, California to enroll in Bible School, I left the cabin where we were living, telling my wife that I was going to town to get my job. We had asked; now it was time to seek. I had been working in construction some while in high school, so I went to the carpenter's union hall to ask about work. They laughed, telling me how many carpenters were out of work, being the dead of winter, and that if there was a job, it wouldn't go to me. I left, not sure what I should do. As I drove toward the Bible School grounds where our cabin was located, I came to a fork in the road, one leading toward home the other leading to another part of Santa Cruz. I felt an urge to go up the alternate road. As I was driving along, my eyes were searching for any sign of new construction. All at once I spotted what I was looking for, a building under construction. I went and asked if they could use a first year apprentice. They said yes, so I worked for them for the next several months. I had asked God for a job; I sought and I received.

Asking, seeking and finding was a way of life for me. This little story was repeated over and over again in ways too numerous to recount. I have found that what God said is true, yet he seldom did it all for me. I always had to take some kind of initiative when receiving from God, but it never was beyond what was reasonable and possible. God is always faithful to help us in our lives, but developing us into mature strong believers who know how to partner with God, is a vital part of the Spirit's work.

The passage of scripture before us is not directed toward simply gaining sustenance or assistance in our lives; it is directed toward getting a very special form of assistance, the Holy Spirit. It doesn't take some special intellectual ability to understand that without the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life, what I described would not have been the testimony of my life. It has always been the interplay between the

Holy Spirit and me that has produced the results. Sometimes I failed to rely upon the Lord with the intensity of loving faith that I could have, resulting in unnecessary hardships and struggles. When Jesus said that the Father would give us the Holy Spirit as his answer to our asking, seeking and knocking; he was giving us the catalyst of a totally successful life. Without the Holy Spirit in our lives as the active spiritual power, we are like ships drifting without a compass to guide us. Had I not had the Holy Spirit in my heart, I would not have had the source of the urge to go to where the job was located.

I have sometimes likened our human condition to being like a glove that needs a hand to give it the power to perform work. Without the Holy Spirit in our heart's we are as unable to perform the kind of work that is Kingdom of Heaven work.

When Jesus said the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask, he was offering the greatest gift a human being can ever receive. With this gift we are able to meet any and every challenge that life is able to throw at us. We have thus made the connection with the central intelligence clearing house of God's kingdom! We are now connected to the source of wisdom that guides all divine activity. Jesus is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace. These attributes are made available to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in the lives of believers. Some members of the body of Christ are gifted as ministers of one or another of his spiritual gifts, but collectively; all the gifts are in operation today. Because, no one person is qualified to be God's sole spokesperson; we need each other. I need the ministry of the Holy Spirit that God has given to you, and you need what he has given to me. This binds the body of Christ together, therefore; we are one body.

We were taught by the Lord to go to our Father with boldness, not worrying that he might be too busy for us. He likened God to us, in that, if we know how to respond to one another, how much more will God respond to those who ask. None of us is capable of the love and faithfulness of God, therefore; we should never hesitate to run to him with every need. He is never too busy for us.

## **Chapter Fifty**

### **Maintaining a Clean Heart**

Luke 11:14-26

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils."

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first."

When Jesus cast the dumb spirit out of the man in this story, a controversy arose. They questioned by what authority he cast out evil spirits. Some of those present accused Jesus of being under the authority of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

I have heard the accusation that Jesus was a psychic: that he operated in the metaphysical realm and therefore was nothing more than an extra ordinary spiritist. If that were true, then Jesus would have fallen under the curse of the law because scriptures condemned all such activities as a very serious violation. It was because of such activities that the nations that had formerly occupied the land of Israel were to be destroyed by the armies of Israel under the command of Joshua. They were instructed concerning such matters in the following scriptures.

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. (Deut 18:9-14)

A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads. (Lev 20:27)

Had the accusations against Jesus been valid; he could not have been the sinless Lamb of God.

The defense Jesus offered was not based on denial, however; but rather, was based on the fundamental principle that a kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand. Divisions within the ranks of any army will weaken its ability to stand against an aggressor. The kingdom of God is at war with the kingdom of Satan; if Jesus were thus empowered by Beelzebub (Satan), then Satan would be engaged in a self-defeating effort.

The principle applies to other matters as well. Divisions between members of the body of Christ weaken Christianity. One of the well-known ploys of Satan against the Christian church has been to stimulate people to become dogmatic about issues that result in divisions. It's the divide and conquer strategy, and it has worked quite well. The body of Christian doctrines has been under attack since the earliest days of its existence. If it were not for this controversy, many of the letters that make up our New Testament Bibles would not have been written. Many of the divisions within the Christian community are the result of efforts to preserve a true body of Christian doctrines, but it has been in the area of interpretation that some of the most serious divisions have arisen. In our day, efforts are being made to bring unity to this fragmented body of Christians. Happily, progress is being made as ministers are now learning to respect each other's differing points of view. As the emphasis of fellowship shifts from doctrinal issues to the more common ground of application, real fellowship is once again possible.

There are issues such as, what constitutes a "born again" experience? What is its evidence? Most theological groups agree that salvation is essentially the result of faith in Christ Jesus and his atoning work on the cross. Some see other necessary ingredients, such as baptism, repentance and in some cases even that a person speaks in tongues or membership in their church. It's in these areas that some of the most heated controversies have existed. In my own ministry, the Lord has been leading away from these issues to the more important issue of; "What is the reality as it presently exists in our lives? Are we, in fact, connected to the vine, Christ Jesus?" I am sure that, no matter how we have received eternal life, the important thing is; do we have it?

The real issue at stake was, who was Jesus really? If he were casting out spirits by the finger of God, thus demonstrating the power of God, then their denial of him was a serious matter. Apparently, some others among them also cast out evil spirits, which was acceptable with the religious leaders. What bothered the elders was that Jesus constantly referred to God as being his father. This was a bone of contention because if they accepted him then they had to accept that he was, in fact, the Christ. All efforts to discredit him were based upon this need to avoid validating him. Nothing he could do or say

would change their minds. Some desired a sign from him, but granting them a sign would only increase their condemnation.

This discussion led to another point to ponder. What happens to a person who has had an evil spirit cast out of him? Can he then stay free of the evil spirit?

Jesus said, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils." (Luke 11:22) This seems to teach that some people being of strong dispositions can guard their own hearts and resist some demonic attacks. In fact, it is my belief that natural man, even unaided by the Holy Spirit, can resist demonic possession. In my judgment, many people who are not Christians have successfully avoided this awful condition simply because they are strong. This, however, is only good to a point. What happens when a spirit is able to overcome the strong man? This can occur when people are experiencing stress, or traumatic shock. Some people, as a result of these experiences, go into a deep depression that leaves them vulnerable to a demonic attack upon them. Others may go into a rage and while in that state of being are open to evil, thus becoming an easy target for demonic activity.

Human spirits unaided by the presence of the Holy Spirit are easy targets of evil. We who are Christians are assured that Christ is in us and that he is greater than he who is in the world (Satan). We, therefore, have this confidence that when we abide in Christ, we are safe. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit guarding our hearts, we are playing a dangerous game. Once a demonized person has been liberated by the power of God, if he goes unprotected will be vulnerable to ending up worse than he was before.

Is it a valid sense of security that says that Christians cannot become demonized? Yes, I believe that it is so long as a Christian is living in obedience to the Lord Jesus. An incidence of incestuous immorality was recorded in I Cor. 5:1-5 that led the Apostle Paul to give the Corinthian Church instructions on how to deal with the individual who was at fault. They were to hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature could be destroyed, resulting in his Spirit being saved on the day of the Lord. I think it is fair to say that as a result, the man would become demonized. The dealings of Satan were limited to his fallen nature, or his body. What Paul said could be translated either way. When we are walking in disobedience, we are walking unprotected without the armor of God.

We are admonished to put on the whole armor of God so that we will be able to withstand the attacks of the kingdom of darkness. This is a generally understood and accepted truth, but the problem that raises controversy is, does this mean that a Christian can become demon possessed? Demon possession is not a Biblical term. The words that refer to this condition more accurately imply affliction or torment, as being under the power or spell of a demon. The idea that Satan and Jesus could co-exist in the interior of a human body is not a Biblical picture. Where the demon is physically located is not, in my judgment, the important issue. The important issue is; are we ready to stand when evil attacks come against us? Who is occupying the house (our heart)? To be cleansed of evil and then to leave the house unoccupied is a dangerous condition. The person who has been cleansed may stand guard quite well, watching carefully not to commit sins that will open his heart's door to evil, however, if a strong enough or subtle enough challenge comes along, he will fail.

It is well to remember that demons have the ability to afflict us in ways that are sometimes difficult to detect. Vigilance is necessary if we are to avoid being victimized by them. Concerning vigilance Hebrews 5:13-14 says; "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." It is our understanding of the teachings about righteousness that gives us the strength to do battle. We are able to draw upon the solid teachings that are directly applicable in our struggle against the attacker, skillfully using the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and



after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Eph 6:10-18)

The attacks of Satan can come from rulers, as in governments of the world. This could also be a reference to fallen angels who were in positions of authority before they fell. (See Jude 6) In such a case our battle would then be with governments who are under the domination of these fallen angels. They can come from authorities, (powers KJV), referring to evil angels, perhaps a lower rank angel that would work through whatever authorities they could dominate such as government officials, administrators, employers, and even parents or other family members. Another means of attack come from powers of this dark world that could be a reference to the occult or cultic bondage exercised through false religions, and cults that pervert the true gospel of Christ Jesus. Still others come from spiritual forces of evil, the remaining horde of evil beings, or demons. It doesn't matter how the battle is being waged, the victory is well within our grasp as we are equipped with all the appropriate armor for the battle. We do not stand in the armor alone, however; we stand in the power of his might.

It is a futile effort to try to stand against a demonic attack without the power of God enabling us to do battle. We not only can survive the battle being protected by the armor, but we are able to destroy the enemy with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

The armor protects us, covering all vital parts. Our feet, or in application, our daily walk (daily life) and with the preparation of the gospel of peace, keeping us in a non-aggressive attitude. In other word, we don't seek out the battle Satan must bring it to us. The belt of truth protects our loins so that we are able to keep our sexual life acceptable before God. The breastplate of righteousness guards our hearts. Our affection for the righteousness of God keeps us from embracing evil desires. Our head is covered with the helmet of salvation, or the knowledge that it is by grace we are saved. We have a shield of faith in one hand, and a sword in the other. One turns away the arrows of false accusations, temptations, wrong teachings that weaken us, betrayals and all such like, and the other enables us to destroy the attacker (The demons, not the people they are using.), with the truths of the word of God.

Once the Lord has cleansed us it is vitally important to invite Jesus to live in us. With his presence within, and his power (the Holy Spirit) enabling us we are able to guard our hearts against all aggressors.

## **Chapter Fifty-one**

### **Let the Light in Us Be True Light**

Luke 11:27-36

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."

He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. The

men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.

"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

On what basis do we give honor? Is the honor we show to one another given because we see some spiritual condition of value, or is it because we value what they are doing, saying, or what positions they hold?

A woman who was admiring Jesus declared that the mother of Jesus was blessed to which Jesus responded, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28)

Jesus had been ministering in the region of Galilee for some time now, but the evidence of change was apparently lacking in the lives of the people. After all is said and done, if the result of any ministry is not seen in changed lives, then the value that those receiving have placed upon it is in question. Jesus then went on to warn those hearing that they were standing in danger because; a day of judgment was coming. There were those cities in history that received far less evidence of the reality of the Kingdom of God and had repented. They were now the standard of judgment as to what response could be expected.

There is a rule of judgment that says, the more we know, the more accountable we become. To ignore our responsibility to the truth we hold is to place ourselves in a position of jeopardy. Jesus is calling attention to the fact that there is a judgment that is taking place and that, when the conditions for punishment are evidenced, judgment will be rendered. He called the generation to which he spoke, a wicked generation, because they asked for a sign when all the while he was demonstrating the heart of God to them in healings, deliverance, and even raising the dead.

Jesus then went on to explain what righteousness looks like when it is seen. Light and righteousness are often used to communicate the same ideas in the scriptures. It is God's intention that his role models be in a visible place. They are living examples, giving visual instruction to those around them.

Jesus also stated that our eye is the lamp of our body, implying that if we are to be a role model, first we must be receiving the light of truth into our inner man. We don't have light in ourselves; it must be received. If then our eyes are not receiving the right kind of light, the light we have in us will really be darkness! This would be a confusing statement if we didn't understand that Satan is an angel of light. Yet we know that Satan is really darkness to the extreme.

How then can Satan be the source of light? Satan uses God's truth in deceptive ways. His goal is to deceive mankind into believing that he is the source of truth or that truth can come from somewhere else than from God through Jesus who is the light of the world. If light is not coming directly from God, it is then being bent or perverted. All truth has God as its source. Some people believe that there is secular truth and there is religious truth. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Oh, but you say; aren't two plus two four, no matter what your religion? No. Not really, four is four because God has arranged it so. First, God created the mathematical systems that regulate this realm of creation, thus making matter, energies and life forms possible. To say, two plus two equals four without acknowledging God as its creator, is to bend or pervert that truth. This is the foundation upon which secularism is built. Science today is, for the most part, perverted truth because it does not acknowledge God. Therefore, the light (truth) in it is really darkness!

Beware that your eyes are good; that is to say, beware that you receive truth through good eyes. Good eyes discern that what is being seen or spoken may be incomplete or perverted truth. What are parents to do about the education of their children? Since it is not always possible to control what is being taught, supplementing their education with proper teachings is necessary. Parents can instruct their children that anything that is taught to them that does not acknowledge God is incomplete if not a lie. No child is too young to be taught to discern between good and evil. If we are able to adequately discern between good and evil, the light we have inside of us will be Godly light, therefore, no darkness will exist in us. We will be completely lighted with every part fully lit.

## Chapter Fifty-two

### How Important is Tithing?

Luke 11:37-42

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you."

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."

Have you ever invited someone to dinner only to have him or her insult you? Well, that is what happened to the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner. I don't think he had any idea that he was about to hear a very direct sermon about all the sins of the Pharisees. When Jesus sat down to eat, he neglected to wash his hands, a very serious error in the minds of the Pharisees. They didn't wash their hands before meals as a matter of cleanliness, but rather to fulfill the traditions of the Pharisees. Deliberately neglecting washing was an insult to the system. The surprise the Pharisee felt was likely nothing to how he felt when Jesus got through with his presentation of truth. I don't know if Jesus ever did get that meal, but one thing is certain, the Pharisee had an opportunity to consider the value of the traditions of the Pharisees.

In response to the surprise of the Pharisee, Jesus explained that the inside of a man's heart is more important than what dirt might be on the outside. Judging by outward appearances is normal to those who lack in spiritual understanding. The Pharisees were big on ritualistic cleanliness, but in the more important issues of the heart; they were totally lacking.

Jesus began with the issue of greed. The Pharisees taught tithing to the extreme, to which Jesus gave approval, however; they lacked in the more important issues of compassion and love of God. Tithing without justice is hypocritical. Tithing should be a practice that springs out of a heart of devotion to God as part of worship to him. Fanatical calculations in what we tithe upon, such as mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, as was the case with the Pharisees, should be because we love God so much that we don't want to leave any area of devotion undone.

The tithe is God's part of our income. To fail to give it to him is to bring judgment upon ourselves. Some people wait until they think they can afford to tithe, an exercise in futility. If we wait until we can afford it, we probably will never do it. Failure to tithe means that God's blessing will not be upon our finances. In fact, in Malachi we read, "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Mal. 3:8-10)

Perhaps this was the scripture that was the catalyst of the teachings of the Pharisees about tithing. It is probably the favorite text in the Bible of anyone who wishes to instruct people on tithing. However, there are more important issues than tithing. Jesus didn't condemn them for their preaching of tithing, but rather, for their lack of understanding of the more serious issues. In the book of Malachi, God dealt with several other issues that were prerequisites to tithing.

First he reminded them that God chose them as recipients of his love. He could have chosen someone else, but he didn't; he chose them. They were his very own children, yet they failed to honor him as their God. The offerings they brought to him were ceremonially unclean, and defiled.

The priests were not honoring God in their conduct and teachings. They were showing partiality and allowing injustice.

They were breaking faith with the wives of their youth, not honoring their marriage vows by divorcing them, and marrying women who worshipped foreign gods.

They had twisted righteousness to mean that evil was somehow good. I have encountered this attitude in the community in which I live. Some of the ministers in this town believe that homosexuality should be allowed. They say that the ministry of a church is to affirm people, therefore homosexuals should be allowed in their churches and that they should be made to feel comfortable. Our society is determined to make everyone in it feel comfortable today. We have become like Israel when Malachi was sent to them, we worry more about offending someone than we do about offending God.

All of these issues were in Malachi before God spoke to them about tithing. When Jesus went to the Pharisees house, he had more on his mind than food. He had a message to deliver, and doing the will of his Father was more important than eating. He didn't worry about offending him (on judgment day lots of people will be offended) but their cries of anguish won't save them. If the Pharisee took heed to the words of Jesus, he would be spared the anguish of hell fire. In the end what Jesus gave him was of more value than the meal that was being offered.

## **Chapter Fifty-three**

### **Woe to you Pharisees**

Luke 11:43-54

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."

"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all."

"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Continuing the discourse at the Pharisee's house, Jesus laid down issue after issue leaving no stone unturned. The tension between Jesus and the opposition was becoming more direct and open. Jesus was not sparing words or feelings as he launches an assault upon these hypocritical leaders and teachers. He likened them to unmarked graves, dead that is, but camouflaged to look normal. They were supposed to

be examples of godliness, but it wasn't possible because they had lost sight of what godliness looks like. They were roll models of hypocrisy.

Whenever worship becomes ritualistic, displays of godliness no longer spring from a heart that loves God. These men were interested in wealth and honor more than pleasing God.

The reaction to the teachings of Jesus was that he was insulting them! Yet, he could have responded, "No insult intended. If what I am saying fits, then repent."

As Jesus proceeded, his words became an indictment. It was evident that they were not going to repent, so he began building a case against them. He spoke about how they were building tombs for the prophets that had been killed by their forefathers. Ironically, in doing so they were admitting guilt. It was like paying blood money to the survivors of a crime they were a party to.

These men were not only guilty before God, but were standing in the way of those who wanted to know God. People ought to be able to look to the clergy as examples of godliness. Those who minister should be pointing the way to fellowship with God. These men were like picketers who demonstrate in front of a business establishment. They will not enter, and they don't want others to enter either. That is what happens when those who are looked to as examples, refuse God. They become guilty, not only of the crimes they commit, but of the ones others commit as a result of their influence.

Building tombs for the prophets was an expression of the guilt they felt for the crimes of their forefathers. Instead of repenting, they were memorializing the victims. The same spirit of rejection of truth was in their hearts that was in the hearts of their forefathers. Nothing had really changed, they were just trying to compensate for their sins, much like a man who brings flowers to his wife after hurting her in some way, it's supposed to make up for the sin. People who believe that, getting by the justice of God is a matter of balancing the good and evil in their lives express the same idea. They believe that if they do enough good it somehow compensates for the bad. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God only overlooks the sins of those who genuinely repent, putting their full trust in the Lord.

Jesus accused the experts of the law of taking away the key to knowledge. They did not wish to enter and were opposing those who would.

What is the key to knowledge, you may ask? First we need to understand what the knowledge is that Jesus was talking about. Searching through the scriptures reveals that knowledge is not merely possessing information. The knowledge spoken about is knowledge of "the truth," and the prerequisite of gaining it is repentance. (2 Tim. 2:25) The truth that we are to have knowledge of is salvation, Christ, God, and all the mysteries that are hidden in Christ that pertain to eternal life. We might say it this way, "Christ is the key since all pure knowledge is hidden in him, and the way to be a part of him is through genuine repentance."

Thus we see that it is not merely possessing knowledge of eternal matters that counts. In 2Tim. 2:25 Paul instructs Timothy on how to handle people who possess knowledge of the scriptures but lack true understanding of these matters. It is only knowledge revealed and understood by the Spirit that qualifies as true knowledge.

Knowledge didn't originate with the logic of man, and it will never be adequately understood by that means either. There is, therefore, a Biblical distinction between just knowing something and having that knowledge ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. Col 1:9-10 says, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."

This knowledge is given to us as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as he opens our hearts to the understanding about our need of Christ, and who he really is, thus enabling us to repent, or turn away from, all the sins and inadequate ideas of the world.

The key of knowledge is repentance that opens the door to the realms of understanding. The Pharisees were taking the key away from the people by their teachings and attitude that all was well. When people are taught that all that is needed is to adhere to some code of ethics, do the best they can,

and that sin is not really something that they should turn away from, the key of knowledge has been removed.

Every person must come to the knowledge of God and repent if they are to have eternal life. Those who resist this process either as members of some religious order or as outsiders to Christianity are taking away the key of knowledge.

## Chapter Fifty-four

### Who Will We Live For?

Luke 12:1-5

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

When the Israelites were given instructions on how to prepare the sacred bread used in worship, it was always to be unleavened bread. In this passage of scripture, we are given the reason it should not be used; yeast represents hypocrisy. The worship of God is always to be without hypocrisy. Mixing the ways of the world with our walk with God results in a life of duplicity.

The philosophy of the world is shortsighted, only considering what belongs to this realm. Its goals are peace, possessions, respect and happiness. There are natural enemies to the fulfillment of these pursuits because we live in a cursed world.

We have a nature that is selfish, greedy, irresponsible, and cowardly. Our enemy may be our neighbor who believes his boundary includes what is ours, or it may be natural forces such as disease, famine, earthquakes, floods or storms.

The Philosophy of the Christian involves a heavenly vision, seeing all that exists as being temporary, and therefore held loosely. He believes in the provision and care of his heavenly Father and sees his neighbor as one to be honored and respected. He sees boundaries as insignificant when his neighbor is in need of what is his. He is generous and kind, and always believes that God is the source of his supply. Whereas, the worldly person is grasping, groping, pushing and shoving his way through life, the Christian is contented with what is provided by the hand of the Lord. These philosophies can't be mixed; to try to do so is to cause confusion, frustration and anxiety.

The philosophy of the Christian breaks down when fear is present. Therefore Jesus said that we are not to fear those who can destroy the body, but rather to fear him who can cast us into hell. Fear is a terrible enemy. It robs us of our peace, joy and hope. It undermines our faith, and takes its power from

the philosophy of the world. The Christian who is living by the philosophy of the world is a Christian who is filled with contradictions and confusion. He doesn't know whether to trust the Lord or his own ability to manipulate what is under his power. If he fears losing his life, he will lose contact with the one who can save it. If he fears losing his health, his fear becomes an enemy of his health. If he fears losing his possessions, he will become miserly losing God's blessing upon his resources.

Faith, on the other hand, releases us from fear of losses. Faith is founded upon our belief in a benevolent God who loves us and cares about us, always planning a future for us that leads us into a life of fulfillment and joy. Our joy, however, is found in heavenly values.

Fear of the disapproval of others is part of our natural state. When fear of disapproval involves our relationship to Jesus, it becomes eternally important. There are sins that are sins of the flesh, that is, sins that pertain to actions that benefit our physical well-being. There are also sins of the soul, that is, sins that involve our attitudes, philosophies, beliefs, drives and goals. And there are sins of the spirit that involve our worship of God. Rejection of Jesus as our Savior is a deadly sin eternally. Being ashamed of Jesus before men is also a serious, if not deadly, sin.

If we are to fear, therefore, we are to fear God, not man. People are insignificant when compared to God. Death is only an enemy to those who value this life. Hypocrisy is mixing these values. If our hearts are pure, we will never be ashamed of our Lord.

Our futures are held within the boundaries of his will. If our association with Jesus causes some kind of problem with the law, we are to trust God to intervene in the manner that is according to his will. We will be given the words to say that will lead to the fulfillment of his purposes.

In the case of Stephen, the first martyr of the church, the purposes of God were best served by granting him a glorious entry into heaven. He became an example for all to follow in how to give up this life into the hands of God. There was nothing shameful in his going to be with the Lord, and it is only viewed as tragic by those who see this life as being something of value. Stephen didn't suffer any loss because his life was fully fulfilled, had that not been true, God would have intervened as he did in the cases of Peter being released from prison, Paul and Silas also being released, and Paul being raised from the dead when he was stoned. We can safely trust the Lord; it is a win, win; thing to do.

## Chapter Fifty-five

### Values

Luke 12:13

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Have you ever prayed that God would give you some monetary blessing? Oh, I don't mean the kind that is required so you can feed your family, the daily necessity kind of blessing. I mean the kind that would fix you up for life of ease. Some large inheritance or winning some prize; I have. I remember right after my wife and I were first married a service station chain in our town was giving away a car in weekly drawings. We would buy our gas there and watch for our number to come up, but it never did!

Jesus' answer to such a request was; watch out for greed. No, he didn't reason with the man. Nor did he ask what the circumstance of the alleged miscarriage of justice was about. Was it therefore

unimportant to Jesus? What is important to a person is not always important from the eternal point of view. If what we need is to have our needs met, then asking God to take care of our needs is all that should be sought. What does it matter, really, whether we gain an inheritance that meets it, or God blesses us in some other way, thereby meeting our need. We tend to look at inheritances as our just portion of what someone else has acquired. Therefore, if someone intercepts our position thereby gaining what we deem to be ours, bitterness, anger, and hate can easily find a home in our hearts.

Why do we focus so keenly upon methods of acquiring substance? Sometimes it may be sentimental reasons that cause our anguish. It is human to care about such things, and this gospel more than any other, focuses upon what we go through in our relationship to Jesus.

How can we be an overcomer when those around us are treating us so badly? Someone steals the heart of a person from whom we should receive an inheritance and gets what should have been ours. How unfair! It's just a legal means of stealing; we retort. But, where is the fruit of the Spirit in all of this? The deeds of the flesh are; anger, violence, hate, bitterness and such like. The fruit of the Spirit on the other hand is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22) We are commanded to live in the Spirit, and not to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Gal. 5:16) How can we accomplish this when we have been done an injustice? By only one means, let go of that which is of earthly value that you may inherit that which is of eternal value. As long as we cling to what is earthly in our hearts, we will not find the peace that comes from above.

Letting go of anger in such matters is not easy because it feels so right. After all, isn't the sin in the heart of the thief? There are, in my judgment, two kinds of sin. One I call a sin of commission, or theft as in the illustration sited. The other is a sin of reaction, how we feel about someone who has violated us. This sin of reaction is the most difficult to repent of because it is so just to feel as we do. Hating a rapist, child molester, murderer, vandal or thief seems so right, perhaps even honorable. What alternative is there? Can we forgive such a person? Should we?

Forgiveness given for a heinous crime may not help the offender, but it can bring a flood of healing into our own spirits. Most people today agree that this is true, that hate is an enemy of good physical health, mental health, and spiritual well being, yet how can it be achieved?

Someone told me about a monkey trap one day. They said that in countries where monkeys are in the wild, they can be captured by tying an object with a small opening to a stake and placing something a monkey likes inside. When the monkey reaches in and grasps what he wants, he can't get his hand back out without letting go of the object. Since that would defeat the purpose of reaching into the trap in the first place, he won't let go.

Many people are denied the peace of God in their lives because they feel justified in their sin of bitterness. Like the monkeys that are caught with their hand in the bottle, they would rather die than give up their anger.

But, you may say, how can I forgive what I can't justify? To this I ask, Does God only forgive what he can justify? If so, none of us would ever be forgiven. We are all victims of something, our sense of justice, our sentimental disposition, the pains inflicted by an unreasonable parent or spouse, or the losses we have suffered at the hand of a rapist, molester, or thief. How can we regain a noble heart when we have been so wounded?

We must do what we expect God to do when we go to him repentantly; we expect to receive a gift of forgiveness.

We should not confuse forgiveness with restoration, however. We can forgive someone for a wrong done but restoration is another matter. I have observed how God deals with sinners. Those who have received a gift of forgiveness and then return to the sin for which they have been set free, often find that though God is quite willing to forgive them, restoration to blessings does not come immediately. Nor do they find deliverance from sin as easy the second time around. The more we violate the grace of God, the more difficult it becomes to return to God's favor.

I am convinced that God is always forgiving our transgressions, but it is our heart that gets hard and our ability to repent lessens. Some people get discouraged if God doesn't immediately restore them to all



the benefits of their former relationship after violating his love and grace. Should we expect him to? Do we do that? Isn't it appropriate to require some proving? Each case is different. Sometimes God does restore people without any serious rebuke, but in other cases he doesn't. We are not expected to do otherwise.

We may forgive a child molester, but should we allow such a person access to children? No, of course not. Forgiveness and restoration are not the same. For the protection of all concerned it may be appropriate to incarcerate the person for the rest of their life. Would that be unjust? Would it be just not to when the consequences of repetition are so devastating? Should a spouse forgive their mate who has a history of abuse and unfaithfulness? Again, forgiveness and restoration are a different matter. Qualified persons must examine these cases on an individual basis. It is not always easy to determine who should be restored and who shouldn't. Forgiveness should always be a gift we give.

## Chapter Fifty-six

### Why Tear Down a Good Barn?

Luke 12:16-21

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'"

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Priorities determine our fate, don't they? When a young person begins an independent life, shouldn't he first consider a good career, or a good education so career choices can follow? Not so, according to Jesus the son of man. Seek his kingdom and all of these things will be given to you as well; he teaches. Jesus came in human form to experience life as we experience it, and to teach us how we ought to live it.

Misplaced priorities lead to all kinds of greed, covetousness and discontent, and because of it, many have suffered great sorrow. There are those, however, who have done well in their lives, accumulating great wealth, power, and fame, only to discover that it has been to no avail, as all that they have counts for nothing in the eternal scheme of things.

They fall into the snare of greed that the man that Jesus described in Luke 12:16-21 fell. In his latter years he received an abundant blessing upon his efforts. This, however, led to a serious problem; his barns were too small to hold the crop he was going to take from his fields. What should he do? His conclusion was that he would tear down his present barns and build bigger ones in which to store his great crop. Then he would tell himself to take his ease—retire, in other words—eat, drink and be merry, and live out the remainder of his life in fleshly indulgence; the reward of a life of hard work, right? Not so fast. What about divine purposes?

When the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt, they were given manna to eat. Each day they would go out and gather enough for that day, and return to their tent; their task completed. Some, however, being the ambitious type, saw an abundance of manna and decided to gather some extra and save it for tomorrow, perhaps reasoning that tomorrow may not be a good manna day. The next day,

when they went to their stash of manna, it was full of worms and had a bad odor. God had told them to only gather enough for one day, but greed was not satisfied with leaving food on the ground. If, on the other hand, those ambitious folk who gathered more than they needed, had returned to the camp looking for those who didn't do well in their manna hunt, giving them their surpluses; they would have pleased the Lord. The only day they were to gather more than what was needed, was the day before the Sabbath. They would gather food for the Sabbath and it would not become wormy or spoil.

These stories are given to us as lessons regarding God's way of seeing things. What is it that drives a workaholic? Is he driven by a legitimate need to acquire goods for some noble purpose, or is it because he has a dream of being able to afford some fleshly indulgence?

I once worked for a company where the owner said on an occasion regarding indulgence in some vice, "I can afford it." He probably could, about as much as the man in our story. He didn't fall down dead because of it, but then, he probably was already dead in trespasses and sin.

We can only wonder what would have happened to the rich man in our story, if upon seeing the great harvest, had calculated means of distribution of the surpluses to those less fortunate than he. His attitude could have been; "Praises to the Lord of the Harvest, at last I can bless others, even as I have been blessed!" As long as this man was just filling his own barns, all was well. Perhaps he was a faithful tither, and saw all this as God's blessing. Wouldn't it be his to do with as he wished? Not necessarily so. God is still concerned with the condition of our hearts, no matter if we just paid our tithe; nor is God going to look away from our hearts even if we gave an additional amount to the building fund or missions. Greed is still greed even if it is whitewashed with charitable contributions.

I am personally convinced that God would rather see a pure heart than to see a good offering. Churches too, need to examine their goals. When a church is blessed with an increase of attendance, and another congregation in the same area of like mind and spirit is struggling, wouldn't it be better to send some of the choicest folk to the other church rather than to tear down the present building and build a bigger one? Is it greed for power, or recognition, that prevents this kind of thinking? Perhaps the church needs to split, not out of anger, jealousy or contentiousness, but rather out of understanding that people grow best in smaller groups.

Many churches have become bogged down with unnecessary debts as a result of the ambitions of a few who were not content with the daily portion being received from the hand of the Lord.

There is, however, without a doubt, a time to build. Outmoded buildings that are no longer meeting the needs of a congregation, like barns that are in disrepair, need to be torn down and replaced. There are legitimate reasons to build new churches. Reasonable expansion is needed to keep a church from stagnating. Without an opportunity to grow a church will lose its evangelistic fervor.

Like people, the heart of the church must remain pure before the Lord. It is the responsibly of leadership to be vigilant so that God's purposes are served. When man's purposes dominate, the Spirit is grieved and unless it is corrected, judgment will come.

## **Chapter Fifty-seven**

### **Consider the Lily**

Luke 12:22-31

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do

not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

"Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

Jesus came to us partaking of our humanity that he might be able to understand us and guide us in our lives as humans. This world is our natural habitat, but God lives in another realm quite different from this present world. His natural habitat, if you will, has none of the negatives that we deal with every day. The limitations we experience are native to this environment. We have to deal with the constant need for food to feed our bodies and those for whom we are responsible. We endure inclement weather and have to deal with poisonous snakes, insects and germs. None of these are part of heaven. Our bodies become dirty and need to be cleansed. Over-stressing our bodies, minds or emotions causes us to suffer pain and fatigue. God doesn't have to deal with any of these factors that we are so accustomed to in this present world.

We now have an advocate with the Father who has experienced all of it, Christ Jesus. He has qualified himself and truly understands us. He is also qualified to instruct us, and in this book of Luke we find practical instructions for life that work.

"Do not worry," he said, then he gives the reason why it is not appropriate, "love." God loves us and is constantly caring for us. We are under the watchful eye of God at all times. No circumstance escapes his notice. The Lord not only tells us not to worry about such things as food and raiment, but also provides an argument as to why we shouldn't worry.

He reasons with us; aren't we of far greater value than birds that can't fall to the ground without his notice?

We struggle to understand the love God has for us, trying to put his capacity to love within the context of our capacity to love; we fall short, lapsing into unbelief. Jesus, understanding the infirmity of our faith, reasons with us, no, pleads with us to try to understand. God is not limited in the ways we are limited. We can only love based upon prerequisites that fit our culture, natures and philosophies.

In this world, possessions are an important part of our lives. We need houses to live in, cars to drive, clothes to wear, furniture to make our homes comfortable, appliances to make our chores easier, TVs and VCRs to entertain us, and yes computers to help us write books. The list goes on and on of the many things that have become so important to us in our present culture. If we are deprived of any of these things, we sometimes react as though we are being deprived of something we are entitled to possess. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Jesus selected the lily to illustrate his point. Solomon was an icon of splendor. His wealth and opulent lifestyle were legendary. Yet, for all his wealth and grandeur, Jesus said he was not clothed as beautifully as the lily.

Perhaps Jesus was standing in a field and saw a lily nearby, a perfect illustration to make his point. He may have even picked it, holding it while admiring its simple but elegant beauty. Not even Solomon could compete with this! Think of the simplicity of it all. The lily's beauty does not depend upon its environment to make it beautiful. Its beauty comes from its nature. God clothed it, and no other ornamentation is needed.

The message of Jesus is a message that challenges everything about our lifestyles, values, and those things that occupy us. Could it be that something as simple as a lily could challenge the very fabric of our lives? The relationship of God to the lily and the lily to God; is perfect in all. What glory the lily possesses; with majesty it gives glory to God. There is no need for complicated support systems to sustain it; God cares for it.

We must care for what belongs to us, for by us; God will care for what belongs to him. If we belong to God, will he take care of us? It seems that as long as we are worrying about our own lives; God will allow us to provide for ourselves. When we cast our care upon him, he will then care for us.

Why do we complicate something so simple as love and care? Is it not our unbelief that causes us to fear? What if God's idea about what we need is not the same as our idea? If we want to live in his care and experience peace with him, we will surrender to his will; adopt his value system as our own trusting his love, integrity, and character; knowing that he will not give us a serpent if we ask for a fish.

God wants us to love and trust him. Without a relationship of trust, there can't be depth of fellowship, nor can we leave temporal concerns and accept eternal values in their place. "Consider the lily," Jesus said; from it we learn so much about relationship with God.

## Chapter Fifty-eight

### Treasure in Heaven

Luke 12:32-34

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

We are rich! The kingdom belongs to us! We are co-inheritors of all things. Paul said, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe." (Eph 1:18-19)

Knowing what great value it is to be found in Christ; we can well afford to forsake all earthly concerns. Everything we have in this world is temporary in nature. When we die, we leave all the substances of this world behind. It is only that part that is eternal in nature that will remain. All deeds done in the body that are for earthly concerns will perish, but what is done out of a pure love for Jesus and for those to whom we are sent, will be saved for eternity.

Selling all that we have and giving to the poor may to some seem foolish, but in the light of eternal values, it is the smartest thing a person can do. This is one of the ways we convert that which represents our life's endeavors from the temporal to the eternal. So many of this world's efforts are consumed upon the needs of living. It is only possible to salvage that part that is above the necessities of life for eternal purposes. Giving to the poor is giving to the Lord when it is given out of a desire to please him.

Where our treasure is, our heart is; is a truth that is undeniable. We labor to provide for those we love, and if our heart is centered in the world, we will labor long and hard to acquire those things that are pleasing to them and us. I am convinced that possessing things of the world in and of itself is not evil. It's a matter of practicality. Owning things is quite different from things owning us. The real issue is our heart. What is it that is important to us? Are we longing for our heavenly home or are we longing for something of this world? What value system do we live by? Do we see each day as an opportunity to invest something in the eternal kingdom of God? Perhaps it's only a word of encouragement that we are able to give today; is that unimportant?

Often, in light of the kingdom, big victories are the result of what may seem like insignificant words or events. We tend to underestimate the importance of seemingly incidental events of life. Just a smile when needed by a discouraged person, can be life giving in nature. Giving to someone a sense that you believe in him or her is like throwing a lifeline to a drowning person.

It is so futile to labor for what is of the earth; thieves steal, storms destroy, sickness requires care that takes all our savings; people we love die untimely deaths; fires, earthquakes, and storms destroy our possessions. Some people have placed great faith in the system of the world to provide for them in the future. They have placed money in savings accounts, made investments, bought insurance plans, but there is no guarantee that any of it will be there for us when the time comes to retire. Banks fail, insurance companies go broke, politics change, or we may die before we receive any benefit from our efforts.

How tragic it is to spend a lifetime laboring for what can perish in an hour. Jesus said, "Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." (Luke 12:33) What wisdom Jesus spoke to us. Those who have laid up their treasure in heaven, when suffering lose in this world, get up and live on; knowing the real treasure of their life is still secure. It is of great comfort to know that our treasures are safe. When others are devastated by some loss of possessions or loved ones, those who trust in Jesus allow their emotions to be expressed, but having grieved, pickup the pieces that remain and go on in uninterrupted peace. This alone is a great treasure, one that cannot be taken from us.

## **Chapter Fifty-nine**

### **The Master Will Serve**

Luke 12:35-40

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, God has revealed himself to man, but the revelation of Jesus as the servant God was taken to new and wonderful heights in this revelation of the nature of God! What is revealed in these few verses of scripture is profound because we see Jesus, God Creator, doing for his servants what only the lowliest of servants in human orders would be called upon to do.

That which is considered trivial, menial, mundane, humiliating, and otherwise distasteful was the work of slaves. Washing feet and serving guests were tasks assigned to those unfortunate individuals. The master of a great house would position himself in a prominent place to assure that all the details of hospitality would be carried out, making his guests as comfortable as possible.

Not only do we see an astonishing display of humility in the life of Jesus and in this prediction of his coming glory, but we also see the redemptive work of Christ taken to another level. There is no greater glory than that of a slave! This truth is not recognized in this world; it is kingdom of heaven truth. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and as such he is the slave of the church.

Oh, please do not think me disrespectful in asserting that he is the slave of the church, because, quite the contrary, I am in awe of him. He is not a slave because someone forced him into this role. It is by choice he serves, and by necessity.

We are like street urchins brought into the palace of the great king. Our dress and behavior are uncouth and out of place, therefore, much is needed to make us presentable before our Father in heaven. None other than our Lord Jesus is looking after this work of transformation. This work, for the most part, is already underway and is being performed by the Holy Spirit as he works in and through the church. We too, on occasion, are a part of this work, being used as vessels through which the Spirit works.

The fact that Jesus is serving the church does not mean that he is under our command. He is not. His orders originate in the heart of the Father and are carried out voluntarily. We are the objects of his care, and his redemptive work is to make us presentable for what lies ahead. Those who have qualified themselves to participate with him in this work are very special in the eyes of the Lord.

The picture before us in this story of a wedding banquet is unique because, those who are waiting were not at the wedding feast, they were apparently his servants, waiting for his return. They were to be dressed and ready for his return so that they could immediately open the door for him. Normally their task would be to wait on him serving him with whatever his needs might require. However, when he comes, he will have them all sit down and he will serve them!

I would hesitate to assign too much significance to the fact that in the story these servants were not at the wedding feast, rather, I assign significance to the fact that Jesus will dress in the clothes of a servant and serve those who have served him! It is the attitude and heart of the King that is of significance in this story. We do not serve a God who lords it over us, as human kings would do. Rather, we serve a God who is intensely interested in our every thought and deed, who loves us intensely, and has great aspirations for us as dear children.

The main focus of Luke 12:35-40 is upon the need for us to be ready. The theme is that the master is coming and that the servants must be watchful. He likens the kind of watchfulness needed as being like one guarding against a thief. Letting down one's guard will result in loss, as the thief will come when he least expects him. So it is with the coming of Jesus, he will come at a time when he is not expected to return, therefore, we are to be vigilant and ready. Our Lord will honor faithfulness in service when he returns, and guarding against thieves stealing away the precious treasures of knowledge, understanding, and application of the teachings of the kingdom will result in being ready for his return. Guarding the king's house is the same as being ready for his return.

Satan is always lurking nearby any work of God. His business is to distract us from duty with temptations to indulge our fleshly natures, thus diluting our effectiveness. He tempts us to soften our message to allow for carnality and preoccupies us with some insignificant doctrinal point. Better still; if he can stir up fighting among the servants, he will be able to plunder the master's house.

Our duty is to be ready when he comes. It is time to repent and return to duty if we have fallen for any of the tricks of Satan.

What joy awaits those who are faithful. Experiencing the love and service of the King is an overwhelming experience. When we see him we will be like him. If we are true servants now, we will discover how like us he is! If we are willing to lay aside all the garments of pride and position and humble ourselves in loving involuntary service, we will be qualified for this love feast planned by our Lord.

## **Chapter Sixty**

### **A Hard Master**

## Luke 12:46-53

“The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.”

“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

It's difficult to read passages that deal with the reality of divine justice. The message of the love of God has an appeal to the nature of humanity. In Luke 12:35-40 discussed in the previous chapter, we see a view of Christ demonstrating the kind of humility with his people unheard of in natural behaviors. Now we are reading the flip side of God nature, demanding faithful service, relentless in the execution of justice, without mercy to those who have rejected mercy, and warning against an unrealistically optimistic view of life as a believer.

We have been granted a privilege not given to fallen angels; grace. Grace opens the heart of God in forgiveness of sins without considering how great or many they have been. With the grant of grace comes an accountability demand that must not be ignored, however; though the verses about being beaten with stripes are part of the previously quoted parable, the lesson is no less important. The assigned punishment should be taken as a warning, though the punishment for disobedience may not be a literal physical beating, yet punishment will be exacted. The warning for knowingly disobeying is even more severe, than for an ignorant transgressor.

Many who walk in disobedience in areas of their lives, reap difficulties that are designed to bring correction to them. Those who persevere in wrongdoing will often reap the consequences in broken relationships, health or other unhappy circumstances. These consequences may be natural cause and effect or divine judgment, but no matter, the pain is real and the remedy requires repentance.

Jesus had said, previous to our text:

“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.” (Luke 12:42-46)

It is, in my judgment, a mistake to take warnings like this to lightly. Many have assumed that God's grace is a license to live half-heartedly, not considering our daily lives as being important. I have difficulty understanding that kind of unthankfulness. Grace is so valuable that it should be treated with awe and respect. If we are grateful we will express our gratitude to the Lord in faithfully pursuing excellence in our walk with him.

Grace should be held with the greatest care. It is our sacred trust. Treating it trivially is to flirt with disaster. It is likened to a costly pearl greatly under-priced, a treasure hid in a field, worth far more than all a man could pay, yet some undervalue what God has so freely given them, living carelessly, and indifferently, assuming God will understand; after all isn't he a God of Love?

# Chapter Sixty-one

## Peace on Earth?

Luke 12:49-53

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

We are living in a war zone; Satan and God are locked in deadly battle. We are both participants in the struggle and the prize sought. God wants sons in his image, and Satan wants perverted sons in his image. Satan may have thought he won when Adam sinned, but God had a plan Satan knew nothing about, it was substitutionary sacrifice, with a completed man in view. From this caldron of pain, struggle, sin, violence, and despair, men are emerging, having put on Christ; they stand in the full stature of Christ, robed with his righteousness. Adam was clothed in innocence in the garden, but sin took that covering away and he saw that he was naked. He tried to cover himself, but to no avail. God then revealed his plan providing man with a covering that was also a promise of a coming sacrifice for sin, and a grant of new clothing that would qualify him to walk in the courts of heaven, with no memory of sin remaining.

Jesus came to bring fire on the earth. This is a reference to the coming Holy Spirit who would occupy the hearts of those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ as savior. John the Baptist proclaimed, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8) Jesus longed for this fire to be released in the hearts of mankind. It is a cleansing fire, a purifying fire and a fire that ignites the heart of man into a blazing worship of his God. It is a fire that causes those so filled to be flaming witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. This fire is also a divisive fire; a fire that causes tension between those filled and those who are resisting the Holy Spirit.

Jesus predicted that his message and the resultant experiences were not going to bring peace on the earth. He predicted that it would result in division in the most cherished relationships on earth, that it would come between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Peace is what everyone wants, but the gospel is not the means by which peace comes. There can only be true peace, after all those who do evil have been judged, and the earth has been cleansed. Then peace will fill the earth; there will be one God and Father of all, one Lord Jesus, one Spirit prevailing in the hearts of all men, the Holy Spirit. Until then, we live in a war zone with the forces of evil alienating themselves against those who hold to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the affairs of nations, those who are of any spirit when in control will persecute those who are of a different spirit. In the United States, Christians have been in control of law, government, and national discourse from the very beginning of our history. Until recent years we have been in control of education as well. Satan's strategy to destroy that position of power was to take over the educational systems and thereby undermine the foundations upon which this government has been so successfully built. As the unbelieving population has grown in numbers, so sinners have become more bold and open in their lives of sin. As the balance of influence comes closer to parity the war intensifies between God and Satan, good and evil, and peace and war. The war is not necessarily a war of outward violence, but it is a war of spirit against Spirit.

We as a nation are about to have another national election. The result of this election, perhaps more than any other in our history, will be a reflection of the spiritual values of this nation. We currently have a young handsome charismatic president who is also known as a devious cunning liar, who will stop at nothing to get his way. He has been accused of crimes such as drug running, money laundering, misuse of government money and power, as well as sexual sins. There have been a number of deaths of people



who were witnesses to the alleged crimes that have been declared suicides, but many people feel sure they were, in fact, murders. Knowledge of this has been circulated among those in the media as well as to all lawmakers in Washington DC, yet it has caused little stir, why? Could it be that this man is closer to being a reflection of the hearts of the people of this nation than those who uphold righteousness? How far have we fallen? A short while ago this would have been cause to have such a man removed from public office and yet the outcome at this time is not certain. What will happen in the election will be a reflection of the condition of the war that is being waged for the souls of mankind.

As a nation of people we are walking down the same road that the nation of Israel walked when they allowed the influence of heathen nations to coexist with them within their borders. They grew in numbers and influence as more and more of the Israelites abandoned the ways of the Lord and began to experiment with idolatry. Idolatry allowed them the freedom to express their sinful natures without condemnation, so to sin they went. This resulted in the anger of the Lord being kindled because these people were under covenant requirements to be faithful to the Lord. This relationship was likened to a marriage. Israel became unfaithful to the Lord and God judged them for it.

We too began as special people of God. Can we expect to get by with opening our borders to people of different religious persuasions? We have been allowing them to come and the result is that our own understanding of the faith we have embraced is now being undermined and polluted. Where all of this will end I do not know, but this much is certain, what we sow we reap. The war will continue; sometimes it may look like righteousness is winning, but if the battle is not won on the front of education and public discourse, eventually evil will prevail.

We are not destined to see peace in this world at this time; yet, peace is in our hearts. Worldly peace is the condition that exists when all is well with those around us, but that is not the peace Jesus gave; his peace is an inner serenity that is the result of our walk of obedience. In Jesus we have peace with God, and the result is that we have peace with those who are of like mind and spirit. The day will come when there will be peace on earth, but Jesus will have come back before that is realized. He will come, and so will peace.

## **Chapter Sixty-two**

### **Fix It, or Pay**

Luke 12:54-59

He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

"Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

Everything that is happening to humanity is the result of spiritual conditions within the collective hearts of humanity. What we hear on the evening news, or read in the newspaper are symptoms of what we believe about God, the world in which we live and ourselves. Can we accurately diagnose the symptoms of our day, discerning the truth about ourselves? When we see violence within our midst is it not because we lack peace within? When sexual lust is being openly displayed as an acceptable life style, is it not because we have lost our love and reverence for a holy God?

Shouldn't we judge ourselves as a society to see why we have accepted tolerance of evil as a virtue instead of standing against evil, seeing it as an enemy within? Sin within a nation is like cancer in a

body. Sooner or later, unless a successful cure has been rendered, those infected will pay the ultimate price. Cancers, we are told, have environmental causes.

Sin likewise is induced environmentally. What causes people to indulge in destructive vices is the availability of the activity. If a person is placed in total isolation, the only sins he will commit are sins within his own mind and heart. He will never get drunk, smoke dope, commit adultery, smoke cigarettes or steal. He may want to do these things, but if they are not available to him or if he doesn't know they exist; he will not partake of them.

When sin is available, temptation is also present. Temptation is held in check by the restraints of conscience. When an activity is condoned, conscience is removed. Whether or not it is an acceptable activity is not based on whether society condones it, however. In our morally liberal world, our youths are left unprotected from the ravages of sinful living. We have done our youths a gross injustice by allowing such moral liberalism to flourish within our midst. Walls of restraint are good when they protect us from an enemy. If we see sin as an enemy then we will build fortifications to protect our children and us.

The wages of sin is death, declares the word of God. Who can argue with that statement? When we allow sinful lifestyles within our midst, we all pay the penalty. We allowed the tobacco industry to flourish within our nation and the result has been an enormous toll of health problems that have cost smokers and non-smokers alike as medical costs have been born by family members, insurance companies, and government. In some way, we all pay when sin is allowed. When adultery is committed there is an immediate loss of closeness with the married partner. This may be ever so subtle at first, but eventually it will devastate the marriage if allowed to continue. Broken marriages cost all of us in the need for special care for the victims. If the children do not become wards of the state or welfare recipients, they still are often left either with the lack of moral restraint or psychological problems that can require a lifetime of treatment. Sexual promiscuity costs all of us in the treatment of venereal disease, aids or the host of social and spiritual problems that follow such a lifestyle.

We are people, when left to our unrestrained desires, who will indulge in vices no matter what the consequences. Some people argue that we are free people and therefore should be free to do as we please. It doesn't take a very brilliant mind to see the folly of such thinking, however. The Apostle Paul admonished us, not to use liberty as an occasion to sin. Until we develop moral responsibility, we cannot be trusted with unrestrained opportunities to sin. The purpose of laws is to restrain people from doing what they might do without laws. To say that we should not legislate morality is a contradiction to good sense. The proper role of law and government is to protect those members of our society who are young or weak. We are derelict in our duty as people, if we fail to perform this role.

Jesus taught a commonsense approach to legal matters. If you offend someone, settle the matter quickly, otherwise the law may be called in and then the results will be in the hands of others. If you get into trouble because you were in the wrong, fix it, don't try to pray your way out of it, God isn't obligated to help you. If you pray for forgiveness, he will forgive you, but you will still have to pay for what you did. There have been occasions when people have experienced divine intervention even in such matters, but God is not obligated to help us if we knowingly violated the rules of righteousness.

## **Chapter Sixty-three**

### **Repent, or Be Cut Down**

## Luke 13:1-9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"

"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Christians are very privileged people, walking in the daily care and counsel of Father God. There is a truth, however, that even good people have bad things happen to them. Bad, that is, when judged in the court of human thought. I have heard it said that life is like delicate needlework with every event of life somehow connected. The overall pattern is not seen from the bottom of the work, therefore, since we are looking at the reverse side, all that is seen is a maze of threads running every which way, making no sense at all.

One day some people were talking to Jesus and told him about what Pilate had done to some Galileans. Jesus apparently picked up on an attitude that these must have been very wicked people to have such a horrible thing happen to them. He responded by saying to them that they should repent or they too would perish. Jesus didn't say that sin was not connected in some way to what had happened, of course it did, all bad things that happen are because humanity is lost in sin.

Some of what people suffer is because sin is in the hearts of others. If we as a society allow wicked people to walk around unrestrained, bad things are bound to happen, and sometimes to very good people. What happens in this world is the result of the presence of two opposing parts of our nature. We, as human beings have both good and evil desires. Laws are created to control the evil side of our natures. It's the good side of our natures that produces humanitarian deeds, says no to vices, chooses loyalty over fun, and, in general, produces well-ordered lives. There is a tension within that is the result of the struggle between these opposing forces. This tension is not only seen within the psychological realm, but is also seen in nature itself. The very forces that produce the beauty of this world are also responsible for some of the greatest disasters to humanity. We live with the reality that storms, earthquakes, famines, and fires, having potential benefits, also threaten our lives.

Some people take tragedy very personally, thinking God had it in for them. This sort of thought is the result of attributing everything to a direct act of God, but they are not. God governs this world by laws, and when he is directly involved in anything that is going on, it is because he is intervening, usually as a result of the prayer of faith.

Christians are very privileged people because God is able to communicate with them through their renewed spirits, often warning them of dangers so they can either pray or change their plans, whichever is appropriate. Sometimes bad things happen to good people because they are not living close enough to the Lord to hear his voice. Had they, they would have been directed by the counsel of God. God loves his people and will do for them whatever love will allow. If the benefit of a difficult experience outweighs the pains, he will allow the difficulty.

We cannot live apart from God and expect to bear fruit. Jesus told them about a man who had a fig tree in the middle of a vineyard that didn't produce fruit. The reason it didn't produce fruit was that fig trees must be near another fig tree if it is to bear fruit. It cannot do it alone. No amount of fertilizer, cultivation or water, would cause it to produce. The vineyard should be a vineyard and a fig tree should be with other figs. If people want to bear good fruit in their lives, they too must obey these sorts of laws. Having the Spirit of life within is not enough; we also need to be with other Christians.

The Galileans who told Jesus about Pilate mixing their blood with their sacrifices thought it was because those people were so wicked, but Jesus was showing that all men are equally in need and unless

we repent and come to him we will all perish. Having two good points is not enough to make a triangle; it takes three. So it is that good people in the company of other good people don't necessarily produce good fruit. The life of a branch comes from being connected to the rest of the vine, tree or plant. Likewise, Christians must be connected to Christ as well as to one another. Jesus, and others, and you make up a triangle that will produce good fruit.

## **Chapter Sixty-four**

### **Dare We Criticize Jesus?**

Luke 13:10-17

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Opposing Jesus is a foolhardy thing to do. But then perhaps, these men were just ignorant of who Jesus really was. The source of their ignorance unfortunately was their hearts hardened by pride. The evidence that validated the ministry of Jesus was evidently discounted as trivial showmanship by at least some of those who opposed him. Their concerns were for the preservation of their religion; thus, they believed it their duty to correct him if he wandered outside the boundaries of acceptable religious practices.

Do people judge God? Do they examine his deeds, wanting to catch him in some act that would belittle him? Maybe God isn't perfect after all; they reason. Perhaps God is really the bad guy, and we are really better than him. If this is not the dialog of the mind, it certainly looks like it must be. What folly for a clay pot to say to the potter, "Why have you formed me this way?" Yet, this is the attitude many seem to have when it comes to God. They criticize God for creating them seemingly less than perfect. I have seen foolish people arrogantly question God's purposes, criticizing the conditions in the world, not understanding that these distasteful conditions are the result of sin.

Jesus had an answer for this hardhearted ruler of the synagogue. He pointed out that they were demonstrating more compassion for an animal that is tied, than they were for a woman, a daughter of Abraham, who had been bound for eighteen years. This man was blinded by his misguided sense of duty and correction brought humiliation.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath because healing is within the spirit of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is for rest and restoration; therefore, healing is an appropriate activity of the Sabbath. Man is to rest from his labor on the Sabbath, that is, his self-serving activities, so that he can rest. There are deeds of mercy that must continue, however. Do we say to

someone in need; go away this is my Sabbath? No, we shouldn't anyway. Love is an activity of the Sabbath.

Those who came to Jesus out of a heart of humility, to receive from him, were delighted with what he was doing for them. Being a critic of Jesus is to seal one's own doom. Without him we are a lost race. He alone has the key of life. He alone can give us passage into the realms of light.

There are those who have had near death experiences in which they have seen a light and felt themselves moving toward the light. They have thus concluded that they are going to heaven when they die.

Not so fast, there are also stories of people who have in the earliest stages of such an experience found themselves traveling toward the light only to suddenly start falling toward hell. Many people today are taking comfort from such ideas, thinking all will be saved, but Jesus said that we must believe in him if we are to have eternal life. Which is better, to believe in the one who is the creator of all or the ideas of inexperienced and misled people?

## **Chapter Sixty-five**

### **The Kingdom of God**

Luke 13:18-21

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."

Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Great is the mystery of the kingdom of God. The gospel is preached, someone hears, hunger begins to grow, faith emerges, and a new life in Jesus Christ begins. One more person has been added to the roll call of heaven, their name has been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That life is like a little bud that has been formed on a twig. What will it become? Will it grow into one of the main branches supporting many other branches? Each person has his own role to play. No two people are the same; each has a calling, personality, talents and responsibilities.

As the kingdom has grown, changes have taken place. Some of the original buds developed and great churches formed, and in some cases have split forming two separate branches. Some have divided again and again, each with a separate mission and each bearing new buds. Some of the oldest branches no longer produce buds, but it was through them that the younger more productive branches have developed.

Many people look at the kingdom of churches and see this diversity and conclude that churches are all fighting amongst themselves. To some degree this is true; however, if we look from a distance we will notice that all churches that have the life of Jesus flowing through them are a part of the same tree, all being connected to the same trunk, Jesus Christ.

He was the seed that had to be planted, and though he seemed to be the smallest of seeds, yet from him the whole kingdom grows. All that preceded him is now like the root system from which the present kingdom draws its strength. He was the embodiment of all that had preceded him. "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us." (John 1:14) All the promises, all the prophecies, stories about God interacting with his people, laws, psalms, and parables; all that was taught about God were gathered together forming the personality, character, mission and destiny of Jesus Christ. Like a seed that is the

product of the lives that preceded them, so Christ came as the result of all that God had done previous to this time.

Jesus used another analogy; it is like yeast mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough. The dough represents the whole world and the yeast represents the word being preached. From every nation, kindred and tribe the people of the kingdom are being gathered. A day is coming when this great kingdom will be complete. World history, as we now know it, will itself be history, and we will all gather before the throne of God, one body, complete in Christ.

## Chapter Sixty-six

### Will Everyone Go to Heaven?

Luke 13:22-30

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

The answer to the question, "will only a few be saved," is given in a passage in Revelations. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Rev 7:9-10) The question before the people that Jesus was teaching was a different one, however, "Would they be a part of the great multitude?" The danger of missing the call of God upon our lives is a very real one.

In the Old Testament we often see God doing what he wanted to do and if the people wanted to cooperate with him, fine, otherwise they became unwilling participants in his plan. The nation of Israel was chosen to fulfill a role, to bring the message of salvation to the world. They were to be the oracles of God, yet only a few were his actual mouthpieces. Being called to be the oracle of God was a high calling; however, they didn't seem to grasp the meaning of their calling.

God wanted them to be a unique nation on the face of the earth; one that he could communicate with, prosper, and bless. He wanted them to love him and live joyfully according to his commands, but they would not follow him. God used them in spite of their rebellious ways, finding a few good men to speak through, and a remnant to love him.

It was not a foregone conclusion, that just because they were called and chosen, that they would be in that final count on the Day of Judgment. In this passage in Luke 13:22-30, we see Jesus addressing this erroneous conclusion. He pointed out that there was a narrow door through which they must enter. Being a part of the nation of Israel did not mean that they were exempt from a personal participation with Jesus

to become a part of his kingdom. Pharaoh too, was chosen by God to be a part of the story, but because he hardened his heart against God, he placed himself in a position to be used by God as the object of judgment. God then went on to harden Pharaoh's heart so that all the elements of the story of deliverance could be demonstrated, because it was the story of salvation being portrayed. It wasn't until after Pharaoh himself hardened his heart that God further hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

The words of Jesus, "I don't know you or where you come from." (Luke 13:25) are words that fall upon our ears with the weight of eternal significance. These people knew Jesus, they had seen him, listened to him, and in some cases received healing from him, yet he was warning them that this is not the kind of knowing that will get a person into the kingdom of God. The knowing, that Jesus referred to, was a more intimate knowledge that begins with repentance and is followed by a life of dedicated service.

Jesus used graphic language in his description of what was going to happen on the Day of Judgment. Many of those listening would watch in horror, as they would see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, enter the kingdom and they themselves being cast out. Jesus said that there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a fearful warning.

What should we do to make sure this does not happen to us? Enter the narrow gate. Conform to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." (John 8:23-24)

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**"

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **Whoever believes in him is not condemned,** but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:14-18)

## Chapter Sixty-seven

### Nestle

Luke 13:31-35

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

There are boundaries in which all history must flow. Those boundaries have been set by the providence of God, and expressed by the mouth of the prophets. We need not fear that some catastrophic event will suddenly disrupt God's plan, it will not. Not even Herod in all his power and sin could cause anything to happen outside of those boundaries. God holds the heart of the king in his hand and turns it whatever way he so desires.

We are allowed to make choices in this world, but no choice we make effects the great plan of God. God is working out the plan of the ages and nothing will prevent its fulfillment. Jesus was not afraid of Herod. God was watching over the life of Jesus and making sure that every detail went exactly according to plan.

Jesus loved these people and the heart of God yearned for them to come to him allowing expressions of love and care. The hardness of their hearts had prevented them from responding to the call of God to come. Using the illustration of a chicken gathering her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing. Jesus went on pleading with the people to look and see that their house had been left desolate, a condition that demonstrates that God's blessing has been lifted.

Whenever people forsake the Lord, walking in their own way, troubled times are sure to come. The further a society moves away from God, the more violent, selfish, and sinful it becomes. Sins that at one time were considered horrific soon become the normal. In our present society, crimes are being committed that were unknown when I was a child. One only has to look at the evening news to see that our house has been left to us desolate. Why does this condition exist? Jesus connected desolation to the lack of nestling under the wings of God!

We see the same thought expressed in the abomination that causes desolation. The historic event that fulfilled the prediction of the abomination that causes desolation was when Antiochus Epiphanes offered a pig on the altar of the temple to his heathen god. The pig is an unclean animal because it fails the test of clean animals.

For an animal to be clean it must have a cleft hoof and chew the cud. The pig has cleft hooves but it doesn't chew the cud. According to early church writings, chewing the cud represents a life of contemplation of God. The act of nestling also expresses the same thought.

When this condition is not present in the life of a believer, desolation is the result. Jesus said, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Mat 24:15-16) Whereas, Jesus was giving a specific prophecy for a specific historic fulfillment, yet there is a principle to be received as valid instruction. When we see the abomination that causes desolation either in our society or in individual lives, flee, seek cover, brace yourself, or otherwise be prepared to witness desolation of some sort or other. No one can violate the principles of God without the anticipated results following.

Jesus said that they would not see him again until they would say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This is a principle also; acceptance of Jesus is the prerequisite of his coming to us either in our lives or at the end of our lives. We cannot be ready to meet God without acceptance of Jesus, and unless we call him blessed, we will not find him.

## **Chapter Sixty-eight**

### **Dealing With the Sin Nature**

Luke 14:1-11

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.



Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" And they had nothing to say.

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Once more, in the book of Luke, we see the ministry of Jesus being directed toward those things that we as natural people have to deal with, and the inclinations of the flesh (fallen nature) to be self-seeking.

One Sabbath day Jesus was invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee. There was a man present who was suffering in body so Jesus tested the Pharisees asking them about healing on the Sabbath. Since they either didn't know what to say, or they didn't wish to be embarrassed, they didn't reply. Jesus then healed the man.

As Jesus and the other guests were being seated for lunch, he noticed the guests selecting seats that by custom would go to honored guests. They seated themselves according to their own sense of worth or status. Jesus pointed out how dangerous a practice this could be because there could be someone present that the host wished to honor. If all the seats of honor were taken then someone who didn't belong there would be asked to step down and thus be embarrassed. It's better to take a seat well to the back and be asked to move forward than to be asked to step down.

The lesson in this story goes beyond a cultural warning concerning protocol. It speaks to us about the difference between the concepts of the world and those of Christians. Christians prefer others above themselves, think of others first, and give the best to those before themselves. It is the fallen sin nature that causes people to want to cut into line, or snap up the best parking places. I have noticed that when famous or important speakers come to town, it's often the Christians who push and shove their way to the front, seeking the best seats. Acting in such a manner is shameful. Truly it is the fallen nature that is manifesting in such actions. Churches ought to reserve the best parking places for the first time guests, and the favorite seats as well. When you go to a special meeting, if you are a Christian already and in no particular need, you should be watching for someone you can assist, helping them find a suitable seat, so they can enjoy the service.

There is a lot of greed and self-interest in all of us. Keeping it under subjection is a task that requires a daily death. Someone accused preachers who proclaim that we as Christians have two separate and competing natures of making us sort of schizophrenics, manifesting two separate personalities. That, of course, is not true, yet the battle between good and evil constantly challenges vigilance on our part. Jesus warned us to be sure that what comes from us is always good, saying that a good tree only bears good fruit and a good well only produces good water. If that is true of those things, how much more it should be true of us, yet the very fact he had to talk about it indicated it is not always so.

There is a place in Christ where all internal struggles with sin are over. Peace is the heritage of Christians. It is achieved when we understand the difference between the fallen nature and the new nature that comes from Christ enabling us to choose the nature we wish to manifest. When we know what walking in the spirit is like and choose to walk in it, we are at rest and peace. The Book of Hebrews talks about this rest and says to labor to enter into it. This sounds like a contradiction of terms, however; it is not. This kind of rest, though of the highest quality, requires vigilance to maintain since it is not at all like the worldly concept of life. This rest requires faith to maintain. Without a faith in the constant care and provision of God, we will worry, fret, covet and connive.

Christian rest is achieved when we know that we know that all is well because he is in control.

## Chapter Sixty-nine

### Don't Advertise Good Deeds

Luke 14:12-23

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'"

"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'"

"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'"

"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'"

"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'"

"'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'"

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

The way of the world is to give to those who will benefit us, be friendly to those who improve our social standing, select a church based on the status of the membership or the beauty of the buildings, thus bolstering our self-image based on those who surround us. Jesus, however, taught another way, the way of the self-sacrifice.

The value system upon which the Kingdom of Heaven is based is very different from the pride orientations of the world system. It is based on values that have to do with character, morality, justice, mercy and loyalty to righteous causes. What makes a person great, in this kingdom, is not how extrovert he is, calling attention to his good deeds, but rather, on the all seeing eye of God who never misses even a smile given out of a pure heart. God gives honor in this kingdom to those who deserve it most, those who would never be noticed except by God.

It's easy to lose the eternal benefit of deeds done on the earth. When we give, if attention is drawn to it, we have received our reward. It is for this reason that I like to avoid methods of receiving gifts that call attention to the giver. It is much better when people give their gifts in such a way that only those who must know, know. When we give to others who can give back to us, we lose the benefit of the gift we have given. Gift exchanges don't benefit us on an eternal level; they only satisfy social duty. Jesus admonished us to avoid such activities, so that we can do what benefits our eternal lives.

Someone at the table where Jesus was sitting eating commented that it will be a blessed experience for anyone to be included in the feast of God.

Jesus replied, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'"

"But they all alike began to make excuses." (Luke 14:16-17) First one and then another had what seemed to be legitimate excuses. All were involved in some activity that gave promise to some present life improvement. After all, which is better, to sit at a banquet or invest in your future? The answer to that question will depend on the values by which you live your life. If you value honoring others above your own interests, you will go to the banquet.

How many people go to church because they want to receive something from the service, the minister, or God? On the other hand, how many go because they want to be supportive of those who are serving? Which is the better motive? In the story before us, there is no indication that there was any benefit to be received from the banquet, beyond the meal being served. It was important to the man giving the banquet, however. Failure to attend was a display of contempt for what he was doing. It said, in effect, "Your interests are not important to me."

What response should the man giving the banquet give? In the story, he was angry. He then sent his servants out to gather everyone they could find, the lame, the blind, the poor, but there was still room so he sent his servants out again to the country lanes and anywhere they could find someone, and told them to compel them to come in. But concerning those who were invited he declared, not one of them would taste his banquet!

There is a day of opportunity when invitations are given. God is not pleased when contempt is shown for what he is offering. Every person should be sensitive to opportunities to show honor to the Lord and those who serve him. When someone is trying to organize an event at church, is it our first priority to work toward making it a success?

Jesus was dealing with heart issues. There are times when it is not possible to attend every service, or go to every banquet, but is it easier to ignore our responsibilities to others, than to put ourselves out to do what we can? If our hearts are right, we will do all that we can to make what others do a success.

I have observed that many people are faithful to events that they have an important role in, but when their part is over, they often leave, not showing interest in what others are doing. I can only wonder how Jesus views such attitudes.

If we are to gain eternal values, we must be willing to do whatever we do for the benefit of those in need and not seek glory for it. Then our Heavenly Father who sees in secret will reward us openly on the day when eternal values are manifest for all to see.

## **Chapter Seventy**

### **The Eternal Perspective**

Luke 14:25-35

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out."

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

This section of the discourse at the home of a notable Pharisee is the climatic conclusion of all that Jesus has been saying.

The Kingdom of Heaven is of far greater value than anything that exists in this world. Anyone who does not value it will not be a part of it.

Jesus used strong language to communicate this truth. Hate is a strong word. Jesus did not use it in the traditional meaning of the word in the English vernacular, but rather it is intended to communicate the idea that a lesser value must be discarded in view of this much greater value. Nothing can be compared to the value of eternal matters, family, friends, or indeed, one's own life!

Serving the Lord Jesus is a matter that demands all the resources we have at our command. Before we begin this journey we should look at all the facts and determine if we will be able to finish the journey. If you are unable to commit to doing so, it is better to never begin.

Hell is a very miserable place in which to live out eternity, and to be there knowing that you had begun a journey that, had you continued your pursuit, would have resulted in eternal bliss in heaven— but now you are in torment day and night, the knowledge only adding to you misery.

If you are not going to commit yourself to serving the Lord Jesus with all your heart, forget about searching into this matter—go on to hell. Don't add further occasion for sorrow. Eternity is too long to needlessly suffer regret upon regret. If you are not sure, try a little test, put a lighted match under one of your fingers, and see how long you can endure the pain. Hell is described as flames of torment. If you don't enjoy the feeling, maybe you better count the cost once more. Forget what your friends think, they won't be feeling your pain; they'll have enough of their own. Only you can decide what you will do with Jesus Christ.

Keeping our hearts focused upon eternal values is what makes us worthwhile. Jesus used salt as an illustration of this truth. Salt is a preservative, however; in the Old Testament it was used in reference to everlasting covenants. This indicated that what makes Christians of value is the fact that every thought, deed, or motive is weighed in the light of eternal values. This preserves us, and the society in which we live. It is up to Christians to object when the rest of society wants to legalize sinful activities. Who else will do it? Who else has the understanding of the light of God's truth in their hearts? All others are blind guides leading a blind society into the ditch of destructive life styles. Take heart Christian; you are the hope of the world. Without your proclamation of the teachings of Jesus Christ the people of the world will be lost.

## **Chapter Seventy-one**

### **Lost and Found**

Luke 15:1-32

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with

me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them."

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father."

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'"

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"

"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Not only should we, as searching pilgrims, value eternal opportunities above our very lives, but we also need to understand the value God places upon us. In Luke 15, Jesus reveals this value that he places upon us his lost sheep, lost coin, or lost son.

Before we come to Jesus and are born again, we are a treasure being sought after. We may not value ourselves that way, in fact, we may see ourselves as a dirt bag or as trash that should be thrown out, but that is not how God sees us. God sees a lost lamb, one that has wandered away from the safety of his care; one who has fallen into trouble, been victimized, beaten, or deceived by false hopes or dreams.

We do not look for God, really; God is looking for us. His Holy Spirit is hovering over the life of every lost sinner looking for an opportunity to draw him to Jesus.

The Psalmist said, "Deep calls to deep." (Ps. 42:7) This expression comes in a Psalm of David in which he is encouraging himself to take a positive attitude toward God. He may have been sitting by a waterfall thinking about his problems, when all at once it was as though God's voice was in the roar of the waters, and he realized that from the very depths of the heart of God, a call was coming to him. His circumstances seemed overwhelming to him, as if God was not caring about him any more, but in spite of this, he determined to hope in God his Savior.

When a person comes to Jesus receiving him as his personal Savior, there is great rejoicing in Heaven. Each person is a special creation of God, fashioned in the womb of his mother, with eternal purposes in mind. What God has planned for each person has not been fully revealed, but based on what God has already done; it will no doubt be a great future.

God is the great architect of the universe. He is the mind that is sometimes erroneously called "mother nature." There is no such thing as "mother nature," it's Father God! He set the course of all creation working through Jesus the Word and the Holy Spirit, the active force, creating all things. They were created for Jesus, and by the Father's will, by Jesus. In this realm of creation, everything exists for the purpose of serving mankind, providing an environment for us to pursue understanding of the horrible tragedy of life without God as compared to a life lived in the fear of God.

God is searching the masses of humanity for hearts that will love him for who he is, rather than for those who will merely obey him. God could very easily overwhelm humanity with the knowledge of his person, might, power, and intelligence; thus, making rebellion against him seem so foolhardy that no one would dare offend him. This would not serve the purposes of God, however. I am convinced that God is after a depth of relationship with his creatures that can't be realized unless those creatures are given the ability to exist without direct contact with him and have the ability to choose whether or not to serve him. It is for this reason that the call of God, while being heard with the ear through the preaching of the Word, must be heard with the heart.

Whenever a person comes to the Lord in repentance and faith, thus receiving Jesus as his Savior, there is great rejoicing in heaven. God wins and his heart is filled with joy! Each person who comes to God loving him, and believing in him, in spite of all the negative voices, is a great treasure that God puts the highest value upon. It doesn't matter to God what a person has done in his "before Christ" life, it is the condition of his heart toward him, that God is valuing.

When a person sits beside a waterfall contemplating the struggles and disappointments of life, wondering why God seems so far away, then in spite of all the pain, sorrow, struggle and tears, as an act of his will, he chooses to believe in him; God sees a pearl of great value. You, my friend, are that pearl of great value when you believe in him no matter what the circumstances are in your life.

Jesus wanted the Pharisees and teachers of the law to know that he is more concerned about saving sinners than looking after those who are already safe. It was for this reason that he socialized with sinners. Jesus did not go to sinner's houses to gain something of this world for himself. He went to reach out to them so that they would have the opportunity to choose him.

Not only is God concerned about those who have never heard, but also for those who have wandered in their journey from their position of honor in Father's house. Jesus then delivered the, now famous, Parable of the Lost Son.

This son was typical of a lot of young people who somehow feel that there is something in the worldly community that they need to experience. This kind of experimentation comes at a price, however. The Prodigal went off having received his inheritance early, but as might be expected, was not ready to use it wisely. He had a lust in his heart for what would please his fallen nature, desiring extravagances that soon depleted his resources. His problem was compounded by a famine that most likely resulted in inflation exhausting his funds even faster. Soon he found himself at the logical end of such a life of folly. He was doing work that was not only demeaning, but also offensive to a Jewish man, feeding pigs.

Nevertheless, the heart of the story is not about the folly of the young man, but rather, the love of the Father for a lost son. This son returned to his father's house finding a reception that was beyond his fondest expectations. With openness and love the father welcomed the wandering son home. The older son, seeing the celebration and joy of the father, was offended. He complained to his father, that he had been faithful to him, and that his father had never even allowed him a party with his friends.

This led to a revelation of the cost of backsliding. The father revealed that the faithfulness of the older son had resulted in everything belonging to him. The Prodigal, though welcomed and forgiven, had spent his inheritance and there was nothing left for him but love and forgiveness.

Being forgiven is a wonderful benefit, still that which was lost could never be regained. This should come as a warning to any who think that there is something to be gained by playing the worldly scene and thinking that if they repent all will be well. Yes, they may find repentance, but what is lost can never be brought back.

What was the value of the inheritance of the faithful son? How did his future differ from the future of the forgiven Prodigal? I do not know the answer to that, but I feel sure it is a substantial difference. Eternity will reveal the benefits gained by faithfulness to the purposes of God as opposed to those who get into heaven by the skin of their teeth.

Again, the message of these parables is not the difference in the eternal destiny of the two sons, but rather the love of the Father who never stops yearning for his lost son. Perhaps in a strange sort of way,

the Prodigal may in the end, have a better relationship with the Father than his rich older brother who never learned to appreciate the love he took for granted. Gaining an inheritance, yet losing the blessing of a deep love relationship is tragic.

Love without appreciation is shallow and fragile and may turn to contempt at any moment, as did the attitude of the older but faithful son. Contempt is a thief robbing its victims of joy and happiness. No wonder the scriptures admonish us to be thankful, and to rejoice always. Rejoicing in the midst of uncertain and perplexing circumstances is to demonstrate our faith in the character and faithfulness of God. This is what God values, and it is our gift of love to him.

## Chapter Seventy-two

### Shrewd Behavior Commended

Luke 16:1-15

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'"

"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'"

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'"

"'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied."

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'"

"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'"

"'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied."

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'"

"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

Jesus the Son of Man speaks to men about matters that pertain to their humanity, and how this is viewed in the light of eternal matters, illustrating these truths with a story about a shrewd business manager.

The manager was a dishonest servant and when his master found out about his dealings, he terminated his employment. What he did to stir up the wrath of his employer is not clear, but it could have been that he was doing what was lending money at high interest and keeping the over charge for himself, a condemned practice. Similarly, tax collectors would over charge in their assessment of taxes. In the light of this, it is likely that this man after seeing he was in a dilemma, decided to forfeit his dishonest gain in

the interest of making friends and settling his master business quickly. Although he would be the loser, he would gain in view of his future dilemma.

The commendation this man received was not for his dishonest behavior, but rather for the measures he took to remedy his situation. Jesus viewed this as a commendable behavior, because it put his future ahead of his present. Jesus used this to illustrate that shrewdness is not always undesirable. It is desirable to put eternal matters ahead of the present. This is only wise behavior. A wise Christian should always think of eternal benefits ahead of the here and now.

When Jesus said, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." he was encouraging generosity as a means of enriching relationships for eternity. Those who have made friends in this world will be welcomed by those friends when they die, leaving their wealth behind.

It is not possible to serve two masters, Jesus declared; "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (Luke 16:13) Thus he took his teaching to an even higher level. Why worry so much about how much money you are accumulating in this world, doing so makes you a servant of money, and that will interfere with your relationship with God.

This offended the Pharisees and teacher of the law because they loved money and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

Jesus had touched a nerve because it was a common practice to do just what Jesus had been talking about. These men had devised clever ways of getting around the letter of the law that prohibited charging interest from fellow countrymen. They wouldn't call it interest, but rather they would change the name, much like banks or other lending institutions do today, calling it a service charge or a lending fee. Jesus told them that it was still known for what it was by God, and that it was detestable.

We can't fool God. He sees what is in our hearts. We may play mind games, or conceal the truth with clever manipulations of facts so that what is said is true, but the reality is hidden, but God sees the motive of our hearts.

He who sees in secret will publish the news openly. We cannot mock God, what we sow we will reap.

## **Chapter Seventy-three**

### **Don't Risk Hell!!**

Luke 16:16-31

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So



he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

When natural man hears a message of hope he will often respond to it with great enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is often expressed with a vigorous compliance to the forms or rituals he has been taught as being pleasing to God. For the Jews of Jesus' day, obedience to the law was the standard behavior sought. The Pharisees had enlarged upon it by adding many traditions that were not commanded by God. Nevertheless, obedience to the law was still the prerequisite of entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus was preaching in the transitional period between the age of the law and the age of the church. The proclamation of grace was just coming into plain view, as the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus was soon to appear. When people heard the good news of the kingdom of God, their response was expressed in obedience to the law. The concept of a changed heart was only now beginning to be understood.

There is difference of opinion today about what was meant by the statement Jesus made about forceful men, and forcefully entering the kingdom of God. Some people think this means that positions of honor are to be seized, as in wrestling, to obtain it from God, even encouraging a violent spirit in their pursuit of God. Can a man fight with God and win? Well, that is a point to ponder, but the obvious answer is, "Of course not." Yet, Jacob wrestled with an angel and prevailed and was called Israel, meaning; he struggles with God. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes evident that Jacob didn't win the battle he was waging in the fleshly way. It wasn't until after the angel touched the socket of his thigh causing his struggle to result in injury, that he stopped struggling and started beseeching and clinging, resulting in favor with God.

There are people today who are still struggling with God, thinking that they can have their way if only they can command him or demand that he keep his word or some other fleshly manipulation of divine principles. None of this is within the Spirit of Truth. To quote Isaiah, "This is what the LORD says—the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?" (Isa 45:11) It is not for created beings to command God, yet because of a mispunctuation of the above passage in the KJV of the Bible; people have been taught to do just that; command God! One does not gain favor with God by striving with him. Our wrestlings are not to be with God, but rather, with the forces of evil that seek to hinder us from the pursuits of faith.

It is not clear from the passage, Luke 16:16 whether the Lord was commending forceful behavior, or whether it was being tolerated due to the ignorance that still existed with reference to the kingdom of God. There is something to be said for an enthusiastic pursuit of the kingdom. God always encourages us to be vigorous in our faith and our pursuit of him. If the violence referred to in Matthew's reference to a similar teaching of Jesus is to be taken as a vigorous pursuit of God, then it falls within the scope of the principles of the Gospel. If however, this sort of violent behavior was a misguided expression of the fallen nature, trying to cash in on the benefits of the Gospel without conforming to the teachings that accompany it, it is dangerous. This view is strengthened by the passage that follows, "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law." (Luke 16:17)

Having said that; he then cited an example of the how misguided interpretations led to sanctions of sinful lives. The subject was divorce and remarriage. Luke's treatment of the subject is brief and to the point. Other accounts of the teachings of Jesus give a more complete view of what he taught. The point was a simple one, divorcing to remarry is an act of adultery and marrying the divorce woman is also

adultery. The Pharisees allowed divorce because Moses allowed it under certain conditions. In this passage it seems that the motive of the divorce is because the man has found someone he likes better than his wife, so divorcing her would then be adultery. Or, if the woman were divorced, perhaps for a similar reason, marrying her would also be an adulterous act. Spouse swapping is condemned in the scriptures, legal or otherwise.

From this we are taken to the subject of hell. The progression of thought leads us to this subject. In chapter 15 of Luke we saw teachings about the value of a lost soul in the stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. Now in chapter 16 we see Jesus teaching us about a dishonest but shrewd servant who after getting into difficulty because of evil behavior adjusts his ways in the light of the future. This led to instructions about the love of money and how it interferes with one's walk with God. Then we see teaching about wrong methods being applied to one's pursuit of God and now wrong attitudes about divorce and remarriage, all leading to the subject of the seriousness of our eternal destinies.

This story of the rich man and Lazarus is a chilling one. The point of discussion here is the attitudes of hearts. Hell is a real place. A similar story about hell is found in the writings of Josephus a Jewish historian, who wrote his histories at about the time of Christ. What he had to say was not from the Christian point of view, although some believe he did become a Christian before he died. There is a similar story in his writings to the one told here, suggesting that this was commonly believed about the destiny of the departed souls. Jesus was then validating and strengthening their beliefs on this subject.

The main points that Jesus made in this story were: 1. Riches don't mean divine approval, nor does poverty mean divine disapproval. 2. Hell is a place where flames torment the wicked. 3. Those who are deemed righteous receive comfort after death. 4. Though the departed souls could see each other, there was no way that the righteous could help the lost. 5. Decisions concerning eternity are being made based upon the condition of one's heart, and that there is enough information available for anyone who will turn to God to do so. Additional information will not lead to a change of heart.

This story was told before the crucifixion of Jesus giving us insight into the pre-cross destiny of departed souls. After the cross we have a different picture, Paul said,

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith. (Phil. 1:21-25)

This insightful passage lays to rest all thought about “soul sleep”, a concept that teaches that when people die they are in a state of death sleep until the resurrection. The Apostle Paul tells us here that when we die we are present with the Lord, a better condition than life on earth. This notion about soul sleep comes from some Old Testament passages that refer to the fact that dead bodies are not capable of any further interaction with living people. They teach that to try to talk to them is futile, because they can't hear, nor speak. The practice of going to a cemetery and talking to a departed loved one may be good therapy for the living, but if a person thinks for one moment that the dead person's spirit is lingering near by and can hear them, they are either ignorant of the truth or deceived. When people die, they either go to be with the Lord, or they go to the place of torment. There is no change of teaching in the Bible concerning the destiny of a lost soul. Lost means lost, and torment is what is assigned to those who have rejected the message of salvation.

When we are born into this world, we are in a lost state. Jesus taught that the little children as a result of their innocence are citizens of Heaven. However, that clemency is only good until the opportunity to understand and chose salvation has come to them. Once their conscience has been awakened, knowing good and evil, they become accountable. For the Jewish people this was considered to be about age twelve.

Inevitably the question is raised, “What about the heathen who never heard the message of the gospel, or what about those who have been mistaught, and are reaching for God but in the wrong way?” No one, to my knowledge, can give an answer to those questions with any certainty or authority. I do find

comfort in the knowledge of the character of God and the justice of God, however. I feel certain that, on the day of judgment I will be filled with pride in my God because every decision he will make will be totally righteous and just. I am convinced that no one will be in hell that didn't belong there, and I am equally convinced that no one will be in heaven that doesn't belong there.

Meanwhile, we have a job to do; we are commanded to proclaim this message to every living person. If we do our job that God has placed us in, we will not be held accountable for the rest of the world over which we have no control.

Taking seriously eternal matters is of utmost importance. Nothing is important at all compared with our eternal destiny. God is able to meet our every need and to adequately take care of every person who puts his trust in him.

Choosing Jesus is to choose life eternal. Won't you choose him today?

## Chapter Seventy-four

### Motives and Actions

Luke 17:1-10

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

It takes faith to walk in the light of the Lord. Without it, what reason is there to persevere, or even care, when those around us are doing wrong? It's easy to take the attitude, "It's none of my business, why should I get involved?" or, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Well, according to Jesus, we are responsible. We must speak up when we know of wrongs.

There is no greater sin in the realm of human behavior than to cause another to sin. Some people take great pleasure in seducing innocent people. Some men have been known to take pleasure in stealing the virginity away from young women bragging about how many they have ruined.

When we understand that God and his kingdom are real, and that we are eternal beings who will have to give an account for ourselves to God, then our behavior becomes important. Great faith requires that we take ourselves seriously. We are, in fact, the visible part of the kingdom of God, and as such, we are responsible to what is right as heaven's representatives, while here on earth. In view of this, Jesus warned us that causing someone to sin is so serious that it would be better to have weights tied to us and cast into the depths of the sea.

Keeping these matters in the center of our consciousness is our duty. We are servants; we have been purchased away from Satan who became our god as a result of the fall. As servants we owe our very lives

to the Lord Jesus. He has every right to claim all we have, all we are, and all we will ever be; after all, he is giving us eternal life in heaven. While we are in this world we must live godly lives, teach others about the reality of God, and in general, promote the kingdom of God.

Some people work hard for the kingdom of God, spending their lives in service to others and to the Lord Jesus. Do they deserve rewards for what they have done? Jesus taught us, "No." Serving him faithfully is a matter of duty. He did, however, teach us that rewards would be given. The rewards that will be given will come from the heart of love of our Lord. The criteria of giving rewards is not earnings, nor is it because they are deserved, but rather it seems, motives that cause actions will be at issue here. For this reason I believe that many people will be very surprised when their deeds are acknowledged and rewarded because they were done for reasons of love with no thought of reward.

## Chapter Seventy-five

### Groups

Luke 17:12-19

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

When we are a part of a group, do we still have individual responsibility? The gospel of Luke is about the humanity of the Lord Jesus and how he related to us and taught us. In this story in Luke 17 about ten lepers being healed; we have an example of grouping.

It is common in groups to lose one's own identity and allow the group to determine actions and even thoughts. We have seen pictures of riots portraying individuals doing things they would never do as individuals. It seems that for some it is a matter of feeling that responsibility has been taken away from them and placed upon the group. Whatever is being done within the group is somehow made okay.

This is not a matter that is reserved for rioters, however. How many of us have been driving down a road where the average speed is well above the speed limit and have used the excuse that, we were just going with the flow? Using this attitude, we can feel safe as long as we aren't the instigator, or are not as bad as the rest: we feel safe from judgment. Does that make us safe? Do we truly lose our identity or personal responsibility just because we are with those who either initiate an action, or are the ones doing the action? Guilt by association is a point of law that has caused a rude awakening to some individuals who would never commit a crime with their own hands, but because they were a party to it, are declared guilty. Equally, some people feel secure and satisfied that they have done what is right in their lives because they have been with a group that did just and noble acts.

Perhaps the members of this group of lepers who were healed felt that the responsibility to give thanks rested upon the one who asked for the healings. Since it was a group request and a group healing, who should speak for them? Were they now to take individual actions after being a part of a group?

Where the kingdom of God is concerned, all actions are judged on the basis of individual actions. Going with the flow may work on the highway, but with God, what others do is never an excuse for

wrong behavior. We are never to measure ourselves by the average behavior of the group we are with. Individual accountability still holds even if doing what is right means alienation from your most cherished group!

Doing what is right individually does not mean that the others in the group are credited for our righteous act. It is true, however, that if we, as a part of a group, refuse to do wrong; we may save the entire group from sinning. This one righteous act could then result in many righteous acts.

Jesus wondered, where are the nine who should have given thanks? Only one returned and he was a Samaritan! How easy it is to take the benefits of our group identities and never stop to say thank you. In this case, these individuals were not only lepers, but also they were Israelites, worshippers of the God who healed them. Why then did they not return? Perhaps for the same reason we often neglect to genuinely thank the Lord when he intervenes in our lives. Do we take his love for granted? Do we benefit from his daily care and only scarcely thank him? Are we a part of the group, "nine"?

## Chapter Seventy-six

### The Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-37

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

From a human point of view, kingdoms are governments, and governments are identifiable. Jesus warned his disciples not to look for the kingdom of God in this way. His kingdom is not an outward organization; it is a condition of heart. Many organizations have been formed claiming to be the kingdom of God, or the exclusive church of God (not referring to a denomination of that name). No, the kingdom of God is not a denomination, church, government, country, or anything else of that sort. The moment an effort is made to form God's people into an organized body claiming any sort of exclusiveness, it has by that action taken a turn away from the very kingdom it claims to be.

This is not intended to be an indictment against organizing a church or a group of churches, for the purpose of united effort, fellowship, definition, or other organizational advantages. From the beginning of the church age believers have sought fellowship in groups called churches. They were recognized and

identified as such by the apostles and the Lord Jesus. They were sometimes identified by geographical designations, and at other times by where they met. The important thing, however, was that it was never a strict organization; it was more of an organism.

It was described as the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, or the church. The members were called saints, believers and Christians. Individuality was encouraged but the individual was always connected to the whole on an organism basis. We are taught that we are one body but as a body has many members, so this body of Christ has many members, and we are merely a part, though an important part.

This kingdom is not entered into by close observation, Jesus told the Pharisees. This was a revolutionary thought for these men who were so institutionalized that they were offended by the least departure from any command or tradition that they had embraced. Acceptability was based upon the observance of these commands and traditions. As is so often the case, close observation diverts attention from a relationship with God.

Luke's account of these teachings takes us to other related instructions regarding the coming of the kingdom of God. Since Jesus is the king of this kingdom, it would seem that his presence would be necessary to its function. Those who are citizens of this kingdom will long to see their king, but he will not be visible to them until he comes back in bodily form. When he does it will be evident to all the inhabitants of the earth, therefore, his followers are not to be deceived by those who would come with false claims about where he is.

Jesus will come back on a very ordinary kind of day. People will be going about their lives in very ordinary ways, yet it will signal the beginning of some very difficult days.

The warning about fleeing was likely intended for the people of Jerusalem, and this may have been a warning about the fall of Jerusalem in A.D.70. At that time the Christians were warned through prophetic messages that they should leave Jerusalem and because they were obedient to this warning, only non-Christians were present at the fall of the city. There are different interpretations of the meaning of these scriptures, but the basic message is not confusing; Jesus was talking about staying focused, not being carried away by deceivers, and being ready. If we pay heed to this admonition to be ready, the when or how becomes less important to us.

He ended this discourse by saying; "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather." Jesus gave a similar discourse reported by Matthew in which he made this same statement. In that discourse he spoke about false Christs coming. There is a need in people to follow a person who is strong and can give them hope. These individuals often accept the role of Christ-hood to those who follow them. Since there already is a Christ who is the Savior of the world, the only source of eternal life, anyone who follows a false Christ is a spiritually dead person. These individuals who set themselves up as some sort of Christ, are charlatans of the grandest order. Actually, they could be called vultures, feeding upon the vulnerability of seeking people who have rejected the one true Christ. Since these individuals are the living dead, corpses if you will, wherever they gather, the charlatans are sure to be close by ready to take advantage of their need.

Those who reject Jesus' authority on the level of their hearts are vulnerable to deception. It cannot be over stressed that, anyone who does not embrace the holiness of God and of Jesus, and strive to live as in the spirit of that holiness, will follow a false Christ. This false Christ may only be an imitation idea that is so similar that those who follow will think it is the real Christ. Since what we worship is a spirit God, false spirits can easily deceive those who do not wish to surrender their entire heart and life. These spirits may offer a less demanding life style, or in some cases, a more strict one.

Christians embrace holiness and strive to attain it as a response to their love for God and his Spirit, but they don't become Christian because they are holy or because they are striving to observe what they deem to be holiness.

Salvation is initiated by faith in Jesus Christ and all other matters that relate to the born again experience, proceeds from that faith. Salvation is an experience and belonging to Christ is not dependent upon any organization. However, belonging to an organization is usually important because it provides an atmosphere in which to grow and a protection from errors that could destroy faith. Naturally, not all

organizations are worthy of our trust or support, therefore; selection of a worthy group is crucially important. If we are to find the right church to attend we should seek it out prayerfully, not because someone recommended it, but rather because we have the true spirit of Jesus manifest in their midst.

## Chapter Seventy-seven

### Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Does God care about what we care about? Probably not everything, there are some incidental things in our lives whose importance has nothing to do with eternal matters. Despite this fact, God seems to look after some of the minutest details of our lives with a love and care that reveals that not all of his decisions are based on what has eternal value.

Heaven is a place of absolute joy, bliss, health, energy, intelligence, love and peace. The nature of God is expressed in his love of details. Look at creation. We are just now beginning to discover species that live deep in the depths of the oceans. Why are they there? If planet earth was created as a home for man while choosing his eternal destiny and is only an environment that enables him to grow spiritually, then what possible purpose does such diversity serve? God could have just as easily deleted some of the species and who would have cared?

The species that presently exist are in abundance, and yet many more have become extinct. Is God still introducing new species in environments where science is not aware, or is what exists only the remains of the initial creation? We know that there are no new energy sources being formed. What exists was created and no new sources have been formed since. When the energy in the stars and suns dissipate, no new energy will light the sky unless God goes back into the creative mood again. I am convinced that what exists is more than adequate to fulfill the mission to which they were formed.

God went to great trouble creating diversity in abundance, beyond the minimum requirements; shouldn't we also assume that he would go beyond the minimum requirements in his work of creation in our lives? I have experienced the joy in the heart of God as he has made provisions in my life going beyond minimum requirements, making my life a joy to live. Why shouldn't we believe that God cares about every detail of our lives? Jesus taught us that even the hairs of our head are numbered, now that's attention to details!

When we pray, we should never be ashamed to express our inmost desires because we serve a God of love. Nor, should we stop expressing our desires just because he has heard it all before. After all, if an unjust judge will grant the request of a persistent widow, how much more will God grant a request from a person whom he loves? Sometimes, however, what we want is not what is best for us, in such a case, God will deny one answer so that he will be able to give us a better answer.

Whereas, this principle applies to natural matters in our lives, how much more should we expect that it applies to spiritual matters? It's no secret that God responds to the persistent and insistent prayers of his people when they pray about matters of spiritual concern, a wayward loved one, a city that needs a spiritual awakening, strength for missionaries, or other matters such as the conditions in our schools and government. If an unjust judge will give way to the requests of a widow's persistence, God will certainly act as a result of our insistent prayer and render justice.

How far will God go to answer our prayers? I do not know the answer to that in every situation. God does not violate the will of any person. Human beings are very powerful creations of God because we have the power of choice. Our decisions not only affect our own eternal destiny, but also the destinies of others. When we pray about our concerns, we engage the heart of God who wants to please us if he can. Although God is all-powerful, he will not violate his eternal purposes, nor will he allow his love for us to cause bad decisions. Any short-term answer is tempered by the long-term plans of God.

We are encouraged to pray and to never give up. What we are praying for may require time to be fulfilled. Keep your faith active, persevere in prayer and watch for God's answers. When they come, rejoice and give thanks to him, this is pleasing to the heart of God.

## **Chapter Seventy-eight**

### **How We Enter the Kingdom of God**

Luke 18:9-14

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Trusting in one's own righteousness is the human thing to do to. We feel encouraged when we look about us and see others who are worse than us. It's easy to trust in one's own goodness when practicing religion with dedication, especially after a life has been lived in obedience to what has been taught as the standard of right and wrong.

The Pharisee has been accused of self-righteousness, however; he was a quite ordinary person. He was a testimonial to the effectiveness of the religion that produced him. After all, doesn't religion teach people that if they will do certain things, acting and saying what has been prescribed, they will be acceptable to enter heaven?

Perhaps the Pharisee was prideful, but it was apparently based on something that was true. Maybe he was looking down his nose at the tax collector, but shouldn't he? After all, he had never done the sins this man had done. Was he being dishonest to God as he stood there praying? Actually, he was praying a very respectful prayer, thanking God that he was not like that other man. Isn't that what we are supposed to do? Isn't protection from evil lifestyles the purpose of religion? This man may have faced some of the same temptations he was accusing the tax collector of, but he had overcome as a result of his devotion to God. Why shouldn't he have left God's presence justified as a result of his obedience to the law?



Not understanding the problem results in misunderstanding the answer. Obedience to the law can never make a man holy, and ironically, the better a person lives, the less likely he is to accept the answer. The truth is; we are all sinners alike. We were all born in sin, that is; we all have a common need. Sin is a condition that exists as a result of the fall, a sort of disease, if you will. Everyone is infected and unless they become the recipient of the antidote, they will die in their sins. This condition is not the result of the number of sins committed, nor is it based on how bad a sin is. As these two men entered the temple to pray, they both had the same need. One man knew what was wrong and sought the answer; the other was ignorant of his need and therefore left without the answer, yet he thought he possessed it. How tragic!

Can it be that some of the best, most conscientious people have the most difficulty getting into heaven? My daughter was teaching a class of children the other day and felt inspired to test them in their knowledge of what is required to enter heaven. In her test she assumed the role of being God standing at the gate of heaven and the children were seeking entrance. She asked each of them if they had the right ticket to enter heaven. Some responded that their ticket was their attendance at church. Others responded that they had read their Bibles and prayed. None of these answers gave them access to heaven though they were wonderful qualities. She used this occasion to explain to them, in a way they had never grasped, that the only ticket God will honor is the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus is the only antidote there is for sin. It doesn't matter how advanced the disease is, without the antidote; we will all die the second death. (The second death is when we are rejected at the white throne judgment.)

The Pharisee left the temple that day unjustified because his own goodness had blinded his eyes. He was unable to do what the tax collector did, seek mercy. Why did he need mercy? He was a good man. What sin had he done? Again, unless we understand the need, how can we receive the answer?

I think this is one of the saddest stories in the Bible, because it shows how easy it is to miss the gate of heaven. The tax collector could have missed it as well had he allowed his shame to keep him from God. If a man is too good, he will trust in his goodness; if he is too bad, he will not bother to pray thinking God would not care about him.

Society also strengthens this concept of self-trust. If a man is too bad, kill him. If a man is too good, accuse him of being "holier than thou."

My faith in the ability of the redeeming grace of God has been strengthened as a result of my present involvement in prison ministries. At the prison where I minister, there is a notorious criminal. He went on a killing rampage one night killing 6 people. Since then he has received the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior and has become a minister in his own right, having a ministry that reaches outside the walls of the prison.

No matter how bad we are, God's grace reaches to the depth of our badness. If we are a good person he can save us too if we can place our faith in the same grace that saves those who are bad. We will have to join the crowd of prostitutes, drug addicts, murders, child pornographers, molesters, and thieves and repent at the same altar, because we have the same need. God does not have a special place for the rich, good and honorable to repent; all must come to the same cross and admit to the same need. There is no distinction; all are sinners; all must repent and trust in the same blood. That blood will wash away the guilt of murder just as quickly and as effectively as it will wash away a white lie. The problem for the good, honorable and famous is that they don't want to kneel next to an alcoholic derelict from skid row. How could he be classified as having the same need? It's hard for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but if he is willing to humble himself, he can.

## **Chapter Seventy-nine**

## Children Can Come to Jesus too!

Luke 18:15-17

People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Bringing children to Jesus is the right thing to do. They are symbols of what we must become if we are to enter the kingdom of God.

Once more Jesus is dealing with our humanity. Because he became human, he is able to talk to us about our humanity.

The entrance to the kingdom of God is so inconspicuously placed that only those whose hearts have been prepared, will ever find it. The way to it is a narrow way and the gate is small.

There is a high road that seems to lead to it and many walk that road. It is the road of human achievement, but there aren't any gates to heaven to be found on it. It is too high, and it leads away from every quality that prepares the heart to receive the Lord Jesus.

There is only one entrance to the kingdom of God; it is at a very low point in the wall, and it is a very inconspicuous gate. When beholding it one might say, "Is this a gate? Why it looks more like a cross!" And that it is. Not a pretty little gold cross one might wear around the neck, but a rough hewn one with nails and blood stains; a place of suffering and death; the place where Jesus died. It is located at a very low place, the place where people are who have lost a loved one unexpectedly or when dangers lurk all around them. Where they are when floodwaters wash away all that is dear to them of this world's goods, or when, due to some weakness in their character, they have committed some act that is shameful and that shame is upon their conscience. It is when we have been driven from that high road into the lowlands of despair, that we can look up and see the cross of Jesus as the only hope there is for a lost soul.

No one on the high road feels a need or desire to leave all the comforts of the high road to go into the valley of pain, death, and despair looking for the gate of Heaven, but that is where it is to be found.

The people on the high road have their crosses too, but theirs are the pretty ones in buildings with stain glass windows, built with the fruit of the labor of their human achievements. When they enter these cathedrals, the beauty of the surroundings pampers their pride, the music is uplifting, and they are encouraged to continue on this road of high achievements so that this world will be a better place.

When Jesus died, his death was not memorialized because he was a great achiever, but rather because he died the death of a criminal in our place. He was numbered among the transgressors and died between two thieves.

Though the location was on a hill, the hill only represented the exaltation of a place of sacrifice. He died among criminals so the least among us can go there and receive pardon for a misspent life. The hill is high because it is the place where God can be found being located on the mount of God, but it is associated with the deaths of criminals.

It lies in close proximity to the Dead Sea and the Jordan River that are located at the bottom of the mountain upon which the temple is built. It's only a day's journey away from the lowest place on planet earth to the city of God, but it is a difficult journey because one must ascend about 4,000 feet from the Dead Sea to the place where Jesus died. Yet, his death was not because he identified with the religious people who inhabited the heights, they are the ones who crucified him.

Being religious does not mean one knows the location of the gate of the city, but children know. It's easy for them to locate it because they are innocence. They can easily associate with anyone, anywhere, anytime. They are not ashamed to be around people who don't dress in the finest clothes. They are not offended because someone lacks the polish of education. They care nothing for reputation. It's only after they have been taught to discriminate, that they start walking on the high road of snobbishness.

The high road avoids the area where crosses mark the place of death. They find it distasteful to talk of death, even though the death is only the death of the sin nature. Who cares about such things? What does that have to do with being an achiever?

Perhaps it does hinder those whose God is of this world. They do not wish to think about dying to the nature that has produced the very things that are dearest to them. If wealth were ill gotten then death to the nature that produced it would mean that those treasures are no longer acceptable. How can we forsake what we love?

For children, it is all very simple; love is what is most desired. Since God is love, he is easy to turn to.

Children love easily because they are innocent. It is only when they learn to be suspicious that they become cautious about where love comes from. Yes, they must be taught not to go to everyone who offers them love.

There are those who would prevent them from going to Jesus, but that should never happen. "Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" (Luke 18:16)

## Chapter Eighty

### Eternal Life

Luke 18:18-30

A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone." "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" "

"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God," Jesus said. (Luke 18:24) Gathering riches is the quest of most people's hearts. Once that goal has been achieved, deliberately disposing of all of it to follow a teacher who speaks only of eternal values and promises little in this present life is unthinkable. Gathering riches in this world of pain, struggle and difficulties isn't easy. In the natural world, wealth is considered the fruit of hard work.

Money means different things to different people. Some people use money as a means of gaining security while others use it to achieve power. Impressing people with possessions is a means to gaining recognition, and favors are also more readily obtained when they are used. To many people, money is the

tangible expression of what they do; therefore, it has value because it is who they are in a unique sense. They work and then receive their pay; the money is compensation for their talent, labor or expertise. So what they are to the person compensating, is now in money form. Their money thus represents the quality of their personhood that justifies its receipt. Those who steal, deceive, manipulate, or otherwise obtain money or goods in some devious way, have robbed themselves of the dignity of honest pay that rewards character and integrity.

In some way, the rich man who came to Jesus saw his riches as a vital part of who he was. His possessions had been gathered, and his identity was now being expressed through them.

Under the Law of Moses, wealth was the reward given by God to those who obeyed his commands. Apparently, this man had met the requirements and was now wealthy and powerful; he was also a ruler.

His problem seemed to be in the meaning he had attached to the wealth he had gathered, viewing it in the worldly way. Its meaning was attached to his view of himself and was an expression of the sense of value and power he deemed to be his. Apparently, he didn't see it as an expression of the care and provision of God. That understanding would have enabled him to dispose of it with the knowledge that the same God who had abundantly provided in the past, would also provide in the present and future.

The demand Jesus was placing upon him to dispose of his wealth was necessary so that his value structure could be seen for what it was. He had built upon the sifting sand of human effort and therefore, nothing he had, had eternal value even though God was the source of his possessions. To him it was the reward of his efforts, talents, toil, sweat and blood.

This is the common problem I see in Christendom today. People do not see that what they possess is not really a credit to them, but rather; it is a credit to God who has watched over them, protected them, and guided them every step of the way. A false sense of personal value is often based upon the recognition that others give us. Failing to give God the glory and thanks results in a very distorted picture of our real value.

Our real value is assigned to us by God, and is not based upon human effort, recognition or achievements. Our value has to do with our ability to place ourselves at the disposal of God to do with as he wishes, therefore; the rich young ruler was required to come and follow Jesus so that he could have eternal life.

Man is a very powerful being in that he is able to say "yes" or "no" to God. Man also has very great value, being an eternal being. God sees us as having great potential value, so great that he sent his son into this world to die for us. Our value is not based upon anything that we have or have done, or who we are, but rather on who God is and what he is able to do in and through us.

God loves us, but to be of any value whatsoever, he must first deal with our recognition of basic truths. Only those who can see in true perspective can be of value eternally. It's not easy to make the adjustment and place our trust in divine truth, rather than, in what we deem to be our own achievements.

After all, aren't the things we have an expression of who we are, and therefore, aren't we entitled to our possessions? Shouldn't we be allowed to love, trust, and protect them and use them as we see fit? Should we be required to give them over to the disposal of God? He did not labor to acquire them. Why should he have anything to do with this?

Only after we have been born again and our minds have been enlightened with eternal truth, do we see the wisdom of God. Then we understand that all that is acquired as a result of human effort is temporal in nature. None of it has lasting value; only what has been given into the hand of God can be transformed into something eternal. As long as we cling to temporal values, we miss eternal wealth. How sad to cling to what will pass away and not increase in eternal values.

When the people heard what Jesus had to say to the rich young ruler, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" Indeed, who then can be saved? It takes faith in Jesus to cast your all upon him and to give him your past, present, and future to be disposed of as he wills.

The Spirit once challenged me concerning my own future. My decision was that no matter what, I was giving myself to him. If he never did anything with my life, it would be okay. The important thing

was that it would be his decision, and not mine. If I give myself to him, then the power of choice now belongs to him. If I retain the power of choice, I have not given myself to him.

The rich young ruler left Jesus sad.

After hearing all this the disciples wondered about their own futures, since they had given all to follow the Lord, what would become of them? Jesus assured them that God would look after them in this world, giving them more than they gave up, and eternal life as well. Man cannot out give God, but before this principle comes into play in our lives; it is necessary that we truly give our all to God. This is not a “try it and see if it works” deal, one to be taken back if it doesn’t work to our satisfaction. If we don’t give ourselves to God, no strings attached; we will never see the blessings promised.

What Jesus taught was a hard gospel. Hard that is, to those who want to have it both ways. There is only one way with God, all or nothing, that’s the deal. The rewards are well worth the commitment.

## Chapter Eighty-one

### Blind Eyes

Luke 18:31-43

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Sight is a gift from God. If when light enters our eyes we are able to accurately discern what is in our realm of vision, we are said to have sight. Being able to grasp and understand what is being said is also called seeing. Both abilities are gifts of God. There are individuals who lack the ability to see; yet they have a wonderful grasp of what really matters.

The man in Luke 18:35 was a blind beggar, yet he clearly understood who Jesus was. As Jesus was walking along he approach where the blind man was begging. Upon hearing a commotion, he asked what was going on, they told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He then began to call out to Jesus calling him “Son of David”; a title usually reserved for the Messiah. Jesus was indeed the Messiah, but how could he know that? Even the disciples were having difficulty understanding such profound spiritually discerned truth.

In chapter 18 of Luke, we have a series of stories that all have to do with being able to see. A Pharisee couldn’t see his spiritual need; a rich young ruler couldn’t understand how giving everything he had away could result in obtaining eternal life; and in verses 31-34, the disciples couldn’t understand the message of the cross.

We have been taught to only accept as fact what can be observed. We observe through taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing. What we observe is then conceptualized and understanding results. This is all good and fine so far as this realm is concerned, but what about what cannot be observed by these senses? Do they therefore not exist? If there is a spiritual realm, must it be predictable according to the laws of the material realm in which we live? Of course not.

Jesus came teaching about a realm that cannot be observed by material realm senses. He called it the Kingdom of Heaven. Access to that kingdom would come through him and they were to place their faith in him. Since humanity belongs to the material realm, a change must take place for them to enter this realm. This realm is where true bliss exists as the normal experience. This may be hard to grasp when all we have known is suffering in this world.

We have become so conditioned to suffering that we can't easily grasp that suffering is not normal. This world is a realm of suffering and blissful experiences only last a short while, if they are ever experienced at all.

The blind man who was sitting by the roadside when Jesus came passing by represents a whole class of humanity who know that they are not able to see all that they should see. There must be more to be known about themselves and a God that they have not met, but how can they know?

The blind man wanted to see, even if he didn't know what it would be like to see. Some things have to be taken by faith. For the blind man to want to see, he had to accept that his present condition was not normal. If he were born blind he had to accept what was said to him by those who could see.

We are of the earth and therefore we must rely upon the report of the One who has come from heaven. Heaven is in a realm that we cannot perceive with natural senses. Heavenly truth is also beyond the realm of natural understanding.

When Jesus told his disciples about having to go to Jerusalem and suffer death and be raised again on the third day, they couldn't grasp it because it didn't fit into their realm of understanding. If we are to follow Jesus, it is necessary to transition from this present realm with all its concerns, affections, motives, and values into the realm of the eternal. To do this we must take a leap of faith and believe the report of Jesus entering through him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Coming to the understanding that lacking spiritual sight is not natural and that to be whole we must be given sight by Jesus the Son of David, is the first step of a spiritual journey that will culminate in heaven!

Faith is the means by which we will receive the sight we need. Faith is the link between the reservoir of the knowledge of God and his kingdom and the point of our need. When we take a step of faith and believe in Jesus, understanding begins to flow. Sight is restored to us enabling us to believe for the rest of the experiences that await us in Jesus.

## **Chapter Eighty-two**

### **Love is for All**

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

In this story about Zacchaeus we see a common human scene in which prejudices concerning the life status of an individual affect how we treat that individual. Zacchaeus was a tax collector and therefore subject to the suspicions of people, since tax collectors were often corrupt. Whether Zacchaeus was a corrupt man or not is not known, nor did he state that he had cheated anyone, but rather he stated that if he had done so, he would return four times what he had erroneously taken. He also would give half of what he had to the poor.

What was the reason for this display of generosity? Perhaps he had heard the story about the rich young ruler who had come to Jesus and had left sad after Jesus had told him to sell all and give to the poor. Zacchaeus was elated that Jesus had come to his house, and ceasing the moment made amends for any dishonesty or selfishness that he had engaged in.

And then there was Jesus, calling a man by name out of a tree, telling him that he must stay at his house that day. In this story, the fact that Jesus knew his name seem to go unnoticed. Was that a miracle or had Jesus been told who he was? No matter, the focus was upon their attitude toward Zacchaeus. We are so quick to see what we deem to be a flaw in someone rather than the good. So it was with the people who were so quick to pass judgment upon him.

I recently taught at a men's retreat, and in the course of teaching it occurred to me that we often look at one another through sinful eyes, seeing critically rather than through eyes of love. What a different atmosphere is created when we have love in our eyes! It is how we are viewing those around us and ourselves that makes all the difference. The scriptures teach us that,

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

When we look upon one another filtering out all lust, bitterness, selfishness, prejudice, hate, and pride, we find it easy to accept one another and to love one another despite whatever wrongs may have happened in the past.

When we look through eyes of love, we look hopefully, believing that what will be, will not be what has been in the past. This can only truly be accomplished when Jesus is in our hearts. In the natural we know that people seldom change when a pattern of wrong behavior has become deeply ingrained. Salvation is not based on psychological probabilities, however, but on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform. One cannot predict the future behavior of any individual, but when Jesus is resident in the heart of a person, there is cause to hope.

Zacchaeus, upon hearing that Jesus was coming and desiring to see him, climbed up in a sycamore-fig tree. Evidently Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and appreciated this humble man who did and said such wonderful things. Desire to see Jesus was evidently based on a hunger for something better in his life than what had been the case in the past. When Jesus came to where he was he spoke directly to him inviting himself to his house! Zacchaeus enthusiastically received this, and they went to his house together, whereupon; Zacchaeus made a proclamation of intention to make amends for any wrongs he had committed and to share his wealth with the poor.

Whenever Jesus finds a ready heart hungering to receive him, he will fill it. Some people object to Christian conversions because they say they are just emotions. Well, emotions are surely a part of any true conversion, but so is commitment. Commitments made without emotion are usually not very lasting. When I married my wife there was a great deal of emotion, but there was also commitment. That was forty-three years ago, at the time of this writing, and it is still an emotional experience! Zacchaeus displayed emotions about Jesus. He climbed up in a tree, committed to restitution, and opened his heart to the poor. Without emotions being involved I doubt that any of this would have taken place.

Everyone involved in sales or fund-raisers knows that emotions are important ingredients to any success. Political campaigns are run on appeals to emotions. Emotions are a gift from God. Without them we are colorless, and boring. Without the presence of emotions the entertainment industry would not be an industry at all.

Yes, Jesus does excite the emotions of people, and as a result great commitments are made to him. Once made, commitments may continue even without the presence of emotion. This is where character comes into play. Will we abide by our commitments even in the face of difficulty?

The work of God in a human heart though greatly affecting emotions, is not primarily emotional. To a great extent the emotion that is felt is the result of the entry of the power of the Holy Spirit. How people react to this mighty power varies greatly from person to person. Some people may give praise to God in a loud voice with physical gestures, while others may react in a very subdued and controlled manner. How people react is somewhat a matter of personality, and somewhat a matter of cultural development. Some individuals who initially are outwardly boisterous learn how to yield to the power of the Spirit in a more controlled manner. Some people believe that to control emotions that result from the work of the Holy Spirit is to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit, such is not the case. What grieves the Holy Spirit is failure to allow his work to go on for fear of emotions. It is better by far to allow someone to become emotional, rather than to quench the work of the Holy Spirit.

Did Zacchaeus follow through with his commitments to restitution and generosity? One cannot know, as the story does not continue that far. It is at that point where emotion ends that the real evidence of a genuine experience begins. If the work of the Holy Spirit has penetrated the heart sufficiently, change will result. If the individual is content with the emotion felt and centers his attention upon that, little else will come of it. Such people are always seeking emotional experiences to satisfy their need to become emotional. They are often shallow in their ability to apply spiritual teaching to the real needs of their lives. Seeking emotional experiences for the sake of emotion can be a distraction from what God really desires to accomplish in the hearts of men. In my opinion, emotions are a wonderful tool of the Spirit, but they are incidental to, and a by-product of, the work that is being done by the Spirit. The focus should never be upon the emotion, but rather, upon the work of God in our lives.

People who do not understand the work of the Holy Spirit sometimes criticize those who seek to help the class of humanity who are lacking in character or cultural development, thinking that they are beyond hope of redemption. The people looking on when Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house were evidently that sort of people. Perhaps they viewed Jesus as a celebrity and expected him to choose the most notable house in which to receive hospitality. Jesus didn't come to pander to the desires of people for vainglory. He came to do the work of God, which is to redeem lost humanity. Zacchaeus was a lost soul who desired change in his life. Jesus discerning that desire went to his house giving him the opportunity to act upon it, and act he did.

## **Chapter Eighty-three**

### **Jesus is Coming Again**

Luke 19:11-27

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'



"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

"The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

"His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

"His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

"'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them -- bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

The gospel is good news to the righteous and to those who love Jesus and want him to be their king, but to the wicked it is very bad news. The message of salvation is a message of grace and forgiveness, but with it are demands that must not be ignored. By freely receiving grace comes an obligation to give away what we have received. If we receive this great gift of love, only to keep it quietly to ourselves, we stand in danger of losing the very gift that brings us the hope of eternal life.

Jesus came from God our Father to be crowned king. The nation of Israel was the primary recipient of the message, and held the responsibility of recognizing Jesus and crowning him king.

Over and over Jesus challenged the religious institution of his day. They were custodians of the official religion God had ordained under Moses. As Jesus neared the end of his ministry, he directed his message more and more toward the issue of the necessity for them to receive him for who he was. Receiving Jesus is not a whimsical option to be taken or left. He is the designated Son and no substitute will do.

Jesus came to us as described in the parable of Luke 19:11-27. He came to be crowned king, but those to whom he was sent did not want him to be their king. He was crowned anyway, but as history testifies, it was done in mockery, nevertheless, it was done, and from that day onward he is known as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

To all who receive his grace comes the responsibility of the gift. Grace is represented by 10 minas in the story. (Minas were coins commonly used in Jesus' time.) The facts of the story are consistent with the fulfillment. Therefore, they are predictive in nature. Jesus established some important truths by this story: 1. His incarnation was referred to. 2. He was to be crowned king. 3. Those who should have accepted him did not want him to be their king. 4. He would be crowned anyway. 5. He would leave investing in those who would receive him. 6. He would return at a later date to collect on his investment. 7. There would be a day of reckoning for those who receive his gifts.

This parable highlights an important truth about the danger of receiving Jesus and not sharing the knowledge of him with others. If we do not proclaim his message, we stand in danger of losing what we have received. Jesus also said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26)

Jesus is coming back to earth to rule and reign over the earth and he will share this with the faithful who have received him as Lord and Savior. Make no mistake about it; what you do today has a bearing upon your future.

In our story Jesus is preparing to go to the cross and preparations must be made. The importance of his mission must be impressed upon those who would be left behind. The world must hear the message of salvation, and it is up to those who receive the gift of eternal life to proclaim it. Jesus promised rewards to those who are faithful and will reward them according to their faithfulness.

The opportunity of participating with Jesus in his kingdom is a great honor and should never be taken lightly. It is clear to those who see the value of eternal matters that full attention to the proclamation of the gospel is not only the right thing to do, but also is a great opportunity as it may result in the future joy of participation with Jesus in his kingdom.

There is a light side to the gospel—love, grace, mercy and forgiveness, but there is also a heavy side—duty, responsibility, accountability, and judgment. All of this must be held in proper perspective. Drudgery, doom and gloom result from too much awareness of matters of duty result in a dull lifeless experience. On the other hand, too much awareness of love without duty, results in a light and careless relationship. If we act faithfully out of love, drudgery is never experienced. It is only in the presence of discouragement resulting from lost vision that a sense of drudgery results. Duty, responsibility, accountability, and judgment are always a part of our Christian experience, but awareness of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness results in joyful activity.

## Chapter Eighty-four

### The King is Coming

Luke 19:28-44

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "The Lord needs it."

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

What a glorious day it is when God comes to visit! It is a once in a lifetime event for most people. The nation of Israel, however, had been accustomed to the presence of God in their midst as he had dealt with them through many events of history. He also visited them through his prophets and the religious institution of their time. They were looking forward to the day when God would send the Messiah to them to be their king and lift them to a position of prominence within the family of nations. They were longing for his coming, but were totally unprepared for his appearance.

When Jesus appeared at a difficult time due to the political conditions with Rome. The manner of his coming also made them uncomfortable. It was for this reason that the leadership of the nation found acceptance of Jesus difficult. When he rode into Jerusalem riding on a colt, with people proclaiming him

king, it posed a problem for the leaders of the nation. They were under the domination of the powerful Roman Empire and any effort to oppose them would be met with force.

Humanly speaking, it isn't easy to accept another human being as being the Messiah. There were divine implications in such a manifestation and the elders had sought to protect it against frivolous attempts by ambitious wanna-bes. In their attempts to protect this revered position, they had blinded their own hearts to the very one that was indeed the sent Messiah.

The common people, however, were much more open to acceptance of Jesus having partaken of the miraculous ministry he demonstrated. Jesus was the divinely sent Son of God, God made flesh and dwelling among us. His incarnation was and is difficult for common man to accept. Jesus was every bit man, but he was also every bit God. For him to use titles and attach himself to prophecies concerning the coming Messiah was truth, but that truth was being rejected by those who were in authority within the religious institutions of his day.

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem with people proclaiming him their king, hardened hearts were being solidified in a murderous desire that would result in his crucifixion.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem his heart was heavy, though people were proclaiming him king, he knew that the nation as a whole was bent on rejection. Amidst the rejoicing through Jesus paused to ponder the fate of a people he yearned to embrace, but they were unwilling to accept his love.

People were gathering to Jerusalem from all over the then known world for the Passover feast coming in just a few days. The stage was being set for his final hour, and Jesus moved boldly into position to become the sin sacrifice for the whole world. With tears flowing on the face of Jesus, he uttered these words, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42) The revelation of who he was would be openly proclaimed to all who would hear and God would visit their hearts, but for now the truth was hidden from their understanding so that God's will could be done.

The leaders of the people were blind to the true meaning of the words of the prophet Isaiah which said, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) There was no media hype when Jesus was born only the proclamation of the angels, "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10-11) The knowledge concerning Jesus was available to any who would care to investigate. He was truly God in the flesh of man, but acceptance of him brings about revolutionary changes in the life of all who accept him. His doctrines were not of this world, therefore, only those whose hearts were ready for the message of eternal hope could receive him. He was a king, but not like any of this earth.

This crowd of rejoicing people would soon be replaced by a mob stirred to hysterical frenzy that would cry for his blood to be upon them and their children and their grand children. The resultant judgment would fall upon them just as they desired. How tragic it is when people reject the source of life and peace. Jesus wept as he pondered their fate.

## **Chapter Eighty-five**

### **The Temple His House**

Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer"; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

The book of Luke sets forth Jesus as the son of man, but not at the expense of the clear teachings concerning Jesus being God. His claim to divinity is clearly seen in all the scriptures and is confirmed once more as Jesus claims ownership of the temple and drives out those desecrating it.

The atmosphere surrounding Jesus was one of expectancy, hope and enthusiasm. Wherever he ministered to people, lives were improved by what they heard, felt, and received. Some received healing, while others found release from the torments of demonic afflictions. In a few cases they even received their dead restored back to life and health.

There were some, however, who were not happy with what Jesus was doing. There were activities going on in the temple that God had not authorized. When he came in and cleared the temple of these people and their animals, he caused quite a stir. Just who did he think he was? Why, the very idea that he would come into the temple and drive people out who were there by permission from the priesthood was seen as a major offense! Who authorized him to monitor the activities of the temple?

His authority did not come from men, but from God. He was the only begotten of the Father, and therefore the heir of all things. All that exists in heaven and on earth are his; therefore, he has authority over all.

They could not see Jesus as he really is creator of all things, because they could only see his humanity. It was not his humanity that had created all things. It was his eternal being that was creator. He came to earth and received a body prepared for him. We call this the incarnation. The physical body of Jesus did not preexist only the being that occupied the body. He came as the Christ of God to be the Savior of sinners.

He did not gain the position by being a good man and thus being chosen from among men to be the Christ; he was born the Christ, and confirmed that reality by living a sinless life. He fulfilled all that had been spoken about him from the Garden of Eden onward. He was unique among men, the product of the will of God, yet he was man; this is called his humiliation. He humbled himself to become a man and not just a man, but also a servant of men.

There have been many attempts to trifle with the doctrines of Christ historically. Some have denied that he was human saying that he only appeared to be human. Another heresy that borders on blasphemy is that he was not Christ until John baptized him. This theory in some forms says he was just a man and that he willingly submitted to the Christ spirit that was then with him until he went to the cross and that there it left him to die alone. How ridiculous will the vain imaginations of man get? Yet, people become confused about Jesus because they don't take the effort to read the testimony of the scriptures or they willfully chose to believe other than what the scriptures plainly declare. "What difference does it make?" you may ask. "So what if these doctrines are taught?" The reason why it is important has to do with the reasons behind the efforts to trifle with these all-essential doctrines. Some do it to make Jesus less than God, thus creating a false sense of equality with him. If Christ-hood was something he attained to, then perhaps we too can become a god person. This is New Age thought. New Agers think that the Christ Spirit is in everyone and that some learn to yield to it and thus become a sort of superhuman spirit. Others believe that Jesus was merely a son of God and therefore less than God incarnate. All of these attempts are based on the desire to glorify our status as humans by making it seem that we can in some way improve ourselves to the level of godhood.

The message of the scriptures is a simple one; man though created in the image of God is man and always will be. Man can never be a God in the same sense in which God is God. To be a God one must be able to exist wholly apart from any other being, with no life supports that he has not created. He must not have anything that he received from another.

There is a sense, however, in which men become gods. It is when men willfully chose to act and think independently of a higher being as having authority over them. It was this sort of godhood that

Adam and Eve attained to when they sinned in the garden. They accepted the serpent's challenge to the authority of God, the character of God, and the willingness of God to carry out the sentence of death for disobedience. In acting independently they became a god unto themselves.

Man is a dependent being in every sense of the word. Salvation has to do with the acknowledgment of that reality. It is our sense of self-sufficiency that is the result of the fall. It is the resultant desire to improve our status through self-help programs that foster a continuation of this selfism. There is no substitute for repentance from this god attitude that is so prevalent both among the ungodly and sometimes among those who call themselves Christians.

The whole meaning surrounding the teaching about living in the Spirit is the ability to divest ourselves of this independence and live our lives as totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit. He has been given to us to teach us, empower us, and enable us to live lives of righteousness. It is only when we completely acknowledge this reality that any improvement results. There is no room for boasting about this improvement. It is the result of God's work in us and not our own efforts.

Jesus went to the temple, his house, a house of prayer, but instead of finding prayer, he found a den of thieves. The selfishness, greed, and ego-centered hearts of fallen man had found expression in the religion that was supposed to remind people of their dependence upon God. The offerings they brought were supposed to be a thanksgiving to God for the provisions he had blessed them with. Their sin offerings were supposed to be an acknowledgment of their failure to acknowledge this in their lives. Weakness leads to willfulness, and willfulness to sin, therefore; we need to pray. All the activities of the temple were supposed to be a form of prayer of one sort or another. When that was not the case, the purpose of the temple was not being served.

Religion often distracts people from the proper relationship they are to have with God. The institutions become the focus and the endeavors of that institution supplant God. They have then become a god to the people. The people serve the institution and look to it for their salvation. The institution and those who govern it have become thieves robbing God of his glory. Jesus came to the temple demonstrating his disapproval. With whip in hand he drove them out and restored it, at least temporarily, to a house of prayer.

## **Chapter Eighty-six**

### **The Rightful Heir**

Luke 20:1-19

One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"

He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

So they answered, "We don't know where it was from."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they

beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"

Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

When the elders of the nation confronted Jesus with the question of authority, he returned a question to them about John the Baptist. He knew full well that by doing this he was touching a nerve with this formidable group of men. They knew how popular John the Baptist was with the people and yet they had not acknowledged either him or his message. They dodged the question, brushing it off by saying, they didn't know.

Jesus then gave them a poignant story that left little to be discussed as to its meaning. The leaders of the nation had acted shamefully toward those that God had sent to them. The story Jesus told was a mini essay on the historic interplay between God and the leaders of this nation.

Without naming names or making indictments, Jesus got right to the point. They knew he was talking about them, and they knew about his claim to Sonship making him the heir spoken of in the parable. Once more they tried to evade the issue, brushing it off by saying, "May this never be." Jesus, however, knowing the scriptures asked them the question that placed the whole discussion right where they could no longer dodge the meaning. He asked them, what's the meaning of the scripture, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Luke 20:18)

This angered the men who were confronting Jesus and they wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the people. They knew he could see right through their evil desires and this could not be tolerated. He, like John the Baptist, was calling for what they were unwilling to give, acknowledgment of the plan of God. They viewed Jesus as a threat to both their authority and national peace with Rome. It wasn't the fact that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead that upset them, it was the way he challenged their authority and teachings by his claims to being God's Son that bothered them. They determined that he must die, and they sought a means of bring this about.

By quoting the scripture about falling on the stone and being broken, Jesus was calling for repentance and acknowledgment of his claim. It was very similar to the story of Joseph telling his brothers his dreams of how he would one day be bowed down too. The reaction was also very similar. The brothers of Joseph sought opportunity to dispose of him, just as these men were seeking a way to dispose of Jesus.

The words of Jesus would have been foolish words had it not been that it was God's will that he die for the sins of the world. What he gave them was the plan whereby men are able to receive eternal life. It is by falling on the rock, Christ Jesus that men are saved. Falling upon him is a breaking experience to be sure, the flesh or fallen sin nature being dealt a deathblow, but the faith required results in entry into the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, the only source of eternal life. To those who refuse this divine remedy, judgment awaits; they will be ground to powder.

Jesus was the stone the builders rejected. They knew they were the builders being referred to and he the stone, no matter; murder was already in their hearts.

## Chapter Eighty-seven

### Futile Efforts to Trap Jesus

Luke 20:20-26

Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

This strange coalition of enemies of Jesus was also reported in Matthew. Teachers of the Law, Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians along with elders of the people formed an alliance to try to trap Jesus. These men usually had little to do with each other but we see them in this story aligning themselves against Jesus. They were seeking some legal basis to arrest him that would hold up before the governor.

Their first attempt to get something on him had to do with paying taxes. There evidently was an ongoing resentment among the people against paying taxes to the Roman authorities. Some of the religious people likely resisted on grounds that the government was an immoral institution due to the worship of Caesar. Perhaps they expected Jesus to take a political stand since he was being proclaimed the heir to the throne of David. Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and asked for a coin. He simply identified the ownership of the coin and admonished them to give Caesar what belonged to him, and to give to God what belonged to him. These men were not expecting this sort of wisdom to come from Jesus.

Next the Sadducees made an attempt. They didn't believe in a resurrection and by implication not after life either. To them, to die was to be dead. The story they concocted about a woman being married to eight different brothers and then adding the question about whose wife would she be in the resurrection, was an attempt to make the idea of an after life a very complicated issue. Some misguided people were evidently teaching the notion of eternal marriage, even back then. I suppose Joseph Smith if he is in heaven, is a very disillusioned man by now, as he too believed in eternal marriage. Jesus, however, set the record straight; marriage is an institution of this life and has no part in heaven. Sex is primarily for the procreation of the species and when this life is over its usefulness has been served.

Lest anyone might still disbelieve in the resurrection, Jesus gave solid Biblical evidence concerning the afterlife. He used the scriptures that referred to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all who had died previous, and yet spoken of in the present tense. Either the scriptures were wrong or they were still alive, only in a different form. Once more his critics were silenced.

Jesus, however, was not through with them. He too had a question to ask. Jesus, knowing the hearts of all men, knew in advance that the hot issue at his upcoming trial would be his claim to being God incarnate and his claim to the throne of David asked the question about how it was that David called his son Lord? If the Christ was David's son and if he was the Lord, then Jesus' claims had scriptural foundation.

If they would accept this, at least on an individual basis, they could withdraw themselves from the murderous plot against him. This was no doubt an opportunity for those with ears to hear, to rethink their opposition to Jesus. As Jesus' ministry proceeded, there were those individual priest, elders, and other leaders who turned to Jesus, however, the institution itself never accepted him.

The efforts to discredit Jesus were fruitless, but murder still remained in the hearts of those bent on his destruction.

## Chapter Eighty-eight

### A Test of Values

Luke 20:45-47,21:1-4

While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

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Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov. 8:13) Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud. To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. (Prov. 16:18)

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Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like -- always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. If I had said, "I will speak this," I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! (Ps. 73:1-19)



Wicked men are a burden in the heart of the righteous. It is grievous when men in positions of authority fail to behave acceptably. How sad it is when we see pride, greed, deceit, and lust manifest in the lives of those to whom we look for spiritual guidance and inspiration.

Jesus spoke out forcefully against the religious leaders of his day, condemning their vile behaviors, especially as expressed in violence against the poor. He saw through their prideful ways, how they behaved publicly, while they took advantage of the poor, denying them the basic necessities of life, while indulging their own excesses. Neither these condemned men nor those following them had a clue about eternal values. Their focus was upon themselves. They were all ignorant about God and about themselves. Had they understood eternal values, they would have behaved very differently.

Jesus was evidently standing in the temple as he warned the people about their leaders and the pride they displayed. Nearby was the treasury where people were placing their contributions to the temple. He observed the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, all giving out of the abundance of their blessings. How much can we give without noticing a change in our lifestyles? Among those giving their gifts was a widow. She placed her gift into the treasury, two copper coins. They were of little value as compared to the gifts of the rich.

Today, a gift of this amount might even be an annoyance to those counting the offering, especially if it is in an offering envelope that requires keeping a record for tax purposes. The gift wouldn't even pay the postage for a tax receipt! Some might think, "If you can't give a worthwhile gift then don't give one at all!" Jesus, however, didn't view her giving as man might view it. He said that she had given more than any of those who gave that day because she gave all her living.

What a view of things! Giving is not counted on the amount of money given but rather on what that giving represents in the giver! The royal law of giving is based upon how a gift is given rather than the content of the gift. Even a cup of cold water given in the right way will not lose its reward. Giving to the Lord should be counted a privilege rather than a duty. God is a giver and he likes his children to be givers too. I like to view giving as the establishment of a conduit through which God pours blessings. Little conduits carry little blessings, but God enriches those who are generous.

How does it work? One man I heard preaching on the subject said that every seed produces after its kind, money produces money, love produces love—I'm not so sure. That's true in the natural world, but what is true here is not necessarily true in the spiritual kingdom. The natural realm has value in illustrating divine truth, but the laws of this world do not limit divine truth.

Those who seek to limit divine truth by the laws that govern the affairs of this life make gross errors. When illustrations are looked at that are similar to divine truths, having seen what the illustration demonstrates, we must lay the illustration aside and look only at the divine truth. An illustration does not at all limit the scope of what is being illustrated; it only amplifies a point.

Giving to God is rewarded in many ways. It may be in good health. It may be in increase of good. I am convinced that 10% given to God as an act of love and worship will result in more benefits than could ever be realized from spending all 100% upon us. Ninety percent blessed by God is more than 100% without God's blessing. It's not how much money a person has to spend that is important, it's how much it will do that counts.

Greedy people have tried to con God into giving them more by giving to him. God, however, sees through the charade and because he hates greed, pride and lustful living, condemns such actions as evil. Many who have given to God in order to get, have suffered even greater loss than they would have, had they not even given in the first place.

There is no evidence in the story that the widow woman gave to get, nor is there any evidence that her giving resulted in any blessing. Perhaps some eligible man noticed her generous spirit and being attracted to her made her his wife. It could have happened. Nor do I know if, walking away from the temple she saw coins lying on the ground that had fallen from the purse of some rich man. It could have happened. But I do know that she left the temple that day with the eye of God upon her for good and not for evil. Having God's pleasure upon us is far more important than how much we have in our bank accounts.

There is a place of blessing that proud, arrogant evil men know nothing about. In it are pleasures that only God can give. The riches of the Spirit are only valued by those whose hearts have been cleansed. Real riches are not found in bank accounts; they are found in human hearts.

## Chapter Eighty-nine

### Look Up, Jesus is Coming.

Luke 21:5-38

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

It is natural to wonder about the future. Men have pondered the future course of human history and have sought answers. Some of their searching has been legitimate, going to the source of knowledge, God. Others have sought to know the future by seeking information from fortune tellers, and other spiritualists who get their knowledge from the unseen spirit world that exists in the lower atmosphere and

can be contacted by those who have learned how to present themselves to this realm of evil beings. God forbids contact with this spirit world, but man is constantly being seduced by its mystical pull.

God revealed his message in Old Testament days concerning the future to men called prophets. One such man was Daniel who wanted to know what the future held for his people Israel. He sought God with earnest fasting and prayer and God answered him by sending an angel with the information he sought.

The disciples were curious too, and their curiosity was stirred when Jesus told them that the temple that they were standing in awe of would be thrown to the ground. They wanted to know when this would come to pass. The answer they got was more than they asked for, reaching to the very end times.

More important than the when and what of future events was how the disciples were positioned with reference to the future. Having a proper mindset regarding future events would prevent them from becoming confused or discouraged.

God's gift to man is not knowing the future, but rather, knowing him who holds the future. Jesus gave us enough information so that as history unfolds we have some points of reference reminding us that we are not adrift in a great sea of chance. God knows the end and all the intervening points. What happens comes as no surprise to him, but it is not for us to know all the events of history in advance, only enough so our confidence in God will not be shaken.

The first matter of importance on the mind of Jesus was that his disciples would not be deceived by leaders who would pose as having some revelation or commission saying things like, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' We are to be careful about such matters as following those who say they have figured out when the coming of the Lord will occur. He will come, but the day and hour has been hidden from us. We have been assigned the task of world evangelism. When we complete the task; he will come. Until then we are to be more concerned with the task than with the lateness of the hour.

As Jesus talked with them he said, "When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven." (Luke 21:10-11) None of these events are indications of the end times. They all have to do with the ebb and flow of human history. Assigning "end of the world" importance to events of this kind is not in accordance with the spirit of truth.

Jesus went on to warn his disciples about what would happen to those who are followers of his. He said, "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name." (Luke 21:12) This is important to know, persecution is a part of what believers can expect, but great rewards are the result. There is a purpose, however, in the heart of God for allowing persecutions to come. He went on to say, "This will result in your being witnesses to them." (Luke 21:13) God is not sadistic, but he must give people a chance to hear the message. If he protects his witnesses from suffering, he jeopardizes the message. After we have endured the pain of being a witness for Jesus, we will be more than amply rewarded.

This raises another concern. If we are going to be placed in a position to witness to people in high places, what should we say? Jesus answered this question before we could ask, "But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict." (Luke 21:14-15)

He was concerned also that we would understand the full scope of possibilities as to where these persecutions would come from, so he said, "You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me." (Luke 21:16-17) But, not to worry, God sees all and will not allow even a hair of your head to be lost, that is, even if we lose our hair as a result of persecution it will not perish! He said, "But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life." (Luke 21:18-19) The meaning of this has to do with eternal rewards. God's accounting of your pain is very complete and he will reward all of it when suffering is the result of your faith.

After talking to them about persecutions, Jesus answered their question about the temple, giving important information about the coming destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled in AD 70. At that time Jerusalem fell under siege by the Roman army experiencing devastations that were unparalleled in Jewish history. The disciples were instructed that the danger would develop suddenly and that they were to immediately leave the city. Great distress would follow within the city and the city would fall and be destroyed. It would be given over to the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles would be fulfilled. Only then would it be returned to Jewish control. All of this would be the result of God's judgment because of their actions in crucifying Jesus.

Jesus continued with information that seems to continue from the restoration of Jerusalem to Jewish control. He speaks of signs in the heavens, anguish and perplexity among the nations using the metaphor of a roaring tossing sea. He spoke of apprehensiveness, fear and terror resulting from heavenly bodies being shaken. This is an indeterminate period of time climaxing in the return of Jesus with great power and glory on the clouds of heaven. Additional information regarding these events is given in the book of Revelations.

Jesus then gave the illustration of a fig tree as well as other trees, that when you see the leaves appearing on the branches you know that summer is coming. Again this is an indeterminate period of time, but it is time to get ones act in order! Jesus knew full well the tendency of fallen man to be complacent and how easy it is to get caught up in the affairs of life. Some of his followers would even allow drunkenness to overtake them as well as other destructive and dissipating activities. These sorts of behaviors numb the mind to spiritual matters and cause such people to neglect their walk with God. God allows catastrophic events to remind us of our vulnerability and dependency upon him, and that we are not our own. We don't have the right to indulge our carnal natures. We are soldiers in a battle for the souls of men. Anything that distracts us from our mission should be regarded as an enemy. End time events will, in many instances, be catastrophic and we will need all our faculties in a constant state of readiness to react. There will be issues that will suddenly arise leaving no time for repentance or restitution. Jesus warned that things would happen that would come upon the unsuspecting like a trap. He doesn't want us to get caught unprepared and unaware. Look up; this is the common need of all men. We tend to look down, down at the mundane cares of life. To look up is to look to the Lord our source of knowledge and instruction and away from us and the immediate problems that are upon us.

I remember once I was invited to go deep-sea fishing. We live in the central valley of California and being summer it was hot. I thought this would be a wonderful warm day out on the water catching fish and in general would be very pleasant. We got up early and drove to the dock, boarded our boat and off we went. Several of the men were dressed in cutoffs, all in light clothing, unaware that it would be cold and foggy all day. The water was somewhat turbulent and when we started fishing they shut off the motor leaving us bobbing like a cork. It was cold and predictably several of the men were soon very sick. I remember standing by the railing trying to fish and fighting the feeling of nausea that was trying to overtake me. I soon learned that by lifting my eyes from the water beneath me and looking at the horizon I would gain a perspective that helped fight it off.

Jesus spoke of the events of life being like a roaring tossing sea. We need to remember to look up, regain our perspectives so that the events of life do not trap us in unbelief and despair. We have a hope that reaches beyond the horizon and if we will look up, we will see that Jesus is coming back and that we have work to do before he comes.

## **Chapter Ninety**

## The Judas in Us All

Luke 22:1-6

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

When Satan needed an accomplice to dissuade Jesus from speaking about his coming death, he used Peter. It was Peter's natural love for Jesus that made him a candidate to be used. Because Peter's mind was upon carnal interests and not upon the desires of the Holy Spirit's purposes, he was easily manipulated into actions contrary to the will of God.

Whenever Satan wants to cause trouble he looks for someone whose spirit can be manipulated into actions in accordance with his desire. If he wants to split a church he will look for someone who doesn't like the pastor, or has an ax to grind, as the saying goes, and begin to stir that individual's mind against the pastor. It could be over an issue of doctrine or an alleged indiscretion, never mind, Satan doesn't care about real issues, all he wants is someone to stir up. Once he has his first convert he can do the rest through snide remarks, and malicious gossip.

In our lesson, Satan wanted to destroy Jesus and Judas was his most likely tool. Though Judas seemed to love Jesus, and was a participant in many ministerial functions. He was, nonetheless still sinning. He seemed to think that he could steal money from the moneybag and still be one of Jesus' most trusted friends. In allowing him access to the moneybag, Jesus gave him the opportunity to sin. What was in his heart was expressed with repentance in view. Once his sin was allowed to express itself, he then had to choose whether to repent or continue in sin. Had he yearned for righteousness he would have sought forgiveness and cleansing. Allowing Judas this opportunity runs contrary to human thought. Who would ever give a thief the job of being church treasurer?

Could it be that God allows people access to the very sins that have the power to destroy them? Repentance is the necessary prerequisite to salvation. Unless we understand our need we cannot repent. Subjecting us to temptation reveals our need. Once sin in our hearts has been exposed, conviction and repentance can follow. Whereas God never tempts us to sin, he does allow Satan access to us when it is in the best interests of our salvation.

Judas loved money; therefore he stole. Some people steal because it is a means of getting something that they want. A drug addict steals to get more drugs; the love of money is only incidental to the greater desire for the drugs. Stealing is breaking a command of God; therefore, Judas was a sinner. Being in the presence of Jesus didn't result in personal righteousness; it merely gave him the opportunity to see his need. Unrepentant hearts are easy prey to Satan's purposes. When Satan needed an accomplice to betray Jesus, he had only to look for Judas. Judas' love for money overruled his love for Jesus.

I have speculated that when Judas proposed to betray Jesus, he justified himself with some kind of mental game playing, perhaps thinking that Jesus would see through the trap being laid for him. Jesus was always aware of even the thoughts of his disciples, surely he would not allow himself to be arrested. He also had escaped from hostile crowds before, passing right through the midst of them. Surely no harm would be done. The elders would be made to look foolish once more and he would have their silver!

Those who hide sin in their hearts always have methods of justification. It isn't easy to come to the conclusion that we are sinners without justification. It is human to want to blame someone or something for our sins. If we can identify a cause, we are more comfortable in our sinful ways. We can develop a sort of peace with ourselves, and live without the interference of conscience.

Today, popular excuses have to do with societal blame or heredity. Those involved in homosexual conduct say they were born that way. Criminals too, have concluded that there must have been some

genetic error that made them criminals. Truth is, all mankind has a hereditary reason for sinning! It is a genetic error that only Jesus can heal! We call it the sin nature. It is a disease that is common to all, that is why Jesus came into this world. He alone has the cure and we need the cure. Repentance is recognition of that fact and accepting his answer. Recognizing that we have a sin nature without repentance is to use the genetic problem as an excuse for sinning. Once justification for sinning has been accepted as a fact of life, no hope of repentance remains.

Judas became sorry for his sin after betraying Jesus, but sorrow for sin is not the same as repentance. Had Judas gone out and smote his breast crying for God to be merciful to him a sinner, he would have received mercy and pardon. When an individual has had opportunity after opportunity to repent and has not done so, hardness of heart results sealing them off from the possibility of repentance.

How can a man repent if his heart is hard? It isn't easy. Sometimes hardships soften hearts, thus God allows tragic circumstances. Hardships also cause further hardening when the principles of the Spirit are being rebelled against, yet everyone deserves a chance to repent. Sometimes if the need is desperate enough, people will call out to God, but true repentance is evidenced when things return to normal.

I recall how the media talked about God and prayer during the time of the gulf war. Our nation was holding its breath, as it were, not sure of the outcome. People prayed who never prayed as a normal course of life. No one seemed to be ashamed to admit we needed God in an hour of crisis such as that, but just as soon as it was over, so was all mention of our need for God. National repentance had not taken place; God was soon forgotten.

The sin of larceny in the heart of Judas may have seemed innocent enough, after all, who was he hurting? It was only the excess he took. How like Judas many of us are saying, "They'll only throw it away anyway." or "They'll never miss it." or "Everyone's doing it."

Sometimes we deny God his tithe, claiming tithing is unreasonable. Don't we need all we earn? Or, I'm not making it now, how can I afford to tithe? Or, I give to God—but 10%? If the love of money and what it can buy is in our hearts, it will be easy to justify not tithing. If the love of God is greater than our love for the things of the world, we will tithe as an act of love and worship. If our finances do not permit tithing, we will use our faith asking God for financial relief.

Paying tithe is like a farmer who takes grain that his family could eat and sows it in the ground with the hope that it will produce a harvest next year. It takes faith to tithe when your present needs are great, but tithe is not discretionary money, it belongs to God. It is not for us to decide whether to give or not to give. It is for us to give and to trust God for the finances needed to take care of our families.

Judas' needs were being met along with all the other disciples, it was his desire for more than the allotted provision that caused him to steal. Perhaps for some of us it is our desire for a new appliance, or to get out of debt, that causes us to steal from God. We may think, "My tithe could have bought those things I wanted, and now look at how the church is wasting the money I gave!" Satan is always nearby, it seems, looking for an opportunity to fan into flame a latent desire, and thus cause us to sin.

Satan entered unresisted into Judas, his doom that had been forming in his heart was now sealed. How tragic to see Satan win. His victories over people don't happen over night. They happen, a little resistance to the Holy Spirit here, repentance postponed there, a little allowance for sin because it's fun, and soon the trap is laid.

Sometimes people connive and get their way in an area of life. They seem to feel that they have won out because they have gotten their way. The other day, a mother told me how her teenage children had manipulated her into doing something they desired. One of her children made the remark, "We won!" When she told me of this my response was, "No, they lost." They failed to gain insight and experience in the development of their character. They lost the joy of conforming to the righteousness of God, and in its place they only had a temporary satisfaction of getting one over on their mother. They had taken one more step down the slippery slope to utter destruction.

The trap that was laid was not for Jesus, really; it was a trap that Judas walked into. Jesus wasn't trapped; he knew full well what was taking place. He went willingly to the cross, but Judas lost his soul.

Satan won Judas, but lost all who believe in Jesus. Killing Jesus sealed Satan's doom, but it provided salvation to all who will believe in him.

Repentance is accepting the fact that we are hopelessly infected with the virus of sin, and recognizing we were born that way, then reaching for the antidote, the blood of Jesus, to cure us.

## Ninety-one

### The Last Supper

Luke 22:7-20

<sup>7</sup> Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

<sup>9</sup> "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

<sup>10</sup> He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, <sup>11</sup> and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" <sup>12</sup> He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there."

<sup>13</sup> They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

<sup>17</sup> After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

<sup>19</sup> And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

<sup>20</sup> In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

The Lord Jesus was now coming to the final hour when the sin sacrifice for the sins of the world would be offered, only this time the real sacrifice to which all previous sacrifices pointed would be offered. As the disciples gathered in the upper room that had been prepared, they were about to experience the most important meal they ever had with Jesus.

In western culture a day begins at midnight, but in the Jewish culture of that day, a day began at the setting of the sun and proceeded through the night and all through the next day ending at sundown. On the day of preparation, Jesus sent his disciples to a room that had been furnished and made ready for a Passover meal to be eaten in. The circumstance concerning whose it was and why it was available to Jesus and his disciples remains a mystery, but the important thing is to note that it was so.

Jesus gave instructions to his disciples to enter the city and a man carrying a jar of water would meet them, they were instructed to follow him to the house he would enter and the man would show them the place where they were to prepare the Passover meal.

The preparations having been made, Jesus and his apostles (Luke changes the mode of reference here calling them apostles rather than disciples.) gathered around the table reclining, as was the custom in those days. Jesus then announce that this was the final meal that Jesus would eat with them and that the next time they would eat together would be after it had found fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

Jesus referred to the suffering that he was about to enter, but the disciple still didn't understand the importance or the significance of what was happening. I think they understood that this was an important event, but just how important seemed to allude them. The whole matter of Jesus being the Savior of the World and that his death on the cross was essential seemed too much for them to grasp. Nevertheless, Jesus proceeded knowing that the day for understanding would soon come and that the Holy Spirit would bring all of this back to their remembrance and give them complete understanding of what was

transpiring. There was no need to belabor the fact that they didn't understand; it was time to proceed according to God's plan and not to concern himself with the lack of comprehension on the part of the disciples.

Jesus took the cup and gave thanks for it saying, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." (Luke 22:17-18) Then he continued, "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19-20)

There is no more precious event in all of Christian practice than accepting the emblems of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ because, the emblems represent what Jesus did for us in giving us forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

There is history in all of this, a lot of history. It all began in the Garden of Eden when Satan approached Eve having embodied himself in a serpent. Eve listened to the voice of Satan and sin entered into the human race as Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in an act of independent defiance of the command of God. It was not an event that caused the earth to shake or the sky to turn color, in fact, there were no outward evidences that anything was any different. The garden didn't suddenly wither or their teeth turn to fangs, but death was subtly entering into their spirits. The source of eternal life had been severed and like a limb that has been cut off a tree, the leaves begin to wither, so the spirit of eternal life began to leave them. The full ramifications were not immediately evident, but today we wrestle with the reality of persistent evil being ever present in the ebb and flow of human experience and history. Every pain we feel, every struggle we experience is testimony to the present of the resultant curse that is upon our planet and us.

Because sin entered into human experience the need for a remedy was evident if man and God would ever again have fellowship as they once did. God is love, and God loved Adam and Eve and indeed all the human family to follow. Therefore, God set a plan into motion that would result in the Salvation of every human soul who would believe on him and receive his gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. When Adam and Eve met God that day in the cool of the evening, God saw their need for a covering for their nakedness, and took the skin of an animal and made clothes for them. Now it is evident that an animal had to die so that skin could be taken, so we have the first instance of a sacrifice being made because of sin. This sacrifice, in my view, was an act by God of commitment to a plan that would ultimately result in the death of God's one and only Son Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. Up to that point, God could have scraped the whole notion of eternal life as a gift to mankind as a result of him taking our death upon himself, but once he slew an animal as a substitutionary sacrifice, he was committed to the plan. All that Adam and Eve had to do was accept the covering for their nakedness and by putting on the garment God gave them to wear that symbolized the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and all was peaceful again, albeit, they had to leave the garden.

Every sacrifice made by a believing repentant sinner from that day onward, was a token of faith in the coming salvation. We make no sacrifice for sin today; it has been made for us. All that remains is to believe on him, and when we partake of the emblems of his broken body and shed blood it is in remembrance of him. What gratitude should fill our hearts, what love should flow from our spirits; Jesus gave himself for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, the sinless for we sinners!



## Betray Jesus?

Luke 22:21-23

<sup>21</sup> But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. <sup>22</sup> The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.” <sup>23</sup> They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Do friends betray friends? Oh yes, if the price is right, and especially, if it can be made to seem like the right thing to do. It's called, spinning it, today. Judas, for whatever reason, decided that it would be okay for him to sell Jesus to the authorities. When you have something of value, and you think you need money, if someone wants what you have, sell it. Judas evidently thought he needed money, and what he had that had value was knowledge, so he sold it to the people who sought Jesus.

Did Judas really want to be rid of Jesus? Probably not, in fact, he may have even thought he was doing the right thing. After all, wasn't Jesus supposed to be the Messiah? According to the popular teachings of the time, the Messiah was supposed to be a liberator from the tyranny of oppressors, and the government of Rome was a tyranny. If Jesus' hour had come as he said, then wasn't it reasonable to believe that he would have to make his move? A man with the kind of supernatural power that Jesus possessed could surely handle a few soldiers! What would it hurt if he helped set things in motion? When Judas left the room having been designated the betrayer by Jesus, he might have even put the spin on it that Jesus approved of what he was doing, never mind that he said woe to the man who betrays him.

One man I knew, who was a single man, came upon a young lady who played a game of tennis with him and afterward made herself available for a sinful sexual encounter that he indulged in. His statement was that he thanked God for the experience! Somehow he was able to put a spin on it as being a special grant from God, he evidently conveniently forgot that fornication is a sin! This kind of twisted logic is common, but it comes from the tempter Satan, not God.

How many are there in the multitude that has indulged in this same kind of twisted logic? Hell is populated with such individuals as this! Judas was no special creation for the purpose of betraying Jesus, only one of a very large group of individuals who are willing to sell their birthright for a momentary sinful indulgence especially if it seems right at the time.

## Ninety-three

### Who is the Greatest?

Luke 22:24-30

<sup>24</sup> Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. <sup>28</sup> You are those who have stood by me in my trials. <sup>29</sup> And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, <sup>30</sup> so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

What does it mean to be given a position of leadership in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it a position of honor? The Lord assigned a position of authority to each of the disciples who had been with him through his trials here on earth. Each of them was given a throne and told that he had a place

reserved at the Lord's table and that they would judge the tribes of Israel. When would this be realized? They thought it would be in this present world, but no such thrones were ever given to them in this present life.

Salvation has more to do with what happens after this life than anything that happens in this life. The apostles were the appointed leaders of the early church, and their roles were to teach and preach the message of the kingdom. The kingdom was and is a matter of the heart, but there is a kingdom that is not of this world and there will be assignments in it that we only vaguely understand at this time. The purpose of an assignment by the Lord to a position in his kingdom is more for those who are being served than for the one who serves.

It's an honor to be given a position of responsibility in the kingdom of God, but the purpose is to bless those who are being served. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is a kingdom of love. Those who serve in the kingdom are to serve out of love for the Lord Jesus and for love of each other. The motive should never be what one can receive from what is done, but rather what can be given to others.

The Lord Jesus set the example for those who are called to service in his kingdom. Even though he is King of kings and Lord of lords, he came to this world and assumed the role of servant. He gathered disciples around him, but served them as teacher. When they sat for supper, it was Jesus who took the pan of water and washed the disciples feet. He also spoke of the time to come in the kingdom when he would sit his disciples down and serve them. God is always available to all who will call on him with righteous intent and humble hearts. He serves us in so many ways, and asks so little in return. What he does ask us to do is to enrich others and us and to fill our lives with the joy of giving.

## Chapter Ninety-four

### Simon, Simon, Satan has desired you!

Luke 22:31-38

<sup>31</sup> "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

<sup>33</sup> But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

"Nothing," they answered.

<sup>36</sup> He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. <sup>37</sup> It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

<sup>38</sup> The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."

"That is enough," he replied.

Radical life changes were straight ahead for the disciples. They had been with Jesus for approximately three and a half years, but the hour of Jesus' arrest and trial were only hours away. Soon they would make their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus would pray before Judas would come with a band of men to arrest Jesus.

As the time of their departure from the upper room grew nearer, Jesus' attention turned to Peter. What lay ahead of him was something he was not even close to being ready for. The disciples seemed to know that something dangerous was about to take place, but just what it was, was hidden from their complete understanding.

Peter thought of himself as being a brave soldier, and boasted that he was ready to lay down his very life for Jesus if need be. Jesus had something to say to Peter, however that was not anything like he

expected to hear. It wouldn't have surprised Peter if Jesus had appointed him as his chief bodyguard to protect him in the event someone might try something, but no, Jesus had something else in mind. The most remote thing from Peter's thoughts was the possibility that he would deny the Lord. Yet, that is exactly what he would do, and Jesus knew it! Jesus also knew that Peter's mission was only beginning. As hard as the events would be on Peter, he asked him to strengthen his brothers; this, of course, would be after repenting of his denials. Then he told him that before the rooster crows, he would deny him three times, in other words, this very night. Peter's restoration was already planned by the Lord, though he knew Peter would fail, he also knew he would succeed.

There was an issue Jesus wanted to clear up before he left them, it had to do with the mode of travel and conduct as his ambassadors. In his teaching, he referred back to when he had sent them out before, and how they lacked nothing. On that occasion he had sent them without any provisions for the journey and in the course of their journey had shown them how he could supernaturally take care of their every need. He wanted them to understand, however, that that was a special occasion, not the norm. In the future when they traveled those rules would not apply. Normally, God expects us to do what we know to do and can do for ourselves. When we can't do something that needs to be done, we can ask Jesus to provide an answer. It is such an important issue to learn, especially when we are seeing supernatural things happening, not to take God for granted thinking that he will do everything for us in a supernatural way. There is a sense in which everything that happens to a Christian is supernatural, but it usually is that God is directing all the natural events in a continual flow of God orchestrated events that result in provisions that almost appear to be totally normal life events. The Christian knows that everything comes from God and gives thanks to him; this is pleasing to the Lord. When we travel today, we normally take a suitcase and whatever else we will need for the journey. God has provided all these items for to, but if we still have needs; he is there for us.

Then there was the question of the swords. Why did Jesus want the disciples to take swords with them? They were going to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, but he told them to take them. The reason is not at all clear, however, it may have been that he wanted to demonstrate to them the futility of trusting in swords or any weapon when doing his work. Wars and rumors of wars are a part of life, but the kingdom of God is not won with weapons of war. They were not called to be soldiers; they were called to be his witnesses. They looked around and found two swords, so Jesus said it was enough. It wasn't necessary to take a whole armory full of weapons; it was only to demonstrate a point. They were now ready to go.

## **Chapter Ninety-five**

### **Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives**

Luke 22:39-46

<sup>39</sup> Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." <sup>41</sup> He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

<sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

“Pray that you will not fall into temptation,” Jesus said. Jesus had come to this hour after living a sinless life, and now he was about to offer himself as the only sacrifice that could ever satisfy true justice. Sometimes in the rush of life we tend to forget the price Jesus paid for our salvation. There was probably as much suffering going on in the heart and soul of Jesus on this night as there would be in his body as he hung on the cross. There was genuine anguish of heart and soul as Jesus prepared to take upon himself the sins of the world. For him to take the place of sinners, he had to accept all the guilt, all the ugliness of spirit that drives men to evil, all the lust and vileness of sexual sins, and all the violence of hate and vengeance; he had to take it upon himself and then take it to the cross and put it to death, all without personal sin. Like a sheep being led to the slaughter, so Jesus offered up himself in our place, the sinless for the sinner, and all without the slightest sin. It was indeed a very tall order, but if God would help him he could do it.

While anguish was in the heart and soul of Jesus, the disciples, knowing that something was happening, were full of selfish sorrow, the kind that causes the body and mind to become very fatigued in short order. They soon fell asleep and when Jesus returned he woke them because he needed their support in prayer, but they were too full of their own selves to care much about what was going on in Jesus’ heart. Once more he admonished them to pray so that they wouldn’t fall into temptation. How many times do we say, in effect, “Me, fall into temptation? I’m beyond all that! Don’t bother me, I need some sleep.” Is anyone beyond temptation? It may be that we are beyond some kinds of temptation, but different sins appeal to us at different times and seasons of life.

Living a life of prayer is an important part of this life experience. Staying humble and walking faithfully with the Lord is essential to a meaningful relationship with the Lord. Since we are creatures of habit, it is important to set a time when we allow the Lord to minister his life and love into our hearts. It may be a time when you read the word or a time of meditation upon the Lord and his word, or it may be a time of intense prayer, but it should be a necessary part of daily routines.

Jesus no doubt could have used the support of praying disciples that night, but that wasn’t what Jesus was concerned with, he wanted them to be adequately fortified with prayer. Jesus wasn’t here to become a hero, or to gain some great position of power; he was here to redeem the human race from the clutches of Satan and sin. He awoke his disciples but returned to the more essential mission of the redemptive work of carrying the sins of the world to the cross.

## Chapter Ninety-six

### Jesus is Arrested

Luke 22:47-53

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

<sup>49</sup> When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

<sup>51</sup> But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

While Jesus was praying, a crowd came out of the city with torches in hand because it was dark, and after crossing the ravine they ascended into the garden where Jesus and his faithful disciples were assembled. Judas was at the head of the crowd, and when he came to the place where Jesus was he identified him with the customary kiss of friendship. Jesus however knew that this was no kiss of friendship really, it was betrayal.

Though Jesus had the full benefit of spiritual discernment, it didn't take discernment to understand what this crowd had on their minds. They had come to arrest him and to have him killed. It didn't take long for the disciples to catch on to what was taking place, and so they asked Jesus if they should fight them with the swords. Before Jesus could reply, Peter cut an ear off the high priest's servant. Jesus then told the disciples to stop, and he then touched the man and healed his ear! I would think that that act of compassion and love of the Lord would have shamed them into realizing that what they were doing was inherently wrong, but it seems that it takes more than that to convince sinners that sin is not a good thing.

Light is always greater than darkness, but when human hearts refuse to allow the light in, darkness is the result. This truth has never been more evident to me than it is in this present day. The love of sin and the hatred of the people of God are the driving forces behind the political struggles that are currently being played out both nationally and internationally. There is a part of the population that is so intent upon their desire to have sexual freedom that they are willing to do just about anything to keep those in authority from imposing restrictions upon them. Abortion is a necessary part of having sexual freedom, therefore, the right to legal abortions in the Holy Grail of this group. Equally, all such sinners hold homosexual freedom to be a God given right because, say they, they were born that way. When we reject the truths about God and his word the Bible, we are left to the natural wisdom of man to solve all of earths problems. The Bible clearly teaches that man has a propensity to sin because he was born with a sin nature and it is the sin nature that is what these sinners point to as why they want to do what is sinful. When a person says that they were born with an inclination to a certain kind of sin, they are correct, however, that sin can never be given legitimacy for that reason. The same perverse logic can be applied to all other forms of deviant behavior. Are we going to allow serial killers to kill because they were born with a fascination with killing? Are we going to allow our women to be raped and our children molested because someone was born with an inclination to do such crimes?

Jesus came into this world, not to legitimize sin, but rather to provide salvation to sinners. Since the sin nature is the result of the lack of the spirit of divine spiritual life, and sin is the barrier to obtaining that life, Jesus had to come and be the sin sacrifice of the world. When Jesus paid the price of our sins, he made it possible for mankind to receive the gift of eternal life that is administered by the Holy Spirit. Salvation is therefore a two-part work of God. First the removal of the sin barrier by receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and then the giving of the Spirit of divine life that counteracts the sin nature.

The first step in the redemptive work had come to an end, Jesus had received the cup from the Father and now he was entering the next phase, the trial of human hearts!

## **Chapter Ninety-seven**

### **Peter Disowns Jesus**

Luke 22:54-62

<sup>54</sup> Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. <sup>55</sup> But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down

with them. <sup>56</sup> A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

<sup>57</sup> But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

<sup>58</sup> A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter replied.

<sup>59</sup> About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

<sup>60</sup> Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly.

There is nothing more humbling than to come face to face with our weaknesses. Sometimes that is exactly what is needed because; we have a tendency to become self-reliant and arrogant when come to feel that we are a cut above those weak sinners around us. True humility comes when we see that our strength comes from the Lord and that without an impartation of his life and strength we are hopelessly weak. Not weak in every way perhaps, but there always is a fatal flaw in every person that God must help us with or it will destroy us. The great challenge to law enforcement comes when a person of high esteem commits a crime for which they must be punished. How is it that a model citizen can also be a vile sinner? The reason is simple; we all have a sin nature and stand in need of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Peter didn’t believe that he was a weak person, and in most ways he wasn’t. His fatal flaw seemed to be his inflated opinion of his ability to determine what was right and what was wrong. Peter had taken a position against the possibility of the cross and on one occasion had rebuked Jesus for talking about it. Jesus exposed this thinking as being from Satan, but Peter must have still held to the idea behind the act. What Jesus was talking about ran contrary to what Peter believed was scripturally correct concerning the coming Christ. Peter apparently didn’t see any need for the work of redemption to which Jesus was committed. In Peter’s view, the mission of Christ was to reestablish the nation of Israel to its former glory. Peter was fixated upon a political Christ, but Jesus didn’t come with a political agenda, his first coming was to provide salvation to the sinful people of the world.

What was happening here in the courtyard of the high priest, was all wrong in Peter’s view of what ought to be happening. I believe that he was totally disillusioned and perhaps even disgusted by what he was seeing.

If our theology is wrong, our behaviors will also be wrong! The attempts by Jesus to enlighten Peter, had evidently been turned aside, and the result was that in the hour of pressure, he failed once again. The warning to Peter had been pushed aside by the events of the moment, and it wasn’t until Jesus turned and looked at him that he realized what he had done. The arrogance of heart that Peter had carried was dealt with in that moment of humiliation, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. We never see Peter manifesting a spirit of arrogance again; repentance did its cleansing work.

## **Chapter Ninety-eight**

### **The Guards Mock Jesus**

Luke 22:63-65

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. <sup>64</sup> They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophesy! Who hit you?” <sup>65</sup> And they said many other insulting things to him.

Peter wasn't the only one who had erroneous doctrines that motivated them to do evil deeds! Peter fit right in with this crowd, because they all had one thing in common, they were not in tune with divine purposes. Peter didn't trust Jesus' understanding of his mission, and therefore he fit in with the crowd that warmed themselves at the fire of human wisdom.

The guards likely felt that they were doing the will of God when they mocked Jesus. Good but misguided people often do evil deeds. Prophecy to us, do a miracle, come on, if you have faith move this mountain; and so they mock the people of God.

The night of the trial of Jesus was when evil reigned. A great unrestrained cloud of evil spirits was gathering in Jerusalem, because the protective hand of the Father had lifted from Jesus. The hatred in the heart of the people who were in rebellion against God, who loved evil rather than good, was now free to be expressed in unabashed violence against God. None of their evil doing could altar the plan of God because even this show of evil intent was part of the redemptive plan! There was nothing unusual about the evil being expressed that night, only a little more unrestrained perhaps, but Jesus was about to pay the atoning price for even this kind of sin!

Indeed, they thought they mocked him, but he who sits in the heavens laughs at their mockery and vows to take them in their mockery. (See Psalms 2:4-6)

## Chapter Ninety-nine

### Jesus Before Pilate and Herod

Luke 22:66-71

<sup>66</sup> At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. <sup>67</sup> "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, <sup>68</sup> and if I asked you, you would not answer. <sup>69</sup> But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

<sup>70</sup> They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You are right in saying I am."

<sup>71</sup> Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

All through the night this madness had gone on, sleeping disciples, the agonizing prayers, the betrayal, the arrest of Jesus, the denials of Peter, and the mocking, and now the demand of the chief priests, "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us." Love was absent from their voices that night. Only condemning hate and a desire to find a cause whereby they might have him legitimately crucified.

This was not a trial, really, only a charade for appearances sake. They asked him, "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." (Luke 22:67-69)

Seeing that they had not accomplished their purpose, they then changed their tactic and asked him if he was the Son of God. Jesus replied that they were right in saying that he was. In this way Jesus affirmed their statement was true, however; they did not intend to believe in him, only to find an occasion to condemn him. They had already made their minds up that he was not the Christ, nor was he the Son of God, so in their minds, they had all that they needed to have him crucified. They knew that when the

Christ would come he would be both the Son of man and the Son of God, but they had already decided that he was neither.

Why, you might ask, did they not believe that he was the Son of God? Probably for the same reason that even the disciples struggled with the knowledge of Christ, they all seemed to believe that when the Christ came he would be a political figure who would lead them in victorious battle against their oppressors! This erroneous view of the prophetic scriptures blinded their eyes to the truths about Christ and his mission on earth. They were like the blind man who when Jesus put clay upon his eyes had too much earth in his eyes to see a vision of the heavenly kingdom. The hunger in their hearts was not for “your kingdom come” but rather for “let our kingdom come.”

People are still looking for a Christ that will come and fix all the problems of their lives. Too often the fix that they want is not the sort of fix that God has in mind. God was and is more interested in the internal problem of sin, than the problems that sin has brought on the world. Jesus came to fix the heart of those who would believe in him, and then the outward problems would also find healing to whatever extent the Father would will it to be so. Not all problems are fixable once a sin has been committed. The Lord does come to us with healing power to heal the wounds of hearts and enable us to live victoriously even in a sinful and imperfect world.

Are you the Christ that is to come Jesus? Of course he is. Is he really the Son of God, or was that a fantasy of his mind? If it had been a fantasy, he would not have also had the power to do all the things he did. They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?”

He replied, “You are right in saying I am.” (Luke 22:70)

That did it. They had what they were looking for. That was all the proof they needed. Yet there was a problem they didn’t discern, it was in fact true! The charge of blasphemy was bogus because, Jesus really was the Son of God!

## Chapter One Hundred

### Jesus Before Pilot

Luke 23:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. <sup>2</sup>And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.”

<sup>3</sup>So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.

<sup>4</sup>Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

<sup>5</sup>But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

<sup>6</sup>On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup>When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

It you want to get your way and telling the truth won’t make your point, then tell a lie! The part about Jesus opposing paying taxes to Caesar was a blatant lie. The part about Jesus claiming to be the Christ was a point that was questionable at best. According to the gospels, Jesus never claimed to be the Christ directly, but when asked if he was affirmed that it was true, but asked that it not be repeated. Others referred to Jesus as the Christ and Jesus never denied it. The part about him claiming to be a king



was also questionable. Jesus spoke of his kingdom as not being of this world. Again it was a truth that when spoken Jesus affirmed that it was true.

When Pilot looked at Jesus standing there before him, somehow he had his doubts about what was taking place; perhaps it was because he didn't wish to be used by these crafty manipulative people. It was early in the morning and Pilot likely was feeling a little put upon by this crowd so when he heard that Jesus was from Galilee, and knowing that Herod was in the vicinity, decided to send him to Herod.

## **Chapter One Hundred-one**

### **Jesus before Herod**

Luke 23:8-12

<sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. <sup>9</sup> He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

Liking Jesus as an interesting man of history, or even as a miracle worker does not equal being an honest seeker of truth. Herod had heard many stories about Jesus and the miracles he had been doing because he was from Galilee and that was Herod's jurisdiction. Right in the middle of this crucial moment in history, Herod wanted Jesus to entertain him with a miracle! The souls of humanity were in the process of being redeemed because Jesus was going to be crucified that very day, and Herod was only interested in what benefit he might get from Jesus! Was it right that the Jews wanted to have him killed? He couldn't care less! After making sport of him, he sent him back to Pilot.

## **Chapter One Hundred-two**

### **Jesus Returns to Pilot**

Luke 23:13-25

<sup>13</sup> Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

<sup>18</sup> With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" <sup>19</sup> (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

<sup>20</sup> Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. <sup>21</sup> But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

<sup>22</sup> For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

<sup>23</sup> But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided to grant their demand. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

After arriving back in Pilot’s chambers, Jesus was further interrogated and Pilot was convinced that Jesus was innocent of all charges! He wanted to release him and said that he was willing to punish him and then he would release him.

The Jews were not in a negotiating mood, their minds were made up and all the demons of hell were backing them. Why do people hate Jesus? Why do people hate the Jews?

We are in the midst of a ferocious spiritual battle that is raging in the world today. The heat of the fire of anti-Semitism and anti-Christianity has been festering in the hearts of rebellious intellectuals who are casting off the old traditional values and are now asserting themselves with the aid of nations that have hate in their hearts and the very existence of the United States of America as we have known her is now hanging in the balances. There is nothing new about the sinful hearts of human beings and what they are capable of; as it was vented against Jesus, it is now being vented against those who hold to their faith in him.

Right when it looked to anyone looking on like Satan had the upper hand, in the court of Pilot, I recall the words of the Psalmist David, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” (Psalms 2:1-6) They (whose hearts were evil) thought they had the upper hand as they mocked Jesus bowing their knees in mockery, spiting upon him, beating him and placing a crown of thorns on his head, but God who sits in the heavens is always in charge, and what they did in mockery, he turned into the most profound victory. The doom of Satan and all his evil demons and those who have allowed their hearts to be filled with evil was sealed, and the day of evil will surely come to an end.

“Give us Barabbas,” the crowd cried out in one voice. Isn’t it interesting how some individuals would rather have a criminal set free, than for a righteous man to be vindicated.

The nation of Israel had a convenient arrangement with the Roman Government, they would pay their taxes, and Rome would protect them. They had freedom to practice their religion, and for the most part, Rome stayed out of their way. The leaders of the Jewish nation saw Jesus as just another zealot who had the power to create friction with Rome, so rather than run the risk, they wanted to kill Jesus. The very idea that he just might be, in fact, the Christ, seemed preposterous to them. How could a man who came from Nazareth and lived in Galilee be the Christ?

They had already justified their actions in the evil minds and even the high priest had agreed that it is sometimes appropriate for one man to die to save the nation, so they would crucify him. Pilot gave in to their demands that day, and Barabbas was released and Jesus was taken away to be crucified.

## **Chapter One Hundred-three**

### **The Crucifixion**

## Luke 23:26-40

<sup>26</sup> As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ <sup>30</sup> Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”

<sup>31</sup> For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup> and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

<sup>38</sup> There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

<sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Even Jesus had fleshly limitations, as he carried the cross, when he staggered under the load, they found Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way from the country, and put the cross on him.

There were women along the way weeping for Jesus, and seeing them Jesus told them not to weep for him, but rather for themselves; trouble was coming their way, and when it did, they would cry for the mountains to fall on them and for the hills to cover them.

Two criminals were also led out with him to be crucified, and when they got to their destination they were all hung on crosses to die, Jesus in the middle between the two felons.

In the midst of the pain and suffering, the voice of Jesus is heard saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

The mockery that had begun in the trial didn’t stop even now as he was hanging on the cross. Some people stood watching along with the rulers of the Jews who were sneering at Jesus, and mockingly said to him, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” (Luke 23:35) The soldiers too picked up the theme of mockery. They offered him wine vinegar and taunted him with the words that if he is the king of the Jews he should save himself!

Someone put a sign over him that read, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Three men were hanging on crosses; two for actual crimes committed and one was dying that such sinners, indeed all sinners, might have eternal life. The one criminal must have noted all the mockery that was being heaped upon Jesus and entered into the same spirit of mockery, but the other man had some sense of decency about him and rebuke the mocking criminal. He pointed out that they were getting what they deserved, but that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Then he said a most remarkable thing, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Here is a man condemned to die, but somehow he has more insight than all the chief priests, Roman leaders, and mocking masses. Revelation of truth is a gift that God gives. What was the catalyst that inspired this revelation? Was he standing in one of the crowds when Jesus taught about the kingdom? Or maybe he had just heard people talking about Jesus and how he said that he had a kingdom that was not of this world. When a hungering heart hears truth, it rings in their heart! When you have heard pure truth you know that it is true, because your spirit bears witness that it is true.

Jesus was indeed the king of the Jews, but he was more than that, he was and is King of kings and Lord of lords! At this time, however, Jesus was on a mission to redeem humanity from the clutches of

Satan. The death of Jesus as a redeeming sacrifice was for this criminal too. Soon he would be in Paradise and this man would also be there!

## Chapter One Hundred-four

### Jesus' Death

Luke 23:44-49

<sup>44</sup> It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Suddenly, in the midst of the darkness that had come upon the land while Jesus was hanging dying on the cross, in a loud voice, Luke tells us, Jesus called out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Normally it took many hours of hanging on a cross for a victim to finally succumb to death, but Jesus had said that he would lay down his life and so it was that after calling out he breathed his last.

The act of dying for the sins of the world was a voluntary act on the part of the Lord. He didn't have to die; he had life in himself. The only way he could die was to give up his life and so it was that he gave it up. In giving up his spirit to God he was able to take upon himself our death, and thus he died in our stead.

Back at the temple a most remarkable thing was happening, the curtain that was hanging between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies began to move, in fact violently, so violently that it was torn from top to bottom. The hands of man did not do this; it was a supernatural occurrence that spoke of eternal truths concerning access to the presence of God. During the entire age of the Law, man had been denied access to the Holy of Holies except for the appointed time when the High Priest would go in once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people. The only other time people were allowed in was when the tabernacle was being moved and the priest had to dismantle the tabernacle and carry it along with the Ark of the Covenant to its next location. Once the tabernacle was assembled and the curtain hung, no one dared enter because God's presence would then be there. Since the atonement made was only being made by the blood of sacrifice animals, they had no power to really atone for sins, but God honored them until his Son would come and lay down his life a ransom for all who would believe on him. It was at this point that the forbidding vial was no longer needed. Those who come by Jesus believing in his sacrifice for sins in now acceptable before God. We can now approach God, though imperfect; we come by faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Every day, when we come to Christ, fellowshiping with him in our daily struggles and drawing upon his life giving power to sustain us, we are identifying with his death for us and making it our death by faith so that we might have access to our Father's love, care and fellowship.

The phase of suffering on the cross had been completed, and Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)

The work of redemption was now complete; Jesus had accomplished what he came to do. He had lived among us, did the sorts of things we do, encountered the same sort of challenges we face, yet without sin. Even after taking upon himself the sin of the world, he remained personally sinless. Now there remained yet one more part to the work, he must be buried to indicate that he did indeed die and that what was about to happen was not going to be resuscitation, but rather a resurrection!

## Chapter One Hundred-five

### Jesus' Burial

Luke 23:50-56

<sup>50</sup> Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, <sup>51</sup> who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. <sup>53</sup> Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. <sup>54</sup> It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

<sup>55</sup> The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. <sup>56</sup> Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

God always has the right person available when something needs to be done that is according to his plan. In this case it was a man named Joseph from Arimathea who was also a man of honor. He had prepared a tomb evidently for his own use upon his demise, but decided to donate it to Jesus seeing a need for a burial place for him. To what extent Joseph was a follower of Jesus is not known, but whatever the case, he didn't join in with the murderous plot against him. He was a man who was looking for the kingdom of God and as such likely was pondering the stories about Jesus and what part he might have played in the eternal scheme of things. Whatever his personal beliefs or ponderings might have been is something we will have to wait for the day when the secrets of men's hearts are revealed, but we do know that he was an honest hearted man and was willing to get involved with the care of the body of Jesus.

The beginning of the Sabbath was hard upon those who were concerned with the care of Jesus, so Joseph being an honorable man didn't want to desecrate the Sabbath so he quickly got permission to take the body of Jesus and took it down and wrapped in linen and placed it in a tomb he had cut into a rock.

Due to the lateness of the hour, he didn't have time to properly prepare the body of Jesus, but the women who had been with Jesus took note of where they had laid him and went home to prepare spices to embalm his body after the Sabbath.

## Chapter One Hundred-six

### The Resurrection

Luke 24:1-12

**24** On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you,

while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.

<sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

In your hour of grief remember what Jesus said to you! It had been a hard two days previous, the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane experience, the trial, the mocking, the beatings, and then the crucifixion. During the Sabbath the women waited patiently, and now it was the third day. In the Jewish calculation of time a day begins at sunset and ends at sundown and any part of a day is deemed to be a whole day. Even though it was early in the morning of the third day, it was at the end of the third night since the redemptive work had begun and now it was at the break of day of the third day.

A person I know was convicted of some misdemeanor for which he was sentenced to jail. He was told to report at the county jail at just before midnight. The jail was so full of people that they were trying to satisfy both the law and take care of the prisoners. He was credited with some time for one reason and then another until it came down to he had two days left on his sentence, so they processed him in just before midnight and then when 12:01am arrived they credited him with the second day and released him. He had served two days in two minutes!

Jesus had served the time required for the redemptive work to be completed and so it was that at the break of day of the third day, he came forth from the grave triumphant over death, hell and the grave! The redemptive work of Jesus had begun in the upper room with his disciples, then continued in the Garden of Gethsemane, from there after having been arrested he was taken to homes of the high priests, then to Pilot's house, then to Herod, back to Pilot where he was flogged and abused, then to on to where he was crucified near the end of the first day. Hurriedly they wrapped him and placed him in a tomb where he remained the second night and day, and then at the end of the third night and at the break of the third day, Jesus arose from the grave.

The women who were with Jesus arrived at the tomb early the morning of the first day of the week worried about how they would roll the stone away so they could go in and properly prepare the body of Jesus in the tomb. Upon arriving at the tomb they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty! As they stood there in the tomb contemplating what had happened, two angels suddenly appeared to them with the great news of his resurrection. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words.” (Luke 24:5-8)

They hurried back to where the disciples had gathered and told them the great news concerning his resurrection, but they evidently thought they were imagining things. Peter, however, decided to go check it out for himself so he ran to the tomb and found it empty, just as the women said it was!

There were other facts about the redemptive work of Christ that Luke didn't include in his narrative, but he did give us some of the essential facts to help establish the certainty of our faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Savior of the world.

# Chapter One Hundred-seven

## Jesus Appears Alive on the Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-35

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”**

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

<sup>19</sup> **“What things?” he asked.**

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”** <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The Scriptures are full of prophetic utterances concerning Christ and his coming, but if you aren’t tuned in to them you might read them and not understand their true meaning. This was the case with the disciples; they just were tuned in to the parts about the coming Savior and his necessary suffering before he would enter his glory. It was for this reason that Jesus appeared to these men that Luke tells us about in this gospel. If it weren’t for Luke, this would have gone unreported, but it was important to him to tell his friend about, because his friend needed to know that this was not a disconnected event to the Biblical story, but rather the fulfillment of the Biblical story!

Luke tells us that two disciples, one named Cleopas, the other is not named, were walking along the road to Emmaus talking about the events that had taken place in Jerusalem. They weren’t a part of the group designated the Eleven, but were close disciples nonetheless. As they walked along suddenly Jesus was walking there with them. It likely wasn’t unusual for someone to walk along with others as they went from place to place, so they didn’t pay attention to just who this might be. Jesus asked them what it was that they were discussing as they walked along. This brought them to a halt, and then Cleopas asked him if he was a visitor and therefore unaware of what had been happening in Jerusalem. Jesus, wanting to draw them out, asked them, what things? Then they told him about Jesus of Nazareth and all they knew about him, how he was a prophet, powerful in word and deed, but what was so amazing was that though he was crucified, now being the third day, his tomb was found empty! The women had visited the tomb and had brought news that while they were there two angels spoke to them and told them that he was alive! Then Jesus began with Moses and all the prophets patiently passage by passage explained to them all the scriptures had said about him, how it was that the Christ must come and suffer these things before entering his glory.

Finally they came to the village where the disciples were going, Jesus made like he was going further but the disciples insisted that he come in with them for the night since it was late in the day. They still

didn't recognize Jesus, but when they sat to eat, Jesus gave thanks for the meal and began to break bread and as he gave it to them, their eyes were opened and they realized who he was.

How many times have we walk along with a voice speaking to us that seemed to only be the voice of our own mind, until all at once some truth suddenly becomes very clear to us, and at that moment we realize it was the Lord all the while ministering to us. I personally have been ministered to by the Lord so many times as he has given me insights and revelations of truths but the method has been so natural that one could easily pass by it as just the meanderings of a mind, except that what was given was so profoundly true that it had to be the Lord. After Jesus disappeared from their midst, they remembered the warm feeling that had filled them as they walked along the road listening to him explain the scriptures to them.

Last week I was visiting a brother at a hospital who was in a terrible auto accident, and while there his wife began to share with me what had happened to her. Her husband was lying there fighting for life, his neck broken in three places, a punctured lung and a severe head injury, and she was a basket case. That night she began to weep before the Lord and committed herself to the will of God. She told the Lord that if he wanted to take him, that was all right, but if not she would accept her husband in whatever condition he was in. All at once, she told me, she felt like hot oil flowed through her, and she knew that no matter what the outcome would be, the Lord would be in control of it.

Now sometimes I'm a little skeptical about experiences like that, though I try to never discourage anyone who feels they have heard from the Lord. But after listening to her recount all the events and seeing the joy of the Lord upon her, I began to realize that the Lord had indeed ministered to her. Not only is she optimistic about her husband's recovery; she is also ministering to the other families in the hospital who are going through like circumstances. Before I left the hospital on the second visit, she showed me a list of names of others who had entered their names on her prayer list. But she didn't stop there; she also started a support group and prayer time for all of them and where it will go from here only the Lord knows at this time. All of this was happening while she was ministering to her husband and watching him slowly recovering from his injuries.

I have seen people chase after miracles, and I have seen people live in their miracles! It is my opinion that everything that happens that is from heaven above is a miracle. It may be simply walking along a road with someone talking about the Lord when a warm feeling begins flowing through you, leaving you encouraged and strengthened in the Lord; no doubt you were being ministered to by the Lord. That is a miracle! Is it a greater miracle to see blind eyes opened or to see sighted people begin to see? Jesus healed the blind eyes of those who came to him, but was grieved by the sighted people who couldn't see the truths of the kingdom, people who have eyes to see but see not, and ears to hear but hear not!

The men on the road to Emmaus were not willfully ignorant, so Jesus patiently explained the scriptures to them. When we commit ourselves wholly to the Lord, he will be there for us. Often we are in situations where we need help from above, we are ignorant, but not willfully so. The Lord wants to guide us and will come along side us, if we will just be open to him.

## **Chapter One Hundred-eight**

### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

Luke 24:36-49



<sup>36</sup> While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

<sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

<sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

After Jesus was resurrected from the grave, he appeared to his closest followers on several occasions providing indisputable evidence that he was indeed resurrected as he had said he would be. The disciples who had been with Jesus earlier that evening while they walked toward Emmaus, had taken the news to the Eleven that were in Jerusalem, and while they were talking about these things, Jesus himself appeared to them. This was a frightening experience to say the least, but Jesus was patient and kind to them providing them with still another proof of his resurrection. He said to them, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39) Then he asked them for something to eat, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish, which he ate. What the Lord demonstrated to the disciples was that in the resurrected state, a person is tangible and has functions that are like unto our present form. There are obviously differences, since Jesus was able to appear and to disappear at will from where they were, but the essential truth is that the laws of physics though somewhat different, are as tangible to a resurrected person as the present laws are to us.

The next issue that Jesus wanted to firmly address is the fact that what happened in his life on earth including his death, burial, and resurrection, were all fully foretold in the scriptures. This is an important truth because Jesus didn't come to establish a disconnected new religion, but rather one that is connected to all that God has done previously.

The message had been given in detail, here a little, there a little, but together it was a comprehensive message that must be proclaimed to all nations. It was to begin in Jerusalem and go to all the world, and even today, it always begins at the local level.

They were to wait patiently in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high, then they were to go forth and make their proclamation.

## Chapter One Hundred-nine

### The Ascension

Luke 24:50-53

<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The message of Luke was about Jesus the Son of man; therefore the attention of Luke was often upon human things about Jesus and how he related to our humanity. The journey Luke has taken us upon has been a long but interesting journey. Even in this closing passage, Luke shows that Jesus is sensitive to our human concerns. He had given opportunity for the disciples to touch him, and he had eaten with them. Now he is about to go into heaven and in the previous chapter of this book we saw him instructing his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power that, Jesus said, the Father had promised to them.

What a way to leave this world! Jesus had already died, been buried and resurrected, but now it was time to leave his disciples and go to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. By now the disciples' understanding of truth was much more complete and thus, Jesus was able to bid them farewell without the sorrow that had filled their hearts at the last supper. As Jesus was giving them final instructions and blessing them, he was taken up into heaven disappearing into the clouds. Instead of tearing their clothes, weeping and mourning, they immediately set out to obey his words with rejoicing.

Back to Jerusalem they went with eager anticipation of an event that they only vaguely understood. They gathered in the upper room and in the temple until the day of Pentecost had fully come. Suddenly a sound from heaven would fill the room where they were assembled, and cloven tongues of fire would sit upon each of them and they would all speak in languages they never new or understood, glorifying God and praising him. They would make such a ruckus that people would come from all over the city to see what was going on, and by the end of the day three thousand people would be added to the church!

This is the story of the Gospel according to Luke, and it is good.