

# Jesus, the Man upon Whom the Spirit Came to Rest

## Introduction

This book is written as a view of Jesus, the Man Upon Whom the Spirit Came to Rest. It is about how Jesus was affected by the Holy Spirit after he came upon him in the form of the Dove. It is also about what affect it had upon his life and ministry. It is also about how the Holy Spirit affects us when we have received the infilling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Having knowledge about this subject does not in any way imply that knowledge is equal to experience. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will infill each reader as a result of having studied this subject. I pray that hunger will arise to know the Lord better.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is of vital importance. We are dependant upon him for every form of spiritual life function. We will observe the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the life of Jesus and in so doing will understand his role in our lives as well

In our present day it seems the gospel message has been diluted and stripped of its power as well meaning individuals have sought to make it more palatable to an ever increasingly corrupt society. There are some within the church who have mistakenly thought that because we are under grace and not law, that what is taught in the law is no longer effectual. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Though the law is no longer law to us, it by no means became useless in the life of a growing Christian. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever, his view of sin has not changed, sin is still sin. Sin still separates man from fellowship with God.

The redemptive role of Jesus is taught both in prophetic scriptures and in typological lessons. In the law of the sacrifices we see portraits of the life and death of Jesus and how his life, lived in our behalf, became an effectual sacrifice both for our redemption as lost sinners, but also for our continuing source of life.

Jesus came to meet our every need as members of this fallen race. No one gospel is sufficient to tell his story, therefore four gospels were written, each with a unique view and mission. Though many of the stories are the same, yet details vary. This difference, in most cases, serves to add additional light to the subject being presented. Since none of the authors give us an exact chronology, fitting the fact together in that manner is a difficult task. Adding to this is the further complication of similar events and sermons being reported without a clear distinction between them. It is for this reason that studying each gospel as a separate message comes closest to the intended purpose of the writings.

It is my prayer that as you read this book you will discover the depth of your own need as well as the true source of eternal life. May the Spirit of Truth and Grace be upon you as you read the words of this book.

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# Chapter One

## A Man and a Message

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" – "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "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."

This is how our quest for God begins. How can we find him? Listen to his messenger, "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way." (Mark 1:2)

Could it be that to approach the Lord requires preparation? Often arrogant men hastily say prayers, or make some challenging statement to God that if he is real, he ought to prove himself to the world; as if God is made better when we worship him. Do we see God as some egotistical weakling who needs our praise, thinking we have some special quality that is so valuable that we would bless him by coming to him? Perhaps we do have some great value, in fact, I am sure we are worth far more than our minds can grasp, but what it is of value about us, and God's reason to pursue us, is quite different from what most of us suppose. It is not our abilities to love, worship, think, reason or act, that are of value to God, since he is already loved and worshipped by the host of heaven. As far as our abilities to act, think or reason, let's be realistic, God certainly doesn't need that!

Why God cares about us humans is one of the great wonders of God! What a marvel that God has even bothered with us, this fallen human race, being so selfish, self-centered, arrogant, rebellious and untrustworthy. Yet, for reasons that are still clothed in mystery, God sent Jesus Christ into this world to provide a way for humanity to return to God.

Few people seem to understand it, but from God's point of view; preparation is required if God is ever going to meet with man again.

To communicate effectively requires more than simply having two entities in the same location talking to each other. The prophet Isaiah put it this way, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55: 8-9)

To even begin to understand God requires major effort on our part. The difference between us is so great. We are so intellectually limited, while his intellect is so vast; our perspective is so earthy, and his eternal.

John's message continues, "Make straight paths for him." (Mark 1:3) This statement suggests the paths we walk on are not the straight paths we might like to think they are. How changeable we are! At one moment we are very generous, kind and compassionate, and then without warning, we lash out in selfishness, vengeance and perhaps even violence.

The path, of which I speak, is symbolic of our daily life experiences, and it is at this level that God is revealed to us. We learn about the Lord while in our places of worship; however, real knowledge of the Lord comes when we choose his way in the face of opposition, determining to live out God's way even when we know that to do so will require divine intervention to succeed. Will God be there for us then to support us and sustain us?

Straight paths begin with repentance; thus John introduced baptism into the biblical text. He uses baptism as a personal proclamation of genuine intention to do other than what has previously been the case in one's life. Before baptism, we often fail to do some righteous act, or yield to some selfish desire or attitude we know to be in violation of revealed righteousness. At baptism we make known our intention to correct this; but can we?

Baptism is a new beginning, a declaration to the world, and a confession of faith to God, and John said it is for forgiveness of sins. We know, however, that if our walk with God is to continue on a straight path, God will have to grant to us a power or strength that we do not presently possess. Can we expect God to be there for us at that moment when our needs overwhelm us?

John came preaching his message of repentance, and all Judea and even the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear him.

In Mark's gospel, we don't find wasted words on incidental, non-important themes. When Mark tells us about John in the opening lines of his gospel, it is, no doubt, a very important part of his message.

There was something about John that caught the attention of the people of Israel. He wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. Does that sound a bit unusual? It evidently was or Mark wouldn't have mentioned it. Seeing a man dressed that way must have suggested that he was a man of God! If you think his clothing was unusual, check his diet — locust and wild honey! Cultural molds don't usually fit people speaking for God at a given time. They are often seen standing apart from the crowd, yet close enough to observe what is happening. They are different because they are non-participants in what is taking place. It's this "differentness," to those who look on, that is sometimes unsettling.

John was definitely different, yet his differentness was not a symptom of some lack of mental power or emotional maladjustment. John was a together person whose differentness was a vital part of his message. What is more symptomatic of what we are, what we believe, and what spirit controls us, than our clothes and our diet?

For John to wear clothes made of camel's hair seemed to be a statement of non-participation in what governs style. It was as though John was saying, "Your lifestyle and your culture is corrupt; I won't eat your food; I won't wear your clothes." Repent was more than a word to John, he saw a need for real and vital change, but John didn't come with an agenda to bring about that change.

He didn't propose that everyone eat locusts and wild honey and wear clothes made of camel's hair. What John proposed was a man, a very special man; one who is powerful and worthy. This man would do what John could not do; what cultures, no matters how well conceived, don't do. His agenda would not be to propose political or social change; but rather, he would come to baptize with a new kind of baptism. John said, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:8)

# Chapter Two

## The Spirit's Entry

Mark 1:9-13

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Without wasting any words, Mark tells us about Jesus becoming the recipient of John's baptism resulting in the Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove, and how his life and ministry were affected as a result.

Mark will only speak about what is really important for us to know. What was important to Matthew or to Luke is not Mark's concern. Such matters as, the lineage of Christ, the circumstances surrounding his virgin birth, and his childhood, go unreported in Mark. The theme is introduced; no distractions will be allowed. Jesus was God's Son and the Spirit was upon him! Mark wants us to view that truth, seeing and understanding what resulted when the Spirit was upon the Son.

If we are to understand what God wishes to accomplish in us who are "in Christ"; we must first see what result occurred when the Spirit was upon Jesus of whom we have become a part. Thus, we are told about who Jesus was, and what significant thing he came to accomplish without confusing the issue. Mark uses the simplest of terms, and avoids unnecessary details.

Mark tells us that John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, and then he goes on giving details important to the theme. Without fanfare or hype John tells us,

"As Jesus was coming up out the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." (Mark 1:10)

The history of man was now turning the corner, what had been lost in the Garden of Eden, at the fall into sin, was about to be restored. The revelation of a new dimension of God's plan for man was emerging. In the Gospel of John we are given insight that went beyond what Mark revealed, revealing that it was the Spirit who would bring life. However, before we learn from John, we need to learn from Mark what effects can be witnessed when the Spirit is upon a man. We will then be able to discern the spirit we are of, and if the same work is being done in each of us.

In the gospel of Mark, the work of the cross is very important, but its importance is viewed as the necessary prerequisite of the more important entry of the Spirit. Thus we are told that Jesus was baptized. Baptism is a symbolic act in which the participant, by faith, identifies himself with the death of Jesus as being his death, Christ having died a substitutionary death. In baptism we see being submerged into the water as symbolic of death, time in the water as symbolic of the tomb but coming out of the water as symbolic of the entry of the Spirit of resurrection life.

As Mark views the baptism of Jesus, his attention goes immediately to the coming forth from the water. No mention is made of how he went into the water, or how long he spent in the water, but

rather, he moves quickly to the point he wants to emphasize, the entry of the Holy Spirit. At this point Mark tells us of, "Heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." (Mark 1:10)

This tearing open of heaven to allow the Spirit to descend is an event worthy of more than causal notice, not being a common event. Never in the history of the world has there been anything like this. When Moses met God on Mt. Sinai, it was with thunder and lightning, a thick cloud, and a loud trumpet blast; the mountain was covered with smoke that billowed like a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. In the midst of this spectacular event a trumpet blast was heard, the tone got louder and louder until Moses and God started talking, at that point things quieted down a bit. By this time there were some very frightened people at the foot of the mountain.

The period of time that followed the Mt. Sinai experience was known as the dispensation of the law, a time period in which fear of God was vitally important because, it is the basis of learning to obey God. Law is never more effective than its ability to strike fear; therefore, judgment must be equal to the crime, and be executed consistently, if it is to be effective. Throughout time, God has had to demonstrate his displeasure with the wrong behaviors of mankind. He did this in the history of the nation of Israel by sending famines or allowing enemy armies to defeat them in battle. When their rebellion became too severe, God allowed them to be carried away into captivity. So on it went throughout the age of the Law of Moses, God doing whatever was necessary to deal with his people.

This event of the tearing open of heaven, reported to us by Mark, was somewhat less spectacular to the eyes and ears of man than the entry of the age of the law, but no less important! What was happening here was not the entry of a new form of law or a new lawgiver, but rather, the entry of the Spirit who, after the resurrection of Jesus, would change the heart of all men who receive him. The effectiveness of the Spirit's work on earth is not based on fear, but rather, it is based on his power to change us!

The tearing open of Heaven to allow the dove to descend was not intended to frighten mankind, but rather to simply alert us to the fact that something very powerful took place. What a contrast is seen here between the spectacular demonstrations of the entry of the law, and the entry of the Spirit. The law came with thunder, lightning and a loud trumpet blast, but the Spirit entered quietly as the Dove! What power does a dove have that law does not have? We shall see.

Mark has thus introduced us to Jesus, God's Son, upon whom the Spirit came to rest. The immediate result of the Spirit's coming was that he was led into the desert where Satan tempted him for forty days. The focus of Mark is not on the temptations, but rather on the fact that, angels and wild animals attended him during the days of his temptation.

Why would Mark mention this seeming incidental detail and leave out what Matthew and Luke report as the substance of the temptation experience? Perhaps we have to speculate a little on this point, but I am convinced that the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to mention it for a very good reason. Let's look at Isaiah 43:18-21.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the waste land, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

The process had begun. The baptism of Jesus was his symbolic commitment to the cross. The Spirit had come as planned and Jesus must be subjected to temptation, but both lower and higher forms of creation seemed more grateful of the event than man, yet it was for man he came. He came to a world spiritually destitute, a desert, to bring the precious water of life so that a day could come when

the struggles we experience now will have past, and even the animals will experience the release from the curse for they too have suffered with man for his folly. The apostle Paul expounds on this truth.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18-24)

The work of salvation that Jesus began when he stepped into the Jordan River for baptism was still in the beginning stages of development. Likewise, for us, salvation is a progressive work that begins when we first believe upon Jesus. It is, however, true that certain phases of the work are finished, yet not all facets of salvation are immediately experienced. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for us; that is finished. Jesus paid the full penalty for sins. He was for us, in his death on the cross, all that the sacrifices foreshadowed; that is finished. The result of this work is that the Spirit has been poured out, the seal, the deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are Gods possession. (See Eph. 1:13-14)

When Jesus returns, the work of salvation will be complete; what begins in us who believe will be finished; even our bodies will be changed to be like his glorified body. What is now is not yet what will be, but even creation, that is, all that is material, and plants and animals, will also be affected, as the present frustration will end. Jesus will return and we will all be changed.

While Jesus was here among us he had to suffer what we suffer that he might be qualified to take our place as the sin sacrifice of the world. He was called upon to also be tempted, but animals and angels were there. He was strengthened as they ministered to him.



# Chapter Three

## Follow Jesus?

Mark 1:14-22

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

Once John the Baptist had accomplished his mission of proclamation and introduction of Jesus, he was arrested; his work on earth finished, and Jesus Christ emerged on the scene of biblical history to be the central figure of the gospel narrative.

In the decisive language typical of Mark we read, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The time had come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." (Mark 1:14-15)

Quickly Jesus moved, gathering those around him who would proclaim his words and deeds faithfully, the message of Christianity. His life must be witnessed by unimpeachable witnesses, ordinary men with their imperfections showing, but their sincerity, honesty and integrity would give immeasurable weight to their accounts.

Some criticize the accounts of these men, pointing to slight variations in their reporting and they use these variations to discount the claim of divine inspiration of their accounts. Such efforts show the shallowness of understanding of the critics because those very variations show us how very normal the men were. If the Holy Spirit stripped them of their humanity not allowing differences of opinion to show in their accounts of the life, words and deeds of Jesus, then we could suspect that these accounts were artificially created.

The gospels were written as the words of eyewitnesses; a scene such as one would see in a court of law, with each witness telling his own version of what he saw. The miracle is that, in every account though memories of exact sequence, wording or emphasis vary, there is solid agreement on all essential truths and their evaluations of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are unanimous.

Mark tells us of prominent disciples being called, Simon and his brother Andrew, and Zebedee's sons, James and John. Concisely Mark reports important events. Without giving details he describes the invitation and the response. This causes me to stop and reflect; what happened that wasn't reported? Do men leave their families and careers to follow another man they don't even know? Something about this strikes me as being a very abbreviated account.

This Jesus was no ordinary man to be sure, yet he was a man! "Oh, you may say, wasn't Jesus God?" To put Jesus into proper perspective as he was among us, let's consider the words of the Apostle Paul.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)

Jesus was indeed God, but in the manner of living out his life he was every bit human. When we say we are human, it is often to make excuse for some imperfection, however, when Jesus became human, he did not take on our imperfections, but rather came to demonstrate the means whereby we may also live as he lived. To become human, Jesus laid aside some of his divine attributes so that, what he did and said would be done in the same manner as other men. This enabled him to partake fully of the human experience when lived in proper relationship to God. Jesus always was every bit God, but he didn't activate his Godhood except through the same means that we must use when we seek divine intervention. Jesus, therefore, became our teacher and example of how to live a Spirit filled and Spirit led life.

Jesus demonstrated to us what a life is like when it is lived in fellowship with the person and will of Almighty God. We cannot do this without help; thus, God gave a very precious gift to us humans, the Holy Spirit. It was this "enabler" who came upon Jesus in the form of the dove.

When Jesus spoke to Simon, Andrew, James and John, the words all sounded very simple. "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'" (Mark 1:17) That's all that's recorded; no emotional hype, no great discourses just a promise, "I will make you fishers of men." Why do you suppose they were so impressed that they left all to follow him? I am sure they understood fishing; they were fishermen, but fishing for men, would they understand what that meant? Even if they did, would they want too?

This passage seems to suggest that when Jesus spoke, his words were accompanied by a convincing power that stirred something very compelling in the disciples. Could it be that this power that moved these men was the power of the Dove?

# Chapter Four

## The Helping Hand of Jesus

Mark 1:29-31

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

In this narrative we find Jesus in Capernaum where he is apparently residing. Capernaum was located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

On the Sabbath day Jesus went to the synagogue, a local worship center. There he began to teach amazing the congregation with the authority with which he spoke. Jesus was under the Spirit's control, and it was what the father willed that Jesus said and did. The result was astonishing. His authority was not only in evidence in what he taught, but also was demonstrated by casting out evil spirits.

Many people make fair speeches and glowing declarations of faith; however, not all these people are under the authority of the Holy God of the Bible. If there is no evidence of outward obedience to the demands of holiness, the works of God will not be produced. The Holiness of God is an attribute to be lovingly and respectfully embraced, applying it to every life situation.

Faith as a natural law has great power, but it is only faith acceptably directed to the holy God that inspires real divine intervention. No form of miraculous display can compare with either the quality or authority of such miraculous manifestations.

Faith as a natural force produces its natural fruit. Faith directed, seeking spiritual manifestation without being sent from a heart of holiness to God, stands ready to be answered by spirit beings who themselves are in rebellion to our Heavenly Father. Such was the case with the magicians Moses encountered before Pharaoh. These magicians produced miraculous occurrences that of necessity involved spirit beings. When Moses cast his rod down and it became a serpent, the magicians of Pharaoh also cast their rods down and they became serpents, but God's serpent produced through his servant Moses ultimately swallowed them up.

What Jesus produced in his ministry was a quality of ministry, both in teaching and in demonstration that was the result of the Divine approval that had been granted to him at his baptism. Those who heard and saw witnessed this, and the news was spread concerning him.

What wonder when God is at work. What is done is far more than just an exciting display of mysticism. The works of God penetrate the heart and soul of man, cleansing, changing and bring life to us as we accept the Spirit of Life into our hearts.

Miraculous deeds by the Lord Jesus affecting our natural beings bring forth an even greater effect upon our soul and spirit. Displays of mystical power controlled by man tend to bondage, fear and often pain or even death. The power Jesus displayed was life giving, liberating and healing. So it is today, when God displays his power in purity, humility, and love, revealing the true Savior, demons are obliged to leave, diseases dissipate, madness yields to the restoration of sanity, and hope is born. The people who heard him spread the news, but Jesus went to Simon and Andrew's house because their mother was in bed with a fever.

Jesus was no longer an ordinary man. The Spirit now rested upon him causing his actions to be unpredictable by the logic of man. Each action was by the motivation of the Spirit for purposes predetermined by God his Father; thus, he went to the bedside of a woman who was sick. Didn't the crowd need him? Yes, a very large crowd needed him, but not the crowd that would soon gather at his door. Simon's mother in law was only one of a very large crowd of individuals who have experienced the presence of the blessed Savior in times of great need. When he went to her he brought encouragement to all who need special acts of Divine intervention. We are told that Jesus went to her, took her hand and healing her, helped her up!

It has been said in other books written on this subject, that each Gospel is a unique view of Jesus Christ. Some see the four faces of the living creatures of the book of Revelations, as being four views of Christ as set forth in the Gospels. Whether that is so or not I cannot speak with certainty, but it would be hard to deny that Matthew wrote a view of Jesus as the King. It is also true that the first face is the face of the lion, a symbol of kingship, and that the second face is the face of an ox, a symbol of service. Thus in Mark we read phrases such as, "He went to her, took her hand and helped her up." (Mark 1:31) Mark was sensitive to notice such trivial matters, but to us who need a Savior who cares enough to reach out his hand when we're too weak to rise to our own feet, that noticing is not trivia; it's hope.

This scene has been repeated in as many ways as there are varieties of human need. Wherever a soul is in distress and a cry for help goes forth, Jesus is sure to be there to lift, strengthen and heal. The means varies too; sometimes it comes through a sermon, a song or some words of consolation. Sometimes it's through fellow Christians, direct intervention, or an unexpected change of circumstances, but no matter the means, it's the Savior's hand stretched out to touch us. When we discern Christ at work, what rejoicing, thanksgiving and worship spring forth, thus healing comes to us as it did to Simon's mother in law.

# Chapter Five

## Led by the Spirit's Power

Mark 1:32-45

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

After Jesus healed Simon's mother in law, a large crowd came to Jesus seeking healing and deliverance to which Jesus responded healing many who had various diseases, and casting out evil spirits. The crowd went home excited about what was happening and returned early the next morning seeking Jesus. Jesus, however, had gotten up early and left for a solitary place to pray.

Unless a person has felt the Spirit's power, or been used to minister to large crowds, he probably wouldn't even notice the extra-ordinary account that Mark gives us. I, like many, have experienced God's power at work in a very small way and know how exhausting it can be to preach a sermon under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The previous day had begun in the synagogue where Jesus taught with authority resulting in an exorcism. He then went to Simon and Andrew's house where he healed Simon's mother in law, then he ended the day with a healing and deliverance service. Most people would go home from these ministries in total exhaustion and would likely sleep in the next morning. Monday is traditionally a minister's day off. After Sunday services a day of restoration is usually very needed.

Mark tells us that, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1:35) Now that's remarkable! Wait, there's more; a crowd looking for Jesus evidently awakened Simon, called Peter. They must have been an eager crowd, so Peter found Jesus and with what seems to be excitement informed him of the crowd.

Peter must have thought, "Success! Just look at the crowd!" What preacher can resist the call of a crowd? What joy it is to minister to a crowd who loves you, and even needs you! Only a person

whose heart is being stirred by the Spirit's call while in communion with his Father, will discern that the call of the Spirit is not always to the crowd.

When Peter finished reporting the news, Jesus spoke the unthinkable, "let's go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." (Mark 1:38) This gospel is meant to be held selflessly and not merely as a means of personal gratification; it is to be published. Those who only see the gospel as a means to personal benefit will find themselves standing alone, not realizing that Jesus does not stand still; he is always on the move. It was only the ones committed to following him who saw his ongoing miracles, heard his next sermons and witnessed the next exorcisms.

There are many disillusioned Christians today whose only concept of the gospel is to create a neat little culture with rules to guide, symbols to identify, and rituals to express some favorite religious ideal, thought or emotion. We want fences to keep us safe, rules to guard us and please don't bother us. These people seldom feel the Spirit's call.

Again, Mark takes us from the preaching, healing, and deliverance scene, with the resultant crowds to show us Jesus the servant Savior touching us; not as a face in a shoving, pushing crowd, but as a needy individual calling for help. A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees;

"If you are willing you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing" he said, "be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. (Mark 1:40-42)

It is understood that leprosy is a disease that typifies sin. One who has leprosy loses the ability to feel. The result of this lack of feeling is that one can be injured and not even realize it until it's too late. So it is with the sinner who, goes to sin as an ox is led to the slaughterhouse unable to resist and unaware of the consequence. Sensitivity is a vital Christian trait essential to one's walk with Christ, without which, he is vulnerable to the temptations to sin.

As pastor, I have witnessed the tragedies of sin. Satan comes to people in one disguise or another and begins whispering sweet sounding words into their unsuspecting minds. Sometimes the means is some story told of sinful delights that captures the vain imaginations and leads the victim into the unseen world of fantasies. Such fantasies only entertain for a while, but their presence sears the conscience, becoming anesthetized, until that which is fantasy becomes an act. When consciences have been seared, fear of consequences fades. It isn't until after the fact, that realization of damage done sets in. Whether the sin is a drunken binge, an adulterous affair or earnings lost in a gambler's den, the consequence is realized too late to redeem what has been lost. For the leper, or sinner, so caught, the threat of repeated injury is very real and he is helpless to stop the relentless progress of the disease. What can be done for such a person?

The man in our story did what all men must do if they are to ever find a cure. He went to Jesus and begged him on his knees; Mark was sensitive to recall that. Luke also was moved by the emotion embodied in the request of the man; he didn't mention his knees but noticed the man as he fell before Jesus, with his face to the ground.

Mark says he begged Jesus. I have yet to see an individual that has come to Jesus in this manner, go away empty! I have seen many go away empty, but not because Jesus was unwilling. How deceptive the human heart is. We can be sorry about our sin seeing how destructive it is, wanting to be free of it, but we don't really fall at the feet of the Holy One to receive his cleansing. (An act indicating true deep heart felt repentance.) Until cleansing has gone into the heart, no true deliverance or healing has taken place.

Jesus touched the man, healing the disease, which would of necessity result in restored sensitivity, and then he sent him back to the religious practice he had learned. Jesus didn't send him back to just any religious practice, but to that which was the authorized religion of that day, Judaism. I have noticed that if there is to be a lasting effect upon our lives, each touch of Jesus must be followed by a faithful pursuit of the Lord.

The man left telling the wonderful thing that had happened to him. Failure to obey the instructions of the Lord to not tell anyone resulted in increased difficulty for Jesus. How important it is to be sensitive to the instructions of the Lord in our lives. The overall plan of God is only fully know to the Holy Spirit, so sensitivity to his wishes is essential if we are to please the Lord.

Did Jesus leave the crowd at Peter's house because they were seeking only what would benefit themselves? Perhaps it was in the mind of God to demonstrate how important the healing of sinners is by healing the man with leprosy. Staying at Peter's house would have been exciting but was that the message the Spirit wants us to understand? Healings and all such miracles are benefits of salvation, but the focus of the Spirit's endeavors is the salvation of sinners. Staying at Peter's house with the crowd could have given the impression that having great meetings is the heart of the Gospel. Jesus must go on seeking and saving that which is lost.

# Chapter Six

## Forgiveness or Healing, Which is Easier?

Mark 2:1-17

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus returned home to Capernaum and while he was in the house, a large number of people came over, so he began to teach them. While he was teaching, some men brought their friend who was paralyzed, and because the crowd was so large, they went to the roof of the house and tore through the material that covered it. Mark wrote, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son your sins are forgiven.'" (Mark 2:5) Once more we have a disease being dealt with showing the parallel truth of sin and sickness. This disease like leprosy speaks of the greater disease in the soul of man, sin.

While dealing with the paralytic, it is Jesus himself who draws attention to sin. The purpose was to teach about his power to forgive sin. Sin causes paralysis of the soul; therefore, there is a close link between the symptoms of this disease and the symptoms of sin. Certainly the cure for both is the same. Once infected by sin, the soul becomes more and more insensitive as the conscience is first ignored and then seared as with a hot iron. (See I Tim. 4:2)

No doubt this man wanted help, but it took four friends to get him to Jesus. When, through much effort and personal sacrifice, they finally did reach Jesus with their friend, it was the faith of these persevering, determined, would-not-be-denied friends that caused Jesus to heal the man.

These actions reflected the spirit of faith that, once conceived, never stops moving toward its goal. Not even sin could stop their faith. What sins were in this man's life, and whether they were in some



way related to his condition, we are not told. What we are told is that when it comes to dealing with sin or sickness it is the very same power at work. One is no more difficult than the other, so with a word he forgave him his sins, and with words alone he healed him.

Friend, your need is never too hard for Jesus. There are times when he comes in some special way, at other times we go to him, and then there are those times when friends pick us up and carry us to him. No matter, it's Jesus we need whether he comes to us or friends carry us to him, he is always there for us with what is needed, and when it is over we have received strength, cleansing and healing. Our sins are forgiven and we are whole again.

The scene changes once more, but Jesus is not through with the subject. He went out by the lake and a large crowd came to him. He then began teaching them as he walked along. Presently he saw Levi sitting at his tax-collecting booth, "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. (Mark 2:14) Later, Levi and his friends gathered at Levi's house with Jesus. What a scene! The house was full of tax collectors and sinners, and right there in the middle of them all was Jesus! Now we need to understand that no well-mannered Jewish boy was permitted to associate with crowds like this one. Although Jesus was a well-mannered Jewish man, he was willing to go against the tide of public opinion, geographical boundaries, or cultural restraints when a hungry heart was at stake.

Jesus chose this dinner party to once more teach us about sin and sinners. He pointed out that he didn't come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance. Jesus came to bring a cure for the ailments of humanity. All people need the cure but once a person has received the truth he moves on to redeem another. These sinners at Levi's house, though looked down upon by society, were the very sort of people that Jesus came to save. Though they were sinners, it's sinners who need the Savior! When Jesus said it was not the righteous he came for, he was not saying that some people do not need him only that, salvation is not the exclusive right of those individuals society has judged worthy. He counted all men worthy, whether thief, robber, murderer, adulterer or righteous. For,

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." (Romans 3:23-25)

As Jesus moved from person to person, crowd to crowd, and to dinner appointments, he never lost sight of why he came. Every move was by the Spirit's prompting. All words, acts and encounters were for instruction.

Jesus didn't fit into the cultural mold of the Jews of his day, since the culture was no longer a product of the commands of God. God's words had become empty rules since they lost sight of the purposes behind them. Religious pride had taken the place of contrite worship, and religious practice had become ritualistic and dutiful rather than a means through which worshippers could meet God.

Religion does not understand the calling of a Levi, yet it was Levi, also known as Matthew who was called. Pride does not select men such as this to be its most intimate associates, because pride seeks men of great learning, influence, power or wealth. Jesus sought men whose hearts could be cleansed, who would allow the Spirit to fill them and work through them. The qualification that God is looking for is humility of spirit. God answers faith from a contrite heart without respect to status, race, color or sex.

The invitation is given to all people. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty; let him take the free gift of the water of life." (Rev. 22:17) Won't you accept him today and find restoration and healing so that you will once more be that person you were created to be?

# Chapter Seven

## The Old is Out, the New has Come

Mark 2:18-21; 3:1-5

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

In the religious culture of the Jews, fasting, the practice of going without food for specific periods of time, was practiced not only as a religious duty, but also to gain approval. In fact, it seemed that all religious practice, at least for the leaders, had become a matter of approval seeking.

Jesus had come to finish what had become old, soiled and torn. The day of the usefulness of the old institution of Judaism was fading. The life of Jesus Christ was both the grand finale of the age of the law, and the foundation of the Christian Church. What was to come was not a patch job on the old, but rather, a new thing as different from the old as day is from night.

When the subject of why Jesus' disciples didn't fast came up, Jesus answered them,

"How can the guest of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot as long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and on that day they will fast."

Then Jesus continued in the same parabolic language,

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse." He also continued. "And no one pours new wine into old wine skins, if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wine skins will be ruined. No he pours new wine in new wineskins." (Mark 2:19-22)

The old order was now coming to an end. The long shadows of the setting sun of the day of the law could now be seen. The day would soon fade forever; a new day was about to begin. (In the biblical concept of time, a day begins in the fading light of the previous day.) Christianity was about to begin, but its beginning would be in the fading light of what had been.

The age of the law had grown old. What was once practiced out of sincerity, now was only a form and a means of maintaining a culture that met the need of pride rather than worship. Arrogant men vied for position as they fought up the ladder of acceptability to secure the best positions of power, influence and recognition. The meaning of being lost had been forgotten. Sacrificing was more for profit than to gain acceptance by a Holy God.

The time had arrived for the New Covenant to be brought into force. Jesus Christ had come to take his position as mediator of that covenant. This covenant would be as different from the old, as day is from night.

Man's lost condition had begun when he was still a spiritually living being, living in a beautiful garden, clothed in innocence. Sin entered and mankind died spiritually. So the cycle in the natural that expresses the spiritual, was set in motion, which is, life precedes death. From that time onward, life was formed, matures, grows old, and dies. That has been the order of all creation on earth. Jesus was about to do a new thing. He would reverse the cycle. He would start a new order! Life would now begin with death!

What a concept! What a truth! The old life must be laid down before the new life can begin! The old life is as inferior to the new as a tadpole is to a frog! Perhaps even that analogy is totally inadequate to suggest the real truth. The gospel seems to prefer to speak of giving up death. In a very real sense, we are dead, even though we are alive, that is dead in sin and away from God the source of real life, yet alive in a lower realm; little more than an animal. It's to the living dead that the gospel comes. The message is clear; we must be willing to die to the lower realm, that we might receive the power of the life of the higher realm.

In the beginning, man was created in the image of God. He was alive both in the spiritual and the animate realms. When he sinned, he died spiritually. His death was like unto Satan's death, which had preceded him. When Satan experienced death, he didn't cease to exist; the candle of spiritual life simply went out, the fuel having been removed; and since he had no life in himself, he could not be sustained. This death did not cause him to cease to exist; rather, he must now exist without any of the attributes of spiritual life.

Likewise, humanity experienced that same spiritual death. In this fallen state, man is more animate than spiritual; however, if he chooses to develop his spiritual self in the state of death, he, like Satan who preceded him, will only manifest the true character of the death of which he is a part. This law cannot be broken; when the fuel of spiritual life is denied, spiritual death is the result. Man must either sink to the purely animate state of existence (non religious) or he will surely manifest the death of the spiritual level of his being. We have no choice, either we will choose salvation through Jesus Christ the only Savior of the world or we will accept vain philosophies, false religions, witchcraft, paganism or atheism. If a person remains neutral at least he is somewhat safe from many of the potential dangers of demonic activity that result from indulgence into forbidden activities that only complicate his lost condition. (See Deut. 18:9-13) Indeed, lost humanity is the walking dead. Outwardly they are alive, but inwardly death reigns. The more we try to develop the spiritual part of our nature before we are born again, the more evil we become. It's like stirring a rotting corpse; the more you mess with it the worse it smells.

God in his mercy provided man with a lower form of existence, the animate, enabling him to escape some of the torment of his death, but this was only temporary. He must come to the knowledge of the truth about his lost condition and accept God's remedy for his plight if he is to ever find relief. This relief comes as the fulfillment of the New Covenant, God made with mankind. This covenant was made in the days when humanity was still bound by the law God gave Moses. It promised to do what law could not do. Law was powerless to change us, but a New Covenant was made that promised real and vital change. The terms of this covenant promised a change of mind, heart, relationship and the removal of the cause of our plight, sin!

This change would come about as the result of a new birth, but this new birth is not like the old birth; this is resurrection life! That spirit, once dead because of sin, now becomes the recipient of resurrection power enabling man to express his spirit nature that is formed in the likeness of Jesus Christ, the giver of life. What will be manifest is not the stench of a dead corpse, but rather, the sweet fragrance of a new life. This is what it means to die to death! We yield up the death inside us, no longer attempting to conceal its presence, openly confessing our condition and with our whole heart; we receive the spirit of life.

Now we can see clearly that what Jesus was proposing was not new wine in old wineskins, or a patch job on an old piece of cloth, but rather a vital change. This change involves not only the content but also the container.

The old system of religious practice could not simply be replaced with another religious system though a new religious order would rise to replace the old religion. This was not what he came to do! What he came to do was to give us life! (See John 10:10) New religious orders cannot do that any more than the law could give life.

There must be a spiritual impartation, not a ceremonial impartation! Religions give ceremonial impartations, but that is all they are, ceremony! Only God can give life. Men can at times assist a lost soul in the acceptance of divine life, but it is only the sort of assistance a mother receives when she is giving birth to a child. We can provide beautiful hospitals, well trained nursing staffs, qualified physicians and the latest medicines, but God must give the breath of life. Likewise, we can assist a person receiving salvation, but we must understand, that is all we can do.

# Chapter Eight

## Do What on the Sabbath?

Mark 2:21-28

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Old wineskins get stiff and lose their elasticity. If you put young wine in an old wine skin it will burst as the process of fermentation takes place. The same principle applies to sewing a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. When the new cloth shrinks, it will cause strain on the old cloth when the garment is stretched by the movement of the wearer.

This passage sets the stage of thought for what is reported concerning the Sabbath. The religion of the Jews had become old and stiff with age. Concern for the letter of the law had taken precedents over concern for the needs of the worshiper.

As Jesus and his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain, and being hungry ate the grain. The Pharisees, who were observing them, began to take issue with the Lord concerning the conduct of his disciples without considering that they were traveling and were hungry. Nor did they inquire concerning their financial condition to see if the reason for their actions was that their provisions had run out. It is possible that the disciples didn't have the money to go to a village and buy food in advance of the Sabbath. If such were the case, it would have been more appropriate to provide them hospitality than to criticize their actions.

The fact that they were picking grain from a grain field that didn't belong to them was not at issue either, as it was lawful to do this. "If you enter your neighbor's grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to the standing grain." (Duet. 23:25) It was, however, the fact that they were doing it on the Sabbath that caused the Pharisees to react accusingly.

The answer Jesus gave the Pharisees suggests that they were indeed hungry and in need, but this was not what was at issue here. What the Lord wished to talk to the Pharisees about was how ridiculous their attitudes had become, and why it was necessary to call men to a "new and living way." (Heb. 10:20) Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit had come to rest, and as such he was teaching and demonstrating the effect this has upon a person who has also received the Spirit.

What Jesus was showing forth was the difference between the old attitudes that placed obedience to the law at all cost ahead of charitable concerns, and the new way that results from the impartation of

life that would result from his atoning sacrifice. In parables such as the ones cited in the text, Jesus was setting the stage for the coming of the life bearing Spirit who would regenerate all that accept him.

The old religious forms were not suitable to the new life giving work of the Spirit. They had served their purposes, but now it was time to bring in a new form of worship. The church would soon be born and it would be a new wineskin capable of allowing individuals to reach for new horizons of understanding in God.

Some have charged that Christianity has a repressive effect upon people, charging that somehow God holds people back, but the opposite is really true. Christianity in its purest form is most liberating! What we are restrained from are those things that are enemies of our spiritual existence. We are warned about activities that bring us into contact with demonic activities that have the potential of damaging both body and mind.

When I was in India I observed the intelligence of the Indian people and saw how talented and dedicated they were to tasks assigned to them. I also noted how backward they were in the development of the resources of that great land. While visiting a village, I saw people cooking over an open fire just as they have been doing for thousands of years. I noted that nothing had changed significantly in all that time, yet stoves lay near by that could have been placed in such a way so as to create a stove on which to cook. I also saw idol temples near by and realized that this demonic religion had a paralyzing effect upon the minds of the people.

When I see countries where Christianity has flourished, I see cultural advances and development. Is this because the population is Christian? I believe it has a definite affect; however, in some cases the advances have come through people who claim to be atheists. I assert that it is because in the cultures where the gospel has been preached, people have been liberated from the demonic repression that gripes heathen societies. It is when people give themselves to the religions that are demonic in nature, and ignorantly or willfully worship demons, that they are held captive to ignorance.

There are societies that have once known God and have forgotten him, and yet have continued to prosper for a time. To their credit, they have not gone back to demon worship in its heathen forms. For this reason they have been protected from much of the devastation they would have otherwise experienced. Restraints linger for a time even after Christianity has been forsaken; but given time, repression will once more take over; sin having taken its toll.

The answer to the needs of humanity is the liberating power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also taught us that the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Those who follow him will experience the impartation of ideas that if followed will lead to increased understanding in their field of endeavor. Again I say, the Holy Spirit is only repressive if our desires are sinful, and our hearts are wicked. Yes, double yes; he will restrain us from that which will hurt us! Thank God he will!! I pray for such restraint! I frequently thank him for it, but he has never restrained me when my desires were right!

Some people complain that God is restraining them from activities, they say, are okay; but are they? Here is where the gospel loses its appeal, when the desires of our hearts are for the present world and the sin in it. This is why we need change, real change that is, heart change! Jesus alone can do that, and he will, if we give him the opportunity.

Picking grain on the Sabbath is not the issue for the person who has been filled with God's Spirit. There are other matters that must take our attention, such as matters of justice, mercy and concern for the lost. We have been charged to go forth proclaiming the gospel of this kingdom. If our society will repent of its evil forsaking of the Lord God, we will experience a resurgence of greatness such as we have never experienced. If not, we will soon pass away and take our place among the graves of great nations that have lost their way, and whose greatness is only a memory.

The Sabbath was a gift from God to allow man a day in seven to rest his body, and give his mind a chance to recuperate. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and the principle of rest is found in him. Whether we rest on the seventh day, as some do, or set aside the first day as a celebration of his resurrection as many do, resting is a spiritual necessity. When it is experienced, it brings us into a relationship of commitment and trust in Jesus. The emphasis upon the seventh day was exchanged for an emphasis upon the day of resurrection. This day was celebrated in the early beginnings of the church, but the spirit of rest was still a vital part of the Christian experience. Rest is primarily a matter of faith now, as set forth in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. The disciples ate grain on the Sabbath and were guiltless because the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

# Chapter Nine

## The Family of God

Mark 3:7-34

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

"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." (Matt. 4:16)

This man upon whom the Spirit had come to rest was now beginning to attract attention. Large crowds were pressing in upon him; everyone who was sick wanted to touch him for healing. Healing the sick was important to Jesus and the crowds were gathering as a result. Healing the sick, however, was only a part of Jesus' mission. It was the deeper needs of humanity, the healing of the souls that needed his touch.



Seeing a large crowd Jesus asked for a small boat so he could remove himself from the pressure of the crowd. Teaching the people is a very vital part of the ministry of Jesus. Seeing people receive a miracle helps people believe in the true and living God, but it's the ministry of teaching that opens the understanding.

The crowds had become large by this time, and the time had come for Jesus to select his apostles. These men would be his assistants in the ministry while he was training them to carry on his work after his resurrection and ascension. After a night of prayer he designated the twelve to be apostles. The needs of humanity can be overwhelming, and so it was for Jesus. Jesus and his disciples needed time for personal privacy, but the people were so insistent that they didn't even have time to eat. This is the true condition in the world, the need is so great but no one was crowding the doors of vain religionists. It was only Jesus who had such a problem.

Natural people of the world do not understand those who care more for others than themselves; looking on, they only see outwardly. Jesus' family worried that he had gone mad, so they came to take charge of him. The religious leaders concluded he had a demon, so they wished to discredit him; nor did empty religion know what to do with Jesus despite God's works among people. Thus, we see it's not religion alone that opposes, just let someone start getting serious about serving the Lord and eyebrows begin to rise. It's okay to be a Christian as long as he eats right, gets proper rest and always dresses right; but let him put on the clothes of a prophet, start fasting and staying up nights in prayer, and someone is bound to wonder if he has lost his sanity. They judge that normal people don't act that way, but Jesus was no longer "normal people." He was the man upon whom the Spirit had come to rest!

The idea that there could be something evil involved with healing the sick, casting out devils and preaching true righteousness is extremely absurd; yet there is something so unsettling about the supernatural that reactions are sure to come.

What Jesus was doing was very threatening to the kingdom of darkness; he was getting results. If a person is a little out of the ordinary it's okay; it can even be refreshing, but Jesus had gone beyond refreshing; he was claiming Divine commission, and his miracles made it believable.

To those responsible for the protection of the religion and culture, what Jesus represented was completely inappropriate. His theme of teaching was about a kingdom that was not of this world, and that involvement in this present world beyond necessity, was folly. He taught that we must lay down our life, let the dead bury their dead, forsake all, and follow him. To social planners, economists, politicians and religious leaders this is madness, if not demonic!

It is no different today; the same accusations are heard. To those whose ideology is to build a utopia in this world, the preaching of a cross is totally offensive. The relevancy of such a message is beyond them. They want to build the world into a better place, not to prepare to meet God! They fail to see the relevance of a hereafter message when the "here and now" is in such a shambles. It's hard to believe that in seeking the hereafter we solve the problems of the here and now! Even when it becomes evident that this gospel works, and that people who put their trust in Jesus find great help in the time of need, it is ridiculed as an opiate. Miracles are hard to explain; it's easier to deny them or to ignore them. When miracles are tied to the teachings of moral responsibility, they become too confrontational. It is at this point that they must be discredited!

Jesus, however, did not side step the issue, but addressed their reasoning with simple logic. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand," he said, and "if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." Then he continued,

"And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end will come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then

he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." (Mark 3:23-29)

What does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? If the answer lies within the passage itself, which is the appropriate place to look, we would conclude that it would be tied to those efforts that are designed to bind the work of the Holy Spirit. There is, perhaps, a question in the passage of who he meant was being bound and whose goods are being spoiled. The principle set forth is very clear; unity of the infrastructure of any house is necessary if that house is to stand. Unity of purpose is manifestly necessary if the goals are to be achieved. The application, without a doubt, applies to both the missions of the Holy Spirit and the efforts of Satan to oppose him.

Further light is shed upon the meaning of the passage in the next reported event. His mother and brothers have now arrived. Mark had already told us of their intention; they had come to take charge of him because they thought he had lost his mind. When word reached Jesus that they were outside looking for him, he replied looking about the room, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:34)

Now we see a transcending truth coming into focus. There are purposes that transcend the natural considerations to which we earthlings find ourselves so tied. God's will must be done, and those sitting and learning from him were the ones in harmony with that purpose. They were his real family because they were acting in harmony with the purpose of the Holy Spirit. The purposes of the Holy Spirit vary from time to time according to the immediate need; but in general, the Holy Spirit was given to accomplish the work of bringing sons into the full image of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this end we are called, and to this end the Spirit works. To oppose or frustrate that purpose is to oppose the Holy Spirit himself.

This leads us to the more probing question of just what was meant by blasphemy. The manner of use in the Bible seems to infer a much more serious implication than merely an individual speaking words against God in the ignorance of his sin sickened mind. It is sometimes used as an action or word that would deny one's access to salvation, such as rejection of Jesus Christ. (See Acts 26:11) Sometimes it is rejection of the authorized instructions of God's purposes as revealed. (See I Timothy 1:20) Peter uses blasphemy in reference to those individuals who presume to act in God's name, yet not submitting to his authority, living in lust, greed, and every corrupt desire. These even speak arrogantly against celestial beings, and their conduct of life is utterly sinful. (See 2 Peter 2:1-22) Rev. 13:5-6 also gives us a look at the nature of blasphemy as the Godless beast described exalts himself over God and his people by speaking slanderously against them and God's name, dwelling place, and the occupants of heaven.

From these and other scriptures it becomes evident that it is vital that man accept the authority of God. Ignorant rejection is one thing, but willful rejection is another. Willful rejection may be forgivable, but to willingly give aid to satanic purposes is a sin of eternal magnitude. (See Hebrews 6:4-6)

If our heart is honest toward God and we want to do his will, then God will do his part. To those who hungering and thirsting after righteousness, come to Jesus, their hunger is satisfied, their thirst is quenched, and they have a hope that reaches beyond the grave. This is the essential difference between false gospels and the true gospel. False gospels offer solutions to the problems of this present world; whereas the true gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that the world is destined to destruction. (2 Peter 3:3-13) The apostle John instructs us, "Love not the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world or anything in the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from

the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." (1John 2:15-17)

And then there is the matter of binding the strong man. Let's look at the first part of the passage again:

"How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come."

In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." (Mark 3:23-29)

This first part of the passage applies to the satanic kingdom without a doubt.

It is the last part of the passage that contains a truth that very well could apply to the Christian or the Christian community. It's the part about entering a strong man's house and carrying off his possessions. If there was a paragraph break beginning with the words "In fact," (a translation option) we would then connect the entering into a strong man's house with the kingdom of God. We would then see the connection of blaspheme as that which binds the strong man, the Holy Spirit, in the life of the Christian or Christian community. What am I saying? Just this, that those evil deeds that are binding the operation of the Holy Spirit are what the true meaning of blasphemies is referring to. Whatever restricts the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of either the believer, or the church, should be regarded as an enemy of major importance. Once the Holy Spirit is effectively bound, the house of God can be robbed. Not only can this happen, but it has happened so many times one can only wonder why Satan is still getting away with it.

I see this principle working in the daily lives of many people. Now, I realize that mortal man, a demon or the devil cannot bind the person of the Holy Spirit; yet, this is accomplished as a result of the nature of God. God will not transgress against the authorities he has set up within the fellowship of believers; nor will He fellowship with sin, so where sin is harbored, God's Spirit must withdraw from fellowship. (See Ephesians 4:30) There are numerous passages that also teach us the importance of living in fellowship with God's purposes. Whenever we rebel against what we know is God's way and do our own thing in the face of his dealings in our lives, we are acting grievously, a very serious matter! There are some who go even farther in their rebellion, knowingly opposing what they know God wants to accomplish for reasons that are selfish in nature. Such actions are blasphemous in nature and when they are directed against the operation of the Holy Spirit, can be disastrous!

It seems to me that it is time for the church of Jesus Christ to wake up to what is happening in this matter of binding the Holy Spirit and his work. We should study our ideas, attitudes, affections, doctrines and all such like, in the light of what it means to be a man upon whom the Spirit has come to rest, for such is the case if we are indeed filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit must be acknowledged in the midst of his people and liberated by the administration of the church to work freely and unrestrained. The only spirits we are to bind are evil spirits and the carnal spirits of man. The church is God's church, and we, as administrators of the church, are servants of his will and purposes. We are to work with him enhancing his every effort. We have a responsibility to create an atmosphere conducive to the work of God, and then allow God to do his work in the lives of people.

# Chapter Ten

## Seed Time and Harvest

Mark 4:1-41

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

"Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Chapter four of the book of Mark ends with a question "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him." (Mark 4:41)

Within chapter four of Mark, we have the parable of the sower, a teaching about a lamp, a warning about using a correct unit of measurement, a parable about growing seeds, a parable about a mustard seed and then the story of Jesus calming the sea. All of these teachings and the concluding story seem to bring us to the logical question, "Who is this?" The answer to this question is vital to our understanding of what has been said, and, in fact, all of scripture from beginning to end. A miscalculation on this important question can lead to utter ruin, because; all correct theology stands on a right understanding of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing so vital to any human being as his concept of God. It is, without a doubt, the cornerstone of his character, personality and philosophy. It determines what sort of goals he will set, whether secular or religious, and what views he will take of life, the world, and the future. It will determine how he will see himself in relationship to his worldview.

The scriptural view of Jesus Christ is expressed in the following quotes.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:3)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15-17)

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Since this is who the scriptures say he is; to understand God we must understand Jesus Christ. May the Lord grant us a perfect understanding of this revelation so that the darkness of ignorance concerning him will leave us, and the light of his presence will fill us. It is to the power and purpose of this truth that he spoke in the parables of Mark chapter four.

First, we have the parable of the sower. By the weight of the volume of the text devoted to it, we sense its importance. This is one parable in which we are not left to speculate upon its meaning. Jesus gives us the meaning, and thus it becomes a model for much biblical interpretation.

The parable is of a sower who goes forth to sow seed. The seed is the "word," and Jesus is also known as the word as is clearly set forth in John 1:14. The manner of use in this passage shows the word to be a spoken word, which is also a living word, like a seed. The seed is sown through the hearing, but not all seeds produce a harvest. Satan who was pictured as birds that came and ate it immediately steals some seeds.

In Matthew's account of this parable, a little more information is given about the seed. He states that it is the message about the kingdom. This is not contradictory to what Mark said, but rather it is an amplification of the truth expressed. Jesus is the king of the kingdom, and all who are of the kingdom must be of the king! The word is the message of the king and his kingdom.

The word is a life giving word but from this parable we see that the word in itself is not what the focus of the parable is, but rather, it is the harvest! The concern of the parable is not the giving of the seed, but rather the hazards that prevent the harvest.

Satan is identified as the initial enemy of the word. He is shown to be like a bird that finds seed on hard ground and is quick to snatch it before it falls into a crack or opening and begins to grow. His mode of operation works best where there is hardness, such as a path caused by much walking. Jesus is not talking about a path; he is talking about human hearts. Hearts get hard from being walked on, just as paths do. Satan is behind the development of hard hearts. They serve his purposes very well.

The next condition is rocky soil, there are soft places here, but there is shallowness as well. This soil accepts the word with joy, an emotional response that looks good at first, growth is very rapid, but it only lasts a short time. When trouble and persecution come, they quickly fall away. The focus in this section is not upon the emotion of joy, because joy is a fruit of the spirit, but rather upon the shallowness of soil that results from rocks being allowed to remain in the field. Crops don't grow well in rocky places. Rocks could be characterized as hardness undisturbed for a long period of time that may be covered over by a very soft and shallow surface. How many people are like that, they are easily moved by surface issues, but there is a hardness that prevents real depth of growth.

They are the ones the author of Hebrews refers to who require milk for a spiritual diet; who can only endure surface issues such as: "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms and eternal judgment." (Hebrews 6:1-3) They cannot endure teachings about righteousness, but that is what is required to produce a harvest.

What is the harvest? Jesus did not explain that, yet the answer is obvious. A seed planted produces seeds like itself with multiplication.

It takes good soil to produce good harvests. Teachings about righteousness are like the farmer's plow that digs deep dealing with thorn bearing weeds (the deceitfulness of wealth), and the desire for other things that choke the word. They deal with the stones by preparing the heart to receive healing and deliverance. They deal with the hard paths by breaking up the fallow ground and allowing the soft rain of the Spirit to heal the hardened hearts.

As the seed grows so the likeness of Jesus Christ appears. As Jesus went before us into intimate fellowship within the veil; so we can become like him and follow him into full restoration and fellowship. We enter that wonderful place of fellowship by a new and living way! (See Hebrews 6:19-20, 10:19-24)

Next we have a teaching about a lamp.

"He said to them, 'Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.'" (Mark 4:21-22)

Just as the purpose of a lamp is to give light, so we who follow Jesus have a destiny, bearing witness to the world. He is the light of the world, but just as the seed is not what is seen, but the new life form, so it is our lives that are seen by the world. The seed must fall into the ground and die, but it is not intended that it remain concealed. It will spring forth into new life expressions, not remaining submerged in secrecy. When the word first enters the good soil it sinks out of sight for a time. The growth seems imperceptible at first, but then as the seed germinates and begins to grow it pushes its

way through the soil, first comes the blade pushing aside crusty ground and even small stones, then the stock begins to form, and finally after maturity develops, the harvest begins to appear. Likewise in spiritual matters, a declaration of faith is made sometimes pushing aside great obstacles; this is the purpose of life!

Just as the purpose of a lamp is to give light, so it is our lives that are seen by the world. If what is seen is the growth from the seed, Jesus the Word, then the growth will be a reproduction of the life that formed it!

Jesus is the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. What resulted in him must also result in us. This is the purpose, the mission, that we might all come forth in his likeness and his image. Yet we are warned that it is not automatic. Man has his part to fulfill and God his part. So Jesus said,

"If anyone has ears to hear let him hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Mark 4:23-25)

Our involvement in the process of growth to harvest is vital, just as the farmer must care for his crop to bring it to harvest. We cannot make a plant grow but we can prepare the field, watering and protecting the young plants from danger and abuse. Whatever the measure of our participation, it will be rewarded in like measurement or more. I suppose this truth has to be applied both positively and negatively. Diligence is sure to bring a fruitful harvest, but slothfulness can reverse the prospects of harvest!

How quickly an unattended, unprotected garden can be ruined! This takes me back to my youth when we would visit my grandmother's farm. She had a fenced garden with a gate for protection against stray animals. There were, however, those occasions when the gate was left open and when there were loose cows in the area that love to eat vegetables, that the garden was in danger of being destroyed very quickly. Keeping them out of the garden was absolutely essential, so when an animal, usually a cow, would wander into the area, everyone would drop everything and run to rescue the garden! We all understood this truth; if you want a garden to produce a crop, care must be given to it. We have considered man's part; now Jesus gives us God's part.

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29)

God does his part quietly and imperceptibly; as long as the process is not hindered, disrupted or damaged, the harvest will come. The life process is God's responsibility. We don't have to decide when the stalk should grow or how tall it should become, nor do we have to decide when the head should appear; this process belongs to God and to God alone!

This parable seems to present a transition of thought from the word that produces life, to the kingdom of God. The theme is further expanded upon in the parable that follows gathering prophetic implications.

In these parables we find the progression of growth and a prediction of its destiny. Mark speaks of the kingdom of God in his gospel; Matthew speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven. This designation helped set it in contrast to the kingdoms of this world. This is vital lest we confuse the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of Anti-Christ that comes posing as Christ's kingdom on earth, a premise already gaining much popularity under various disguises.

Mark speaks of the kingdom of God, because his theme is different; he is presenting Jesus, the Spirit anointed servant. The focus of attention in Mark is upon the works of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is seen as the servant of the Spirit. The growth and development of the kingdom are not evidenced by tangible expressions such as the philosophies and principles, or modes of government, but rather upon the more imperceptible characteristics of the Spirit's work that goes on quite mysteriously, and independent of anything we can do.

If the Spirit of life is present, it is because God has granted it and if it leaves we cannot call it back. There is a divine sovereignty about life that can often frustrate man; nevertheless, there is a close correlation between man's activities and the Spirit's work. We cannot give the breath of life, yet we are permitted to participate in its inception and development. Our efforts and influences are external; the Spirit's, internal. In the natural formation of life, the parents provide the substances in which life will dwell, and provide the environment for its development, but it is the Spirit's work that creates it into the likeness of its parents.

This is why sexual sin is so offensive, and especially abortion, for the womb of the women is like a holy sanctuary where the Spirit of life does his most glorious natural work, the formation and development of human life. Inappropriate activity in this holy sphere will surely bring the judgment of God!

The work of the Spirit, as seen in the natural creation, is a lower order than his work in creating the spiritual Kingdom of God. Like the Spirit's work in the natural formation of life, so in the spiritual; man again has his part to play scattering the seed (the word), providing the soil (hungry hearts), but growth is the Spirit's work. After the kingdom comes to full maturity, we will participate in the harvest, and will even be nurtured by it! What joy springs forth when the fruit of the Spirit comes to maturity, what satisfaction when at last the veil has been broken and we are granted access to the Most Holy Place, where fellowship with God is deep, fulfilling and eternal!

When the seed of spiritual life enters the heart of man, it often appears to be very insignificant as natural concerns still overshadow it, but when it is full grown it becomes the resting place of all who are weary from vain pursuits.

So in the parable of the mustard seed we see this picture portrayed. The process is well defined, however, its application is less certain; yet with a little help from the Holy Spirit we shall be able to see clearly.

A kingdom is a collective body of people, so when we see the formation of a spiritual person, we see the process of the formation of the kingdom. Kingdoms are made up of individuals, and since the kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven, it exists in the heart of man. It too is in the formative stages, and its citizens are being created into the likeness of Jesus, our forerunner.

There is a process of growth that is seen as it emerges historically. First a seed was sown, being Christ; the sowing was his death on the cross followed by his burial, and afterward came the blade, the first resurrection. The stock followed as the formation of the church began to take rapid form. The nurturing rains of the spirit fell upon the young kingdom of believers in the Pentecostal outpourings of the first century. The drought of the Dark Ages followed threatening the very existence of the spiritual kingdom of God on earth. However, the rain of the Spirit began to fall once more, bringing forth revivals in the period of the Reformation. The growth has gone on with stages of growth continuing until the stock matured and the heads of grain appeared. The harvest, while in progress is not fully completed, that is, the kingdom has not yet come to its final form, nor will it, until the last person who belongs to it has been gathered. The Spirit still works imperceptibly, yet what is most readily seen in the visible kingdom is a mix of the wheat and tares of another parable. The true kingdom will come to



full development and become increasingly more visible as the people of the kingdom begin to take on the life and character of Jesus Christ.

The chapter in Mark ends where we began this chapter, on the stormy sea. To many of us who hope for the kingdom to emerge in the beauty of our Savior, it all looks like wind and waves about us. Some become disillusioned with the imperfect conditions in those persons who have the Spirit of the Savior at work in them, but not yet perfected. Like the disciples, we tend to want to run to Jesus in panic and wake him to action because we are sure all is going to be lost unless he acts quickly. It's hard for us to remember that he is not a man, such as we are, and that all things are formed by his command. We tend to forget that wind and waves serve his interests and that when the time comes, one command from him will silence the storms forever!

The times and seasons are in his control, and the harvest will surely come. We must look after the field faithfully serving the interests of the king; this is our job. The kingdom will come, first in us, then in the world! It is only when we truly desire the kingdom to come within us that we can pray from our hearts, "Thy kingdom come."

# Chapter Eleven

## The Spirit Brings Life!

Mark 5:1-43

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs 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 saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?"

Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

In Mark chapter five there are three persons who are significant as symbols of the work of the spirit. He shows us a man who is dead while yet alive, a girl who is dead but yet alive, and a woman who is alive but as good as dead. What response is appropriate when such conditions exist? What answer does Jesus offer?

First we have a man who has become demon possessed living in the tombs. What possessed him was beyond human control; even chains and shackles have failed to hold him.

Such is the condition of lost souls. For this man, the power of his bondage was so great that his true condition was evident to all. No one wondered, "Is this man demon possessed?" There was no question about it, what plagued this man was demonic. We may see a person who demonstrates bizarre behavior and wonder; is it simply an illness or is it a demon? Some people deny the existence of demons, while other people see demons in everything.

Personally, I find no problem in believing that demons exist, seeing abundant evidence of their existence and work. If we believe the Bible we are left without an alternative, but just in case anyone might question, Mark gives us reasons to believe that this man was truly demon possessed. Demons are evil spirits, and we are told that this man had them.

The reason some people argue about demons is because they have never really seen one in action. Once you have seen a true demonic manifestation you are forced to a conclusion unless a person has a stubborn bias against acknowledging the existence of beings that are unseen to the natural eye. We acknowledge the existence of many forces and laws that cannot be seen, yet on the basis of evidence we conclude they exist. So it is with the subject of demons.

I am not a scientist, and have very little knowledge of science, yet I believe in many scientific truths. I have not been in a position to observe the evidence that led to scientific conclusions, yet I accept the conclusions of those who have.

The problem with demons is; first, we cannot see them; and second, there is fear connected with acknowledging them. To many people it's like a can of worms they would just as soon not open. It's easy to either deny their existence or to try to ignore them and act as though they do not exist. Another factor concerning demons is that, if you admit they exist, then you are forced into facing the whole subject of the supernatural. Acknowledging the existence of demons forces us to acknowledge that there is a Holy Spirit that can also possess the heart, and affect the life of a person.

In my experience, it is rare to see a manifestation of demonic power that even comes close to what Mark describes. I have, however, seen manifestations that left no doubt in my mind that demons exist.

Once we admit they exist, the next question becomes, what are the evidences of their existence and how wide spread is their influence?

It has been my observations that the work and influence of demons are much greater than most people want to acknowledge. We have insight in the scriptures on the subject, yet it seems more comfortable to ignore it. If we admit that demons exist, we are tempted to relegate the subject to the bizarre, or we want to think it is a subject we can ignore because it doesn't affect us.

How startling it must have been to Peter when Jesus turned to him and said, "Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me." (Matt. 16:23) Was Peter possessed by a demon? No, of course not. Yet, Peter was under the influence of Satan sufficiently to become his mouthpiece.

I once spent some time in India. While there I was preaching in a village one night; when all at once a man who was yelling wildly and being thrown about by an unseen force interrupted us. All attention shifted to the man. The place irrupted into bedlam, so there was only one thing to do, cast out the demon. After the incident was over and order was restored, the man gave a glowing testimony of deliverance. The result was that the meeting was extended an additional night to accommodate the need for ministry. Satan's effort to stop the meeting was overcome by God's power to deliver. Casting out the spirit was relatively easy because the manifestation was so clearly demonic that no one doubted it was a demon. The appropriate remedy was to take authority over the demon in the mighty name of Jesus.

A few nights later I was in another crusade. It seemed that Satan was at work to hinder this crusade right from the start.

The first night of the crusade we were in a building that was much too small. The next night the meeting was moved outdoors and things got off to a great start. As the service commenced, a large crowd gathered. I could sense the atmosphere was building for a real move of God. My sponsor and I had paid for the crusade, but what began to happen was beyond belief. A local church pastor was allowed to do the organizing, and this is where things began to go astray.

In India they have a custom that when special functions that attract large crowds gather, the pastors are to invite their supervisor to be a speaker. Much to my surprise, my friend who was scheduled to give a short sermon before I was to speak had been eliminated so that their district official could preach a sermon. I do not wish to put anyone in a bad light. Their intentions were good, but they were out of order. This was a direct attack upon the meeting that prevented carrying out God's will as we understood it.

I had already learned an effective method of winning souls in India. In our previous meetings we would invite people to come forward to receive prayer for healing, as they would come we would ask them if they had ever received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The result of this was, each crusade where this was done had produced a number of decisions for Christ. People were eager to receive the Lord and this was the perfect opportunity.

This meeting was the time for an outpouring of spiritual ministry. I sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the crowd was ready, but so was the opposition. Because the local church pastor had invited his district supervisor to be a speaker without consultation, I was in a very difficult spot. The meeting had already begun when I learned about this. What was worse was this official was delayed in coming so he arrived right at the time he was to speak. In an effort to salvage the situation I had sent word to the brother that he was to come immediately and speak, he responded that he could not, thus I was left no alternative but to proceed. I knew it was out of order, but I felt trapped. The circumstance seemed out of my control. They had assumed authority; I felt I must comply.

As I spoke I sensed an anointing on the message that was truly outstanding, the atmosphere was charged with expectancy, but I felt helpless to do what needed to be done because they had already

announced that this brother would be speaking. I felt unable to conclude the service in the manner that I had planned. The best I could think of to do was announce that prayer for the sick would be offered the following night. I prayed for salvation for all who would receive, thus concluding my message. The brother delivered his message, then at the conclusion, thinking I wanted to pray for the sick; he gave a call to prayer for the sick.

He was unaware that the healing ministry was to attract people to Jesus for the greater miracle of salvation. When properly used in an evangelistic setting it can result in the salvation of many people. My purpose for postponing prayer for the sick was so that we could harvest the souls who needed salvation the following night. What happened was, we prayed for healing that night, but we were unable to deal with them about salvation.

The next night turned out even worse, this time they had invited a minister to speak of a different doctrinal persuasion who was related to a member of the church. What could have been a very fruitful crusade had turned into what seemed to be a total waste.

I was never more conscious of Satan's influence over the work of the Lord. This crusade, which should have seen a good number of conversions, didn't produce even one known decision. The night the break should have come, people were ready. It was reported later that someone had said, "They were ready to receive the Lord that night." We can only wonder how many more there might have been.

What happened? Were these people ungodly? Were they seeking to prevent the work of the Lord from being done? Of course not. These men were simply doing what their customs dictated. They were involved with their own concerns. When the pastor was questioned about why he had arranged these speakers, he said that if he was to advance in the ministry in his denomination he had to accommodate his superiors. Is this the sort of motivation that should dictate decisions where souls are concerned? Should souls be jeopardized so that someone can gain favor from a superior?

I have made the charge that Satan was at work in this situation; could that be? Yes, I believe it is true. I believe this is Satan's most effective tool to frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. These men were not demon possessed, but they were useful to satanic purposes because they were concerned about earthly matters. Like Peter, who became the voice of Satan, they were easily manipulated by those concerns.

How often this scene is played out in a variety of ways. This is by far the most difficult form of attack the church of Jesus Christ must face. The demon-possessed man who came raging into our meeting was much easier to deal with. Everyone understood it to be satanic, but could I have dealt with this other circumstance in same way? Who would understand that the pastor and his superior were being manipulated to frustrate God's plan? And, who would believe that my hesitancy to ignore their plans and go ahead and close the meeting without allowing the superior to speak was equally wrong, yet my fear of offending was also being used!

Let's look again at our story of the man who was demon possessed. We started with Jesus being confronted by this man who had been driven by demons to live in the tombs. Being filled with torment; his behavior had become destructive and antisocial. He was dead to all societal purposes, but Jesus the life giver was at work to bring him healing and salvation. Life, healing and deliverance were always the result whenever the work of Jesus was permitted to be accomplished. Satan never won power over Jesus in his ministry by confronting him openly. Jesus would simply cast out the demons, but he was successfully hindered on occasions when Satan was able to control people through their attitudes.

The problem in the world is not Satan a defeated enemy, a truth seen both inside and outside the church. Jesus was able to cast out the demons from the man in our story, but when the people of the

town told him to leave their area, he obligingly left! Again, it is not Satan that is the problem; it is humanity! We have been given the power to select our destiny and choose our God! When the God society at large selects is other than the Lord God, the conditions of that society will soon reflect the character of that God. I can take authority over demons in Jesus' name, but I cannot take authority over the will of any person.

Satanic forces had victimized the man in our story. He was dead though still alive. His natural life was a contradiction to his actual state of being. When we are under Satan's control, we are under the control of the prince of death. Death, destruction and torment are his domain, and his every effort is to deceive us by wearing many disguises being the master of deceit, but in the end his true spirit is manifest.

Jesus came to this poor demonized man dismissing the demons, then sent him back to his family, his home and his community. He became a living proclamation of the Life that is the light of the world.

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After this, Mark introduces us to a little girl who, in the course of the story dies, but Jesus has been summoned to heal her. In this case the death was physical, not spiritual. Jesus had said concerning this child, "The kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt. 19:14) This girl for whom Jesus was summoned belonged to his domain. She was still alive when Jesus was summoned, but he was in no hurry to reach her.

Continuing his journey, a woman among the crowd pressed in upon him; she was alive but as good as dead having a condition that had rendered her useless to the normal course of life. Nevertheless, she was a woman who refused to accept defeat having a vitality of spirit that reached out to Jesus in hope. She was a woman who had the capacity to see the opportunity before her, and to press through the obstacles to touch Jesus. She had a condition of bleeding, and had done everything she knew to find a cure. When she heard about Jesus, with great effort, she got through the large crowd to reach him. Being a woman of perseverance she was a true candidate for healing. She exhibited the kind of spirit that is characteristic in the Kingdom of Heaven. She embraced hope, believed in Jesus, and pressed in until she made contact with his life-giving power! Her belief in Jesus was evidenced by her actions, and her healing became manifest to all.

The story now shifts back to Jairus' daughter. Word came to Jairus who was with Jesus, "Your daughter is dead, why bother the teacher anymore?" (Mark 5:35) However, Jesus ignored them telling the synagogue ruler not to be afraid, but rather to believe! Jesus and those with him went to the ruler's house and as they approached they found a crowd of people crying and wailing. Jesus spoke to them saying, "Why all this commotion and wailing. The child is not dead but asleep. (Mark 5:39)

Here is a marvelous truth! This girl was dead, yet she was alive! How blind we are till the Spirit opens our understanding to kingdom truths. When we are in Christ we are in Life! Though our body may be lying lifeless, we are never dead! The body may sleep in death, but the spirit is alive with the Lord! This girl was not dead, and to prove his point, Jesus went to the girl and said, "little girl, I say to you, get up!" Immediately the girl stood up and walked around." (Mark 5:41-42) Jesus restored this little girl back to life! Jesus then commanded those present to feed her. This was not resuscitation or a temporary artificial state such as some witch doctors have been thought to accomplish; she was alive to continue living out her normal life span.

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to demonstrate the life-giving power of Jesus! His domain is the domain of life, liberty, joy, and peace. Wherever the Spirit is allowed to work, people live again, thus everywhere Jesus went, he was seen to be, the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest.

# Chapter Twelve

## How Should We Go Forth to Serve?

Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Being a man upon whom the Spirit rests is not always pleasant. In spite of the fact that Jesus was God's son, the problems he faced were the same as experienced by every person upon whom the Spirit comes to rest. Those individuals whose lives are yet quite normal do not often understand the changes that occur, and since the changes that occur are not regarded as natural development, they are suspect of being erroneous intrusions into our well-organized social order. In the world's view, the evidence of true intelligence is to recognize the systems that regulate our lives, comply with them, master them, and even outsmart them to good advantage. This is sure to bring increased acceptance and applause: but to reject the systems, and to live by the rules of another kingdom is not acceptable, ever!

The reaction to the individual who fastens his gaze upon the heavenly city, embraces its laws, loves its king, and seeks its glory, will be varied but certain. There is no escaping it. Ironically an indifferent world will view us in a better light than those closest to us from whom we need support but who are least likely to give it.

So it was with Jesus. Upon going to his hometown where he had been raised, the reaction was a combination of amazement and rejection. "Who does he think he is anyway? What does he think he's doing, acting like a teacher, listen to him!" There was one troubling thought however; he had power, wisdom and authority they couldn't explain. Where did he get it?

Here Mark lays to rest all speculations about a mystery boy in Egypt, or some other fable, and gives us solid evidence of where Jesus had been during the "silent years" of his life. He had been in Nazareth, working as a carpenter, living with his mother Mary, his sisters, and brothers James, Joses, Judas and Simon. (Mark 6:1-3)

This fact was what created the problem that confronted Jesus. No amount of evidence of the supernatural could overcome their knowledge of the natural. He was a local grown carpenter, and



carpenters are not Son's of God, was their judgment. Rejection was inevitable. They must not support this alleged fantasy. If he had claimed to be an anointed carpenter, maybe that would have been acceptable, but Jesus was much more than a carpenter; in fact, he didn't even refer to himself as one anymore. He was God's one and only Son, however, it wasn't just his claim to Sonship that was bothering them, simply claiming to be a prophet was sufficient to bring instant rejection.

They had seen him sweat in labor, unkempt at the end of a hard day's work, as human as any of them. Had he desired to improve his natural skills and become a teacher of his trade, they would have accepted him; but to become a teacher of God's word and a miracle worker claiming to be the fulfillment of a prophetic passage of scripture was more than they could accept. I can just about hear what they might have said, "Go back to your shop, Jesus! You're neglecting your duties."

Such is the hardness of our human hearts. When it comes to being changed, we can only accept that within limits. Improvement is acceptable, but transformation is bewildering, however, we are to please the One who calls us, we must surrender to transformation.

Change and improvement are human, but transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the transformation from the role of being a carpenter to being manifestly the Son of God that caused the reaction exposing the hardness of their hearts. It was not what he claimed to be that was at issue here; rather, it was what they saw and heard that was unsettling.

People claim lots of things, but when the evidence demands a conclusion, something will begin to take place. How do we react when we are confronted with this sort of evidence? Do we choose denial? They did. Do we choose indifference? Many of them did. It forced them to a decision to either acknowledge him and accept him for who he claimed to be, or to deny him as many of them did. Will we accept him, or seek to destroy him, as some of them did?

As Jesus went about preaching, the reaction to him was divided, yet the issue was forced upon them. Those in authority did not wish to accept him, so eventually they crucified him!

Many people have faced the same dilemma. When the Spirit comes to rest on a life and the demand is "Follow me," there are those who will accept it, but there are those who will rise up against the Spirit's purposes. What should such a person do?

Jesus blazed the trail, never allowing anything to discourage him, he did what he could for them, and marveling at their unbelief, he moved on. There were other towns, no need to make a fuss or cause a division. He would live in Capernaum and minister where he found acceptance.

No cure was offered for the hardness of their hearts. There is a cure, but when the hardness of hearts is against the only cure there is, it becomes to them, incurable. Jesus Christ alone is the cure for a hard heart. He is the mediator of the New Covenant guaranteeing a changed heart. Outside of him there is no hope. Once he is rejected, all hope is gone; there remains no other sacrifice. Jesus left to find a ready heart.

The call of the Spirit is a call to publish the good news. The good news is that there is a kingdom that is not of this world.

Jesus went from village to village teaching; however, what he said and did in these villages was not included in Mark's message. One brief statement is all he gives to cover what was no doubt an action filled series of events. Without attempting to give all the details of the ministry of Jesus, the gospel writers drew from the vast reservoir of teachings and experiences that best suited the message each communicated.

While it's true that Jesus went about teaching the people, he also spent time preparing his disciples to take up the ministry he would leave them. In preparation for their future ministries, Mark reports that Jesus called the twelve to him and sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil

spirits. Jesus gave them instructions about how they were to carry out this training assignment, but Mark only reports the segment that fits his message.

These were his instructions, "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. (Mark 6:8-13)

Jesus is best portrayed in the role of servant, and so must his disciples be servants as well; that is the call of the Spirit upon all who follow after the Lord. Thus, their manner of going is given greater focus by Mark than what they were to do and say. Could it be that if we are to be effective in our witness our manner of going is really what is most important after all?

When the disciples were ready to travel for Jesus, they were fully dressed, but they didn't have a brief case, a change of clothes, a lunch, or money! They were told to wear sandals and carry a staff. They obviously would be walking and would be dependent upon others to take care of their every need. They would not even be able to pay for their own lunch. They would seem like nothing more than a slave, being in a weakened condition in the flesh unable to care for a single need, yet they would be mighty in Spirit! They would speak of repentance and give healings and deliverances.

What a contrast of style to most of us who travel for Jesus today, however, I don't think Jesus intended for this to be the normal mode of operations. Even he carried a purse, or should I say, allowed Judas Iscariot to carry it for him. What he was doing was giving insight into how total the care is upon those who work for his purposes. The needs of the disciples would be met by the hospitality shown to them, but those filled with greed for this world's goods would be offended; the willingness of their hearts being tested.

The disciples went forth lacking all symbols of power and influence. They left their resources behind, their resume, letters of recommendation, financial portfolios, even the outward symbols that would suggest status.

Men of means who traveled in those days would wear extra clothing. This was so that upon reaching their destination they would have clothes to change into, and, more importantly, it was a symbol of their wealth.

Do symbols of power and wealth have a place in the proclamation of the gospel? I personally find them offensive, yet I realize circumstances vary and Paul taught us to be wise in our presentation of the Gospel. He tried to be all things to all people and there are times when God uses natural status to open the doors of ministry, but in this Gospel the focus is upon the Spirit's work. By stripping the disciples of all symbols and natural resources, he was able to show them how ably the Spirit works.

When the disciples returned from their mission, they didn't even mention how they fared in the natural, but rather, they reported on the Spirit's work through them. They may have received contributions of cash, which seems likely. However, seeking worldly gain from the proclamation of the gospel falls under the condemnation of the scriptures. Those who proclaim the gospel are entitled to ample sustenance and provisions for whatever is needed to maintain their lives and the needs of their families, but excessive use of kingdom resources is condemned. (See 2 Cor. 2:17, 1 Tim. 6:3-11)

Those who accept the commission of the Lord Jesus Christ and go forth to serve may find themselves having to depend upon the hospitality and generosity of those to whom they serve. This may be offensive to our fleshly instincts, but God has a reason for this arrangement. What is in our hearts is manifest by our actions and attitudes. If we have difficulty accepting hospitality, it is evidence of the presence of an attitude that springs from the presence of evil within our hearts.

Those upon whom the Spirit rests not only bear a message to be proclaimed, but also are themselves a part of the message testing the hearts of those individuals to whom they minister. Will they welcome those sent to them? Will they willingly share the substances of their provisions with them? Will they do this out of duty or love?

When these disciples were sent out in natural weakness, they were to take note of the sort of reception they received bearing witness to what they experienced. If they found a house unworthy, they were to shake the dust off their sandals as a witness against them on judgment day. The people to whom they were sent were being tested with eternal judgment in view. Do we understand the importance of each event of our lives? If we are the "sent" person, we are a part of God's test to those to whom we are sent. If our conduct is less than what God has ordained and we find rejection based on our deficiency, no dust should be shaken off! In such a case, we have failed in our obedience.

How frustrating it must be to the Holy Spirit to have to deal with some of us who are called and sent, but are unwilling to accept his criteria of service.

Years ago, an evangelist came to the town where I lived. A Christian brother was asked to make arrangements for him, but was surprised to learn that the evangelist expected to be accommodated in the best hotel in town, added to this were a few other requirements for his personal comfort and pleasure.

How far have we fallen? How corrupt have we become? Where is our commitment to service? We, as servants of the Lord Jesus, should extend whatever hospitality is reasonable and possible to another servant of the Lord, but should that servant insist upon the finest accommodations?

I feel sure Jesus did not disapprove of people giving generously to his disciple's needs. I am also sure that those who gave their very best were generously rewarded and approved of by the Lord. I am equally sure the disciples were also to accept their hospitality with graciousness and thankfulness, so long as in doing so they did not bind themselves to the giver.

It is offensive when a minister or any representative of the Lord Jesus fails to accept hospitality when offered, unless that rejection is based on some understandably legitimate reason. If we reject hospitality for reasons of pride or selfishness, we have become guilty before the Lord Jesus who sent us.

The tests we find ourselves in most often are test of our own attitudes. What we do or say always springs forth from our attitude of heart. If we are to represent the Lord Jesus in a manner that he will approve, we must go forth in his Spirit. The right attitude, right conduct and right motives of our lives will open the doors to effective ministry.

The disciples must have gone forth with the right attitudes or they would not have come back with good reports.

The report they gave was, "they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out demons, anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." (Mark 6:12-13)

This is the report of Mark, and how revealing it is. The procedure is what I have learned to be the proper procedure in the presentation of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. First, repent, next, cast out the evil spirits, and thirdly, receive healing. John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness." (1John 1:9) James puts it this way, "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, 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)

How easy it is to pass over scriptures such as these. In self-pride, people do little more than give casual lip service to the deep need in their hearts! Some people respond to a call to accept Jesus,

repeating a prayer, admitting they are sinners, and reciting an affirmation of faith. It's part of the requirements of confirmation, much like an under-classman is initiated into a fraternity. He may be required to admit his low estate in word or deed, yet everyone knows full well; their humility is only positional. The humility they display will soon be replaced by a new and deeper arrogance that will be based on their achievements within the institution.

Such is the danger of superficial repentance in which we "join God" much like we join a club. We see repentance as part of the initiation, so once completed we go on to become members in good standing, never mind that real change is not yet in evidence! We seem to see salvation much like social security! You sign up when you wish to enter and regardless of what happens in the intervening years, when the time comes, you get your checks from the system.

I have to wonder if in our zeal to convert the world; we are more concerned with outward conformity to the requirements of our religious institutions, than our actual relationship with a very real and personal God. It seems that James, in the passage quoted, saw salvation as being a response from God that would come as a result of a real change of heart. He uses verbs indicating the need for real repentance on our part. Being concerned about passive repentance, he punctuates his points using words such as, submit, resist, come near, wash, purify, grieve, mourn, wail, change and humble yourself; all words referring to our part in the process so that God will respond to our need. James says the response will be, "He (God) will come near to you – and he will lift you up." (James 4:8b, 10b) Until we have experienced the nearness of the Lord, and felt his hand lifting us out of our lost condition, it's easy to assume that all that was needed were words.

Salvation is an action that results in a process. There are heavenly scribes assigned the job of recording the names of those received.

But you have come to Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. --- To the church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven. (Heb. 12:22-23)

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12-15)

Need I comment on the seriousness of the need to be certain about something as important as salvation?

Can we know that God has accepted us? John told us that God would forgive us and cleanse us. (1 John 1:9) James said that God would draw near to us and lift us up. (James 4:10) And Paul said that the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Rom. 8:16) Mark pointed out three things they experienced in ministering to the people to whom they were sent, repentance, deliverance from demons, and healing.

Is there a result that we can expect when we come to Jesus? I believe there is, I have seen it in many lives, and I have experienced it in my own life. Repentance, real repentance, results in deliverance from evil domination and control, and the resultant change opens the door of healing both in the natural and supernatural.

# Chapter Thirteen

## Kill the Prophet!!

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

Others said, "He is Elijah."

And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb."

The impact of the ministry of Jesus was becoming well known, and knowledge of him was beginning to effect people. King Herod, like many others was being greatly affected by the ministry of Jesus.

When John the Baptist was still alive, Herod liked to hear him preach. John was the sort of individual who would say what was on his mind, and had very little if any concern for what others thought about it. When John saw Herod in the crowd, he told him that it was a sin for him to be married to the woman who had been his brother's wife. This upset Herod, but he still admired John and liked to listen to him. He did, however, eventually have him arrested and thrown into prison. Herodias, his wife, was not quite so nice; she hated John for saying the things he did. She wanted Herod to kill him, but he was unwilling to because he respected John and feared him. He believed John was a prophet, so he protected him.

What games we play! If we have an enemy, we look him over and determine what his strengths and weaknesses are. If we determine that our enemy is strong enough to defeat us, we will seek out other means of dealing with him. We may try the pushing game, you know, just crowd him a little; see how he will react. If we can't defeat him in all out war, then try to determine how much can be gotten away with without causing an all out conflict. You may be able to defeat him by wisely using his

aversion to conflict. Children, spouses and nations use this technique. We have many names for it, strategy, diplomacy, negotiations, or co-existence, but when it comes to God; it is called folly.

How far do we think we can go in defiance of God? By our actions it appears we think God is so tolerant that actions, thoughts and attitudes, have to be grossly bad to arouse his anger. Many people have been pushing at God, waiting for a response, but because nothing seemed to indicate God's anger, they have either settled into a life of mediocrity, or recklessly pursued evil behaviors. Just because bolts of lightning don't come out of a cloudless sky doesn't mean God has approved of our rebellious behavior.

Judgment for evil behaviors that have been against God will come at the designated time of judgment. Sometimes, however, we seem to feel that if the penalty is not immediately served, it will not come. We understand that there are certain behaviors that result in immediate pain and suffering, so we seek to avoid them. These effects can often be managed, for example, one might avoid a venereal disease by using care and good judgment even though he is very promiscuous; but does that mean he has escaped the penalty?

If we confuse the effect of sin with the penalty of sin, we can very easily become convinced that we are clever enough to escape judgment. The effect of sin is something that can be readily observed, but so is the fact that not every sin has an absolute result. We as humans have a certain tolerance level for some forms of evil. So as long as we manage our lives within limits, we will be able to successfully avoid disastrous results. Just because an individual drinks a pint of whiskey and smokes a pack of cigarettes every day, and lives to be a hundred and twenty years old without suffering ill effects from that life style, does that mean people can assume such behavior is safe? Even if it is deemed safe, does that allow us the view that we have escaped the judgment?

When Herod had John put into prison, nothing drastic happened. He had removed his critic from public view and had appeased the anger of his wife Herodias. On the surface of things, everything seemed all right. Herod, no doubt, felt he had done the right thing. Since he didn't wish to deal with his sin, and since he stopped short of fulfilling Herodias' desire to have John killed, he was able to justify his action as being good. Wasn't he protecting John from an even worse fate?

Things went along pretty well for a while, but Herodias was not satisfied. Having John in prison was not enough. One day the opportunity Herodias was looking for came. It happened at Herod's birthday party. Herod had invited the high officials of his kingdom, and everyone was having a nice time. Herodias' daughter came in and danced for the men and Herod was very pleased with her. He was so pleased that he promised her anything she would ask for, up to half his Kingdom. The girl then went to her mother and asked her advice about what she should request. Her mother instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptist!

How strong is sin? When we allow sin into our hearts it may not look very bad at first. How innocent the desire to be noticed by someone other than our spouse seems, or the desire to get ahead at the expense of our convictions looks or the desire to have a little fun appears. Yet those innocent desires have a way of leading us to sins that are much more sinister.

What happened in the lives of Herod and Herodias that resulted in an apparent divorce and marriage to the king is a point of speculation. Perhaps Herodias and Herod started noticing each other leading to flirtation. For Herodias to be noticed by the King was likely exciting and satisfying to her ego. She may have taken delight in being noticed by the King, and he may have liked getting one over on his brother. There could have even been some latent anger or bitterness between them that was just waiting for an opportunity to express itself. Herodias was probably endowed with feminine charms that appealed to the King. The fact that she was Herod's brother's wife did not stop him from taking her to be his wife! We may wonder how he could do such a thing. But wait, maybe his brother was an

abusive person; or maybe it was just that he was neglectful or lazy, possibly he too was flirtatious, giving Herod a reason to think that marrying her was the right thing to do. He may have even seen himself as her savior.

Their anger against John could have seemed very right, just and even righteous in the court of man's wisdom. After all, wasn't John being a little narrow? How naive, how meddling of John to accuse this great king of adultery!

No matter the rational; sin is still sin! Herodias was married to Herod's brother and Herod took her away from him and married her. It seems to me that as politicians and public figures, they had done a good job of making it look all right. When John began pointing at the deed as sin, he was meddling in matters with grave implications. The same attitude of permissiveness that allowed Herod to marry Herodias was, no doubt, the same attitude that made him a peaceful king and tolerant of the culture and religion of the Jews. This "good old boy" with his permissive attitude was no doubt very appreciated by the otherwise very strict Jews.

What strange bedfellows, legalism and selfism! How often we see apostate religion riding on the back of secularism! Should we point at the sins of the secular leadership when they are being tolerant of our religion? Isn't our religious freedom a more compelling interest than confrontation? If confrontation results in persecution, is it therefore wise?

God's prophets are not called to be humanists. John was called to proclaim righteousness. God's view of world affairs is not what man sees. We judge the wisdom of public policy on the basis of convenience and ease, but God looks at the eternal implications of every attitude of man. In the short run, confronting Herod seemed like folly, but history testifies that permissiveness leads to corruption and corruption leads to decay! We are not to evaluate our message of righteousness on the basis of short run effect. We are to look beyond the court of human wisdom and see an all-wise God who knows the end from the beginning.

When we cease to trust in divine wisdom, what fools we are! Herod and Herodias, knowingly or innocently, did not live by the requirements of righteousness. The sin of adultery grew in Herodias' heart, and sin has away of producing offspring. Adultery soon produces deceit. The act of adultery is an act of larceny, we either give what is not ours to give or take what really belongs to another! Getting caught leads to anger and often violence of various kinds. The adulterer's sin blinds his eyes to the pain of others, and their need to justify their actions may lead to destructive behavior toward those who would condemn their actions.

What happened in Herodias' heart, and what was involved in her hate is a point of speculation, but the result is reported; she instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist! Again we see an amazing progression. Mothers, of all people, should be concerned about the moral values of their children! Herodias was so blinded and mesmerized by her hate that she now involved even her daughter in a plot of murder. The reaction of her daughter suggests that she had already been well infected by the same hate that was in her mother. How contagious sin is! Bitter people have a way of spreading their sin everywhere they go.

Herodias' sin of bitterness took its deadly toll. Her daughter became an enthusiastic convert to her evil plot. To this point in time, Herod had shown resistance to this latter stage of evil development, but like the builder of a dam who can stop a river from flowing, a flood that Herodias was able to unleash inundated his effort.

Herod got caught between his lusts, his fear, his pride, and fear of embarrassment pushed him over the precipice of evil. His moral judgment was overwhelmed by his self-preservation instincts and the order was given; he immediately sent the executioner to kill the prophet!

Sooner or later the prophet, our conscience, must die if our sin is to live! May God help the person, nation, or people, who kill the prophet. When conscience is dead, nothing remains to restrain us; nevertheless, judgment remains! "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Heb. 9:27)

After sin has taken its toll, after the prophet is dead, peace may return, but conscience is not God! Herod, having been pushed by expediency, killed John; but horror of horrors, now there was Jesus! Had John been resurrected? How many people have thought they have successfully come to terms with their sin only to find they must now face God! No, it wasn't John that Herod heard about; it was Jesus! Opportunity knocked once more, but Herod seems only to have squirmed. Had he gone too far? Had he reached that point where, once crossed, there remains no more sacrifice? I do not know at what point a person has gone too far. I do suspect it varies from person to person, but one thing seems clear, when we can no longer feel the desire to turn from our sin, we are beyond hope! Had Herod gone too far? I do not know, nor do I know if any man has reached that point, but if you are feeling the pangs of conscience as you read this, the prophet is still alive, there is hope!



# Chapter Fourteen

## Balancing Faith and Reason

### Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

One day Jesus gathered his disciples around him and listened to their reports of what they had been doing. As they were talking things over, Jesus suggested to them that they should get away from the crowds, as they hadn't even had time to eat. So they went by themselves by boat to a solitary place.

When they arrived at their destination, a large crowd had gathered awaiting him. The news of his coming had traveled fast, because needy people everywhere sought Jesus out wherever he went. When Jesus saw them, he had compassion on them because he saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

Within the Christian community there seems to be an attitude that, to be spiritual we must be impractical. Some people seem to believe that obedience to the Lord means that we are to "throw our brains away." Efforts to make people act irrationally in the name of spiritual commitment may make good preaching material, but is that truly the way Jesus would have us behave? Does obedience to the Spirit require unreasonable, irrational behavior? Sometimes zealous preachers, thinking they are preaching the word of the Lord, have encouraged reckless, irrational behavior as evidence of the presence of real faith. Does faith require such behavior? At what point does faith require us to do the unthinkable?

Mark gives us a very interesting point of view of an event that I find to be a rich resource of instruction to those who desire to understand the proper relationship between faith and reason.

Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. From that point onward, supernatural power was in evidence in his life and ministry. He always acted appropriately never lacking from limitations, the Spirit's presence having effectively removed them.

The story is about Jesus feeding a multitude of people often referred to as the five thousand. In this story, we note the concern of the disciples for the people. They had been at this remote meeting place for a long while; and aware of their natural needs, they went to Jesus encouraging him to send the people away so they could still find food in a nearby village.

The next thing we note is the response of Jesus. He responded, "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37) It is at this point that we see "reason" and "faith" both being challenged.

The disciples reacted to the command of Jesus out of their natural world, natural law orientation. Their response was reasonable, but by what law? Their first thought was to count the cost. Were they always to think only in supernatural terms? Obviously not, because; though Jesus could walk on water, most of the time he traveled by boat.

In this story we see Jesus demonstrating how the natural and the supernatural merge. When it became evident that a natural answer was not a reasonable solution to the problem, Jesus began to show them how the supernatural would take up where the natural ends! This seems to be the consistent pattern in the life of Jesus. Jesus seemed to always do in a natural way what was reasonable and possible. The rebukes for unbelief came when what needed to be done went beyond natural answers, and the disciples failed to look to the possibility of a supernatural answer. The Lord often complimented those individuals who, having exhausted natural and reasonable solutions reached for supernatural solutions.

The procedure Jesus used is noteworthy. First, he asked them to assess their available resources. They found there was some available food, however, not nearly enough. In short they were asked to take all appropriate natural steps toward the desired goal. Jesus then did all the natural things that should be done. He took the food and presented it in thanks, then began to break it into portions for the people. Here is where the miracle power took over! When they had done everything they could do, or could be reasonably expected to do, the purpose being appropriate, the Spirit began to do a most remarkable thing. The bread he broke continued to be in his hand in sufficient quantity for the next piece that needed to be broken.

There is no evidence that suggests that any bread or fish appeared in advance of the need for the next piece that was to be placed in the next basket. I feel sure that the miracle did not appear until the last loaf was being broken, and the last fish was being given. I have heard various ideas about where the miracle happened: did it happen in Jesus' hand, or was it in the basket as the disciples gave it out? It really doesn't matter. The important lesson has to do with the concept that Jesus and his disciples did all those things in a natural way that was reasonable and commensurate with their custom of hospitality.

Had Jesus taken the natural worldview, he probably would have sent the people away with an apology, yet hungry. What he did instead was, he did by the Spirit's power what could not be done by natural means. It isn't until we come to the understanding that all things really are possible to the person who believes, that we begin to enter into true fellowship with Almighty God!

God is essentially Spirit. For God to be perceived he must manifest himself in a form that can be comprehended by natural man. Throughout history God has shown himself to man in a variety of ways, and for different reasons. He allows us to see him in a manner that is best suited to our need.

In my life, God has come to me in a variety of ways. I have had visions (pictures in my mind that I understand to be supernatural), however; I have never seen an actual visual representation of a spiritual being, angel or God. I have, in the manner described, seen portrayals of some characteristic, mood, or attitude, of the Lord that had special meaning to me. These instances are points where the natural physical creation in which we dwell and the spiritual kingdom merge. The superior realms of God's dwelling place become discernible and real as we enter into special fellowship with God. Is this a valid experience for humanity? If we believe that God wants to fellowship with us, and that God is a real vital being having intelligence, emotion, character and personality; and that he lives in a different realm, not governed by the laws of physics; then we can begin to understand that for God to fellowship with humanity, there must be a means whereby we can perceive him.

The evidence of the presence of God is always a manifestation of some form of the miraculous. In this usage of the term miraculous, I am referring to any manifestation of the presence of God that cannot be explained by the use of natural explanations. There are many historic evidences in the physical world of the presence of God. We ourselves are evidence of his existence. All that is seen in the natural world is the result of the presence of the supernatural God. Natural laws and substances had their origin in a supernatural beginning because every effect has a cause. The fact that there is even the minutest form of substance declares that there is one who caused it! Is God still at work? Is there evidence of his continued presence? If so, what occurrences are evidences of his presence?

I am sure that each person who would reply in the affirmative would point to very vastly different occurrences of the ongoing presence and involvement of God with us. If my observation is a correct one, I feel sure each such occurrence would have an element of the supernatural. The manifestation may at times be of such a nature that almost any observer would conclude that God was its author. Others would be of such a nature that it would be a matter of speculation, or a position of faith, to even acknowledge its presence.

Are all such experiences of God? To be sure, care must be taken to be certain that we do not seek to have spiritual experiences for the sake of having spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences should always be treated with great caution. It is no secret that Satan is also a spiritual being. We are warned in the scriptures about this clever deceiver going about as an angel of light. Satan too, being a spirit being, is capable of revealing himself to people in spiritual experiences.

How can we know what is the source of our experience? God and Satan are two opposing beings. They are as different as day is from night. One is "God," the other is the "ungod". God is light, though Satan comes as an angel of light, yet he is darkness. How can this be? It has been said that Satan has a very large mirror that he stands behind. If we look at Satan and see light, or truth, it is not his light; he stole it with his mirror! All true light has God at its source, but not all light is coming from God! Reflected light is distorted light.

There is a principle in Christianity that is of vital importance. The principle is repentance. Repentance is of vital concern to all true Christians. It implies turning around. It means changing Gods! Once we were citizens of the kingdom of death, but now Jesus the king of life makes us alive. If we understand the true nature of what it is that must happen to us, and allow it to happen, we will then be able to be a recipient of that which is coming direct from God.

When we understand what our God is like, we will not be deceived by an imitation. Our God is the God of the eternal kingdom. All that he is, does and says have to do with eternity. God calls us heavenward; Satan calls us earthward. God calls us to heavenly concerns; Satan calls us to earthly concerns. Jesus is the king of the Kingdom of Heaven; Satan is the god of this world.

We are told,

Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting about what he has and does—come not from the father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Again, are all spiritual experiences valid experiences? In our world today, many people are experimenting with all sorts of spiritual experiences. Some of the experiences are regarded as psychological phenomenon that is just an extension of the person. Maybe so, but can we be sure we are not being seduced into the very dangerous world of the demonic? It is my belief that all mental and psychological activities that reach beyond the purely natural functions of the mind, emotion, and will, are essentially violations of our role as God fearing, God worshipping people.

I see God's intended role for us as being worshippers of God and him only, and being in non-aggressive relationship to one another, except where the natural relationship requires natural forms of authority and power. Such relationships as family, employment, community and government all are necessary areas where some level of power and authority are needed. However, when people begin to manipulate or control others through psychological or spiritual techniques, evil is present.

The influence of God and his kingdom upon us is always a wholesome one. When a parent corrects his child because it has behaved badly, it is a positive action that produces a positive result. If, however, the parent corrects the child simply because the child is not wanted, or its actions are an inconvenience to the parents, correction becomes a negative that produces a negative result.

To those who know the Lord, the effects of his dealings upon us are life giving and liberating. The Lord seeks to draw us away from the enslaving, death dealing powers of the satanic spirit. Satan's purposes and plans for us are destructive; but God's desire is to bring us into true and deep fellowship with him and other believers.

True worshippers of Jesus Christ, whose central focus is worship, will find occasions when in an act of worship, or in the course of their life of worship, there will be supernatural manifestations of the love, care and power of Almighty God. God initiates these manifestations in response to his relationship to us. All such actions are actions of grace, love and mercy!

This seems to be the distinction between those individuals who are truly ministering the virtue of Jesus and those that are impostors, posing as worshippers of Jesus, but all the while drawing attention to themselves, promoting their own name and interests. They often demonstrate psychic and miracle power that impresses those who are either seeking to be the recipient of a miracle or want to see one.

There is a whole class of humanity who do not truly love God, but see him as a possible answer to a problem in their lives. They reach for God because of this need, but because it is not truly God they seek, but rather an answer, they are easy prey for those individuals who are ready to exploit people for personal gain.

Jesus made a statement in Matthew 24:28; "Wherever there is a carcass (a spiritually dead seeker after the supernatural) there the vultures (predators and charlatans) will gather." The need for answers in our natural life comes from the death (sin) we have within us. Those individuals who are seeking answers without truly embracing the Holy God are targets of deception, still being in their fallen natures. Jesus had just been talking about the abomination that causes desolation and false Christs who would come, when he made this statement.

The spiritual meaning of the abomination that causes desolation is symbolized by the sacrifice of a pig. According to the book of Barnabas, a very early writing of the Christian era, a pig is symbolic of those individuals who eat their spiritual food but lack an attitude of contemplation (chewing the cud). The teaching here is clear; those activities that lack a true focus upon the holiness and person of God

are unclean and cause desolation. These are especially devastating when they are offered in a place dedicated to the worship of the Holy God. When you see this sort of thing, run.

Jesus then went to the subject of false Christ's. For there to be a false Christ there must be a need for a false Christ! Many people, who reject the message of the cross because it implies personal change that is deep and painful, still want a Christ nonetheless. Anyone who allows himself to respond to that need of another by passing the need of repentance and becomes a substitute savior becomes a false Christ to him! There are two dominant features of the fallen nature of man, the need to be "saved," and the need to be a "savior." It is in this context that Jesus made the statement about the carcass and the vultures.

When Christianity loses its focus upon the real issues, trouble is sure to come! Jesus was and is the Savior of the world. He is the one, the only one, who is appointed to meet the needs of mankind. Anyone who steps into the role wanting to be a savior to another person spiritually has transgressed. It is my conviction that it is time we all begin to see these things more clearly, lest we become the target of divine judgment. When giving aid to a hurting person, we are to bring them to Jesus who alone is the Savior of the world. When true spiritual ministry is taking place, our appropriate role is being a willing vessel through which the Holy Spirit can minister. There are valid gifts of the Holy Spirit, which when properly used bring glory and attention to God alone. Those being used will be constantly seeking to lift up Jesus and the spirit of true holiness will be in constant evidence.

# Chapter Fifteen

## Hardness of Heart

Mark 6:45-56

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, "because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

How slow we are to see as God sees! Seeing spiritually is seeing with our hearts. If there is hardness in our hearts, we will not see clearly. As we come to the end of chapter six of Mark, we have a story that builds on what we dealt with in chapter fourteen of this book. The Spirit is always at work teaching. When it is important to learn a lesson, he will often repeat it in a different form.

Having concluded feeding the multitude, Jesus sent the disciples ahead across the lake to the region of Gennesaret, but he went into the hills to pray alone.

Men upon whom the Spirit has come to rest often pray alone. The prayer Jesus prayed here went unrecorded. Obviously, this prayer was not for the ears of the disciples, or the crowd, or even us! Some people pray in secret, but it's no secret! We have a way of publishing the news about everything we do. Secrets are not secrets when told. What did he pray? He did not tell. Was it a short, long, quiet or loud prayer? Did he listen or speak? We do not know if he prayed while he walked, or if he just stood still with his head bowed. Perhaps he looked upward gazing into the distant sky—he did not tell. It had been a long day; perhaps angels came to strengthen him. We cannot know for sure what happened when Jesus prayed, but this we do know, his Father always heard him when he prayed. When he returned to the lakeshore the disciples were already in the middle of the lake, straining at the oars, doing their best to be obedient. They were in "the will of God," out there in the storm! Jesus knew where they were as they struggled in the storm. These were tough men, accustomed to storms. This was their lake; they made their living on these waters. They knew what to do when the wind came up, row real hard and bail fast!

In this natural world, storms can be very threatening. If they get too severe you row hard and bail fast. Keeping the boat of our lives on top of the water of adversity is vital to our survival. Were the disciples in danger in the storm? Yes, by the measure of natural laws; however, this was not a contest

between the violence of the storm and the resourcefulness of the disciples. This was a life and death struggle, yet survival was assured. Would they go down in the storm? I am sure the danger was real; nevertheless, they were not in serious danger, because Jesus was also there in the midst of the storm! By what measure do we look upon our storms? Do we see them as threats to our safety or strength?

The purpose of most storms is neither to threaten us nor test us. They come to all men, good, bad, rich, poor, strong or weak, and when they come, we begin to worry; can we endure their fury? What will become of us? If storms do not come, we worry more; it takes the winter storms to nurture the grass in spring. We don't like the storms, yet we can't live without them.

Much good comes from storms. What could not be learned on the grassy slope eating the food of divine provision was learned in the storm.

The disciple's hearts were hard, and this hardness of heart kept them from seeing the true identity of Jesus.

There is hardness of heart in all of us, affecting the eyes of our understanding. It takes tender people, pure in heart, true worshippers of God out of a heart of pure love, to be sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit. Until the outer man is dethroned and his voice silenced, the voice of the Spirit will be difficult to hear. It is this condition of being controlled by the outer man that is referred to as hardness of heart.

Hardness of heart is not restricted to one class of humanity, being common to all. Carrying the theme one step farther, Mark reports an incidence that happened in the region of Gennesaret. When Jesus arrived on the shore they ran throughout the region and carried all their sick folk to him, begging him to allow them to touch even the edge of his cloak. You may ask, what does this have to do with hardness of heart? Mark didn't say it had anything to do with it directly, yet the report comes between two passages that deal with hardness of heart. First, Mark mentions hardness of heart as being a problem in the disciples, then he reports how the people brought their sick to Jesus for healing, after that he tells us about the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in the first verses of chapter seven. He then concludes with this quotation from Isaiah,

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. (Mark 7:6-7)

I do not wish to imply that there is anything wrong with people bringing their sick to Jesus. This was always allowed and always met lovingly and compassionately, but there is a much more important reason to seek Jesus! These people, like the disciples, were oblivious of their real need. They did not seem to see anything in Jesus but a means of getting healed! To see that there are purposes in the mind of God that reach beyond this life requires an enlightenment that comes by the Spirit's work in our lives. It's this condition of hardness of heart that prevents our seeing these purposes, causing us to worry about the many concerns that are temporal in nature, and forgetting how fragile life really is.

The Pharisees were concerned about ceremonial washing of the hands, and many such customs, none of which were commands of God. The people who met Jesus were concerned about their sick. The disciples were concerned about their safety on the lake. All these people had forsaken the concern for what is the true need of humanity.

It was this need that caused God, in his great love, to compassionately send Jesus into this world. Humanity was lost in sin, thus separated from God, living in a state of spiritual death. Judgment had been assigned to all men, yet here in their midst was Jesus, God's love gift to the world, but no one was aware of either the doom they faced or God's answer. They seemingly had forgotten the problem; therefore, they could not appreciate the answer!

We struggle in this world because this world is under the curse. Storms, sickness, and contaminating dirt are all part of the curse. Controlling these concerns is vital to our earthly existence and any relief from the effects of the curse is always welcome. Jesus' mission on earth had another goal that was of greater importance than bringing relief from the pressure of the curse, however; he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. This life he came to give is not a richer form of present world life, but rather, life in a higher order that will never pass away!

When Jesus quoted Isaiah saying that these people honored him with their lips, but their hearts were far from him, wasn't it because their hearts were still set upon the temporal, seeing only what is here and now?

How far apart man and God seem to be! Our world today is a good deal the same as it was in Jesus' day, in the spiritual sense. Most people seem oblivious to the reality of why life on earth exists. If we could just understand that this is all for preparation, and what lies beyond is more real and vital, and truly forever, we would change our whole worldview. Education, politics, government and cultures would all look much different.

When the Holy Spirit's power moved the nation of Wales with great revival at the turn of the century, it is said that bars, places of amusement, and even governmental functions were affected as everyone was at church seeking the Lord!

When people become aware of the true condition of this world, it causes them to seek the Lord less for what they can get out of this relationship, and more for the joy of knowing him whom their soul loves.



# Chapter Sixteen

## Contamination Comes From the Heart

Mark 7:1-23

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, "unwashed." (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. )

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' "

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

There is a close relationship between hardness of heart and a lack of understanding regarding what constitutes spiritual contamination.

As events unfolded, it wasn't long until a group of Pharisees and some teachers of the law, came to where Jesus was. As they watched what was going on around Jesus, they noticed that the disciples of Jesus didn't perform ceremonial washings before they ate. Ceremonial washing was one of several traditions Judaism observed as a part of their religious practice.

Standards of culture and conduct are religious concerns. Enthusiastic, even fanatical devotion is needed to be effective. Thus, religion thrives in the presence of a strict adherence to laws that are directed to what is outward and visible, while little concern is given to the real needs of the person.

Jesus was talking to Pharisees and teachers of the law who were leaders of the religious establishment of the day. What Jesus said to them was not anti-establishment rhetoric, rather it was anti-that which fails to meet divine purpose. When man's purposes and God's purposes are at odds, it is

man who must change. To attack the establishment would be to miss the point as far as the establishment had missed it! In our day, we sometimes sense there is something fundamentally wrong with the established religious institutions. In seeking to define this deficiency we sometimes turn to the outward expressions of the religious institutions and seek to change them, when the real problem is within the hearts of the people of the institutions.

Jesus always addressed the real problems and used the outward errors to illustrate the point. However, outward forms in and of themselves don't seem to be of too great a concern except where they were part of God's revelation to man.

Jesus said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." (Mark 7:14-15)

It's heart issues that are the real concern of God. The man upon whom the Spirit rests must conform to the Spirit's nature and purposes. The Holy Spirit is just that, a "Holy" Spirit. We too, if we are to please him, must be holy as he is holy. (See 1Peter 1:15-16) Here Jesus is showing us that holiness is a matter of the heart, rather than conformity to traditions or even commands. Outward conformity to God's laws or Christian culture, that are in harmony with the Spirit of holiness are fundamentally easy to observe. Desires for impurities when harbored become behavioral problems.

Temptation is not an external matter, that is to say; the source of problems is not environmental. Temptation is only temptation when there is an appeal being made to some need or desire that is within the person. It is Satan's business to try to deceive us into believing that what he is offering will in some way satisfy our need.

Without regeneration working within us the heart of man is a sad picture to behold. This is what Jesus said about the heart of man.

"What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." (Mark 7:20-23)

Do you find this list shocking? Probably not, that is, if you are like most of us. We have a clever way of detaching ourselves from what is being said here, as though it is a picture of someone else. We can see these tendencies in others, but seldom in ourselves. Now read it again carefully pondering the words; do you see yourself battling with these tendencies in certain situations of life?

We who have the Spirit's power working in us may have learned to draw upon the resource of overcoming power to the point we think these tendencies are no longer with us, but let me warn you, they're still there! We have a wonderful resource to draw upon, but neglect of our spiritual life will soon reveal that tendencies we thought were gone forever, are still lurking near by.

Let me illustrate the point. Turn on a light in a dark room. While the light is on, the darkness is no longer there. When light fills the room, shadows may even cease to exist. Now surely, if all the darkness is gone, the light should remain even if the source is removed, right? Wrong! Instantly, when the source of light is removed, darkness returns leaving only a residue in some substances that have the ability to store the energy, but even that soon dissipates.

Sin is the natural condition that exists in the human heart when divine energy is not at work. Look at the list again. That's me, unrestrained, untaught and unempowered! You don't like it. I don't either, yet in honesty I must admit that what Jesus spoke of I still perceive exists albeit as shadows. Where there is a shadow there must be some substance. When the power of the Spirit is in my life and I am willing to submit to truth, there are fewer shadows, yet I cannot deny that while I live in this body of death, shadows of the old man still exist. Giving place to the world, the flesh, or the devil, by allowing

for expressions of such things as Jesus mentioned contaminates a person. The environment around a person cannot contaminate unless you let it draw you away from the source of your life and power. If that happens, you will sin sooner or later in some measure, be it ever so subtly.

# Chapter Seventeen

## A Woman a Dog?

Mark 7:24-30

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Jesus moved about among the people being led by the Spirit's direction.

The love and compassion of Jesus provided a very touching scene in the region of Tyre where he met a very special person, a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She was a Gentile, and racial prejudice ran high among the Jews. The Jews considered Gentiles to be inferior and excluded them from any benefits of their religion. Jesus didn't directly attack the prejudice of the Jews, but rather, used it to set the stage for what was to follow.

Jesus went to Tyre and entered a house secretly, but soon the word got out. When there is a person present through whom the Spirit works, it's hard to keep it a secret.

While speaking at a conference in southern India, I found that people desired prayer for healing. We did this routinely yet feeling a very strong sense of compassion while praying for the people. The person praying seldom knows the result of such prayer; however, one night someone received a noteworthy healing resulting in my being called a healing evangelist. I don't think of myself that way, but I do pray for sick people.

Jesus never billed himself as a healer or deliverance minister; his purpose was to bring life. Healings and deliverances are fringe benefits that come to those who seek Jesus. Many people seek Jesus for healing, if they receive healing and that is the only reason they seek him, they will likely soon forget him. Healing is a part of the ministry of Jesus and we are not to question the motives of the people to whom we are called to minister. Our job is to minister as the Spirit directs us and leave the results with him.

When I read the story of this woman who came to Jesus because her daughter had a demon, I think of the many women who came to me in India. Many of them had an appearance reflecting a life of poor struggling people. What pains they felt, I do not know. Knowing what I do of human suffering, I know that not all pain is physical. We in America know very little about real suffering. When I prayed for these women wrapped in their sarees looking poor, and helpless; my heart was moved with compassion. Whatever benefit they may have received from my prayer, I am sure, was only a token of our heavenly Fathers love for them. Only heaven can provide a home deserving of them. If they received healing, and some of them did, it is so little compared with what God will do for all who

believe. This world with its suffering will soon pass away, but we have a home in Heaven. This was the message I preached to such people, the message of hope, the message of God's love that has provided a means whereby we will spend eternity basking in God's loving provision.

When the woman in our story came to Jesus in behalf of her daughter, she came in humility. She is an example to all of us. Jesus listened to her request then he made a statement that would have angered most people. He spoke to her about being an outsider to God's blessings and likened her to a dog! It was probably acceptable to speak of her as being an outsider, she likely already regarded herself as such, but to liken her to a dog would probably be viewed as insulting. Her reaction to Jesus was remarkable. She brushed that remark aside like it was nothing! She wanted help from Jesus for her daughter so if it meant identifying with a dog, so be it. She simply said that even dogs are allowed to eat crumbs. What a compliment she returned to Jesus! What she wanted was a major miracle in the minds of most people, but to this gentile woman, this was only a crumb of what she saw on the table!

It's interesting to me how pride blinds our eyes. We become so accustomed to the table of the Lord that we become oblivious to what is on it! We are so caught up with the grandeur of our relationship to God as dear children that we fail to notice how little we partake of the benefits offered. This woman got more benefit out of this crumb than some people get from the whole table of God's provision!

# Chapter Eighteen

## Loose the Tongue—Open the Ears

Mark 7:31-37

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.

After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Having completed his work in the area of Tyre; Jesus returned to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Decapolis. Here a man was brought to Jesus who was deaf and could hardly speak. Jesus took him aside and put his fingers in his ears, spit and touched his tongue. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Be opened!" (Mark 7:34) At this the man's ears were opened and he began to speak plainly. If we want to speak correctly, we need to hear what is being spoken.

The actions of Jesus in this story seem a bit unusual, yet Mark never speaks of unimportant things, so we must look closer.

When Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears, they were the fingers of God! There are a few references in the Bible to the fingers of God. The first reference is in Exodus 8:19 where Pharaoh's heart was hardened against the children of Israel, and Moses was showing him God's power to break down his stubborn will, thus he struck the dust with his rod and the dust became gnats. The magicians tried the same thing, but they couldn't do it, so they said it was the finger of God! The next mention of God's finger was when Moses received the commandments. It was said they were inscribed in the stone tablets by the finger of God! In Psalms 8:3 we read of how God created the moon and stars, the work of his fingers. Daniel speaks of Belshazzar's great banquet being interrupted by fingers writing on the wall.

In these references we see God's fingers being seen in action in connection with his power and his purposes. Each of the instances seems to show forth the importance of what is being spoken of, it might seem that God was pointing to certain things as indicating importance.

In the first case it was God's power at work bring about deliverance. In the second, it was God's commands being given. In the third it was God's direct involvement in creation, and in the fourth it was God's judgment marking the end of Belshazzar's reign. In each instance we see direct involvement on God's part, not some cause and effect. When Jesus healed this man we see him doing things symbolically that brought about direct divine results. What happened here was not a work of faith, or positive mental attitude, magic, or coincidence, it was a creative action of God! We need to know that. When we begin to hear God's voice, thus speaking what he speaks, it is God getting directly involved

with us! We need to know that everything that is done spiritually having life giving, healing or delivering power is an action of God and not man.

Satan and man can imitate God, but only to a point. I do not doubt that many seemingly supernatural occurrences happen that are not God's direct involvement, but do they do anything significant eternally? God's power and the manner in which he works is what needs to be seen. Do our eyes perceive him when he acts, or do we regard it as coincidence? It is hardness of heart that keeps us from seeing God at work.

God is at work in our world and is still setting boundaries within which men must act. There are many events that happen in our world because man's will and not God's will, prevails. I do not believe that every action is divinely ordered or controlled. I do believe however, that God has set boundaries inside which we must remain. The course has been set, the mold of history predetermined; the outcome is certain. Within these broad boundaries there are many factors left to the decisions of man. Within this undetermined zone of activity, the Spirit works pleading his cause and seeking for hearts that will turn to Jesus.

It takes spiritually sensitive people to properly discern when the Spirit is at work in our lives directing events, showing forth the finger of God! When we learn to listen to his voice, and follow his leading, we begin to see him working both willing and doing his good pleasure. To cooperate with the Spirit is to begin to see the good fruit of the Spirit manifest in our lives.

When Jesus put his fingers in this man's ears and touched his tongue with saliva from his mouth, it was no doubt symbolic. Proper speech comes from God's words being mixed with our words, and everything entering our ears is conditioned by the awareness of God's direct actions.

Language is the gateway to thought! Without language, reason is limited and confused. Hearing is the normal means through which language is communicated. When Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears, he was emphasizing the need for accurate hearing.

When I was in India, I had to preach through interpreters. Since I teach concepts, language becomes a vital tool. If people do not understand what is being spoken, little fruit will come from the ministry. I found two major difficulties of communication that were magnified in this situation. The first was, how do I take truths that are readily understood in our culture, and communicate them to people whose culture is quite different; and second, can the interpreters say what I want said, in the language of the people? When what we express is understood, it is because we have access to terms familiar to everyone. The difficulty of communication is magnified when the interpreter has only a limited understanding of what is being spoken.

The Spirit also has difficulty communicating with us. When he would speak to us of spiritual matters he has difficulty getting past our carnal minds. God must touch us enabling us to understand the language of the Spirit, and since we can only speak what we understand, he must first open our hearing; thus he spoke those wonderful words, "Be opened." Can we hear the Spirit's voice? To hear his voice we must stop listening to our own voice. Some of us are so occupied with our self-life that our minds cannot comprehend what does not pertain to it. We are seldom concerned with God's concerns.

# Chapter Nineteen

## Is Government Accountable Too?

Mark 8:1-21

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it." Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Once more we see Jesus feeding a crowd of hungry people! This time it's a crowd with about four thousand men present.

In the previous case he fed five thousand men, with five loaves. He thus taught that when something ought to be done, it can be done because God is a supernatural God even though it is impossible in the natural. We saw the disciples being required to do all they knew to do, and could be reasonably expected to do, before the miracle accomplished what was otherwise impossible.

In the case of the feeding the four thousand the lesson is a different one. First, I note the use of numbers. In the first case it was the use of the number five. They had five loaves for five thousand and in the second case they had seven loaves for four thousand. In this second case it's the use of the numbers four and seven.

I wouldn't mention this as being interesting if Jesus hadn't brought it up! He specifically said,



Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears to hear but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of pieces did you pick up?

"Twelve," they replied, "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?" (Mark 8:17-21)

Here once more Jesus is speaking of our hardness of heart as being what prevents spiritual understanding. The subject of the conversation was the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. Yeast was what Jesus wanted to talk about, but bread was the original point of conversation. Jesus liked to take natural things and use them as vehicles of spiritual thought, but in spite of his best efforts, the earthiness of his listeners often perverted understanding.

When Jesus spoke of the yeast of the Pharisees, he was speaking of those religious attitudes that conceive worship to be an exercise of religious rites. Holiness is conceived to be an atmosphere of reverence created by the exercise of those religious rites. One is seen to be acceptable before God on the basis of how faithful he is to those practices.

Likewise, Jesus spoke of the attitude of government that tolerates religious practice, yet seeing itself outside any obligation to regard God or be accountable for its actions.

Many people believe that secular thought and religious thought are somehow separate. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God never relegated himself to being a religious being. From the first introduction of the God-man relationship, we see God involved with man at every level. In our first introduction to this relationship we see the primary function of God as being a physical one, creating and providing for his new creation, man. The first conversation God had with Adam and Eve was to establish boundaries of behavior to live within. Isn't this the primary function of government?

Evidence that God is concerned with government is seen from Genesis to Revelation. The fact that people have rejected the Lord God and served other god's has in no way exempted them from having to give account to him for their actions. Few nations, if any, have had peace and prosperity if they displeased the Lord.

We in the Christian community stress the need for personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. This, without dispute, is the vital message we bear. Yet, in our zeal for what is of primary importance, we have allowed the influence of the satanic lie of separation between our life with God and secular events, to affect our thinking.

The yeast of Herod is the underlying corruption of thought that has led to the concept of separation of, not just church and state, but rather, God and state. Most Christians do agree with the concept that we should be able to pursue our religious convictions without governmental interference or dictation. This need is only because we have become so corrupt, and the spirit of division has been so successful that this is our best solution to our present dilemma. We have allowed society to go nearly unrestrained in their effort to force God out of his place of influence upon what we deem to be secular. Fact is; nothing is really secular! Everything that exists is a part of the God-man relationship; however, government should not be permitted to dictate how individuals pursue their worship of God! Government, education, entertainment, literature, arts and science are all accountable before God for their conduct and attitudes.

When Jesus called attention to the numbers, it is my conviction that he was trying to make an important point. The uses of numbers in the scriptures are often of more symbolic value than literal. When Jesus referred to the five thousand we take this to be a designation of approximate size of the crowd. When he called attention to it, he also brought up the five loaves, then asked how many loaves were left over, "twelve," was their response.

The uses of numbers in scripture are generally recognized to have symbolic value. Five is observed in use in association with the grace of God, and twelve with governmental perfection. We associate grace with the church, so perhaps we can say that Jesus took the substance of grace, his body, broke it and gave it to the people, his church (symbolized by the five thousand), and collected governmental perfection!

Now let's look at the four thousand. Four is a number that associates with governments as well, twelve being  $4 \times 3 = 12$ , God's number 3 times government's 4 equals governmental perfection. Jesus also called attention to this number. Did they thus represent the governments of this world? If so, notice what he did to meet their need. He took seven loaves and fed them. Seven is believed to be God's number for completion. The creation story is our first introduction to the use of numbers in the Biblical story. In the Genesis account we see what God did and how he did it. Thus, under the use of the number seven we see God's thoughts, desires and actions concerning creation, completed. Where the number three speaks of God's person, the number seven shows us what came from him.

The number seven seems to associate with God's character. The book of Revelations speaks of seven stars, seven candle sticks and seven spirits. I would suggest that these spirits are more likely attributes rather than separate entities. The light that shines from these candles, which are churches, would have as its source the very life of the Lord Jesus. (See John 1:4, 8:12) The seven stars are seven angels, no doubt, bearing God's message and character.

In the book of Revelations we see four types of delivery of a basic message of judgment. They are seals, trumpets, thunders, and vials. Each comes being broken into seven parts. The messages of three of the four are known but one is held as a mystery. The fact that there are four and that three of the four all speak essentially the same thing, and that four is the number for government, it seems reasonable to conclude that God's answer to what is good government is first found in his nature and shines forth from him, and when received as our necessary food will result in a most satisfactory result! The fact that these messages delivered are judgment rather than blessings is of course the result of the gross violations of the nations of the world!

In review of what we observe from this passage concerning these two events, the feeding of the four and five thousand, and in view of the theme of this book, the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest, we see that Jesus gives us his life (bread) by grace thus meeting our needs resulting in perfect order in the life of his ministers (angels), the church (candles), and the governments of the world. It is, after all, the very nature and character of God given through grace that truly satisfies every need of man.

God will call the nations of the world to judgment, but if they will receive the bread of life from the hand of the sent ones, blessing will be the result!

# Chapter Twenty

## Seeing is not Always Seeing Clearly

Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."  
Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

As I read the story of the healing of this blind man I am immediately struck with the observation that this is an unusual event in the life of Jesus. It wasn't the fact that Jesus healed the blind man that was unusual, but rather, the method of healing.

First we note that the request for healing did not come from the blind man. It came from those who escorted him to Jesus. There is no indication that the man either wanted healing or that he had faith for healing.

The first clue about what was taking place here comes from Jesus' response to the man's need. Many people came to Jesus for healing and apparently he simply healed them and went on to other needs. The fact that Jesus stopped what he was doing and took this man by the hand leading him outside the village indicates special circumstances.

What were those circumstances? We are not told. We can, however, look at the story for clues as to what might have been taking place.

When Jesus arrived at the location of healing, he spit in the man's eyes! Actually, since his eyes are a part of his face, it could have been said that he spit in his face. In the culture of the Jews, spitting in someone's face was a sign of contempt. In the story of Moses and his sister Miriam recorded in Numbers 12:1-15, the Lord referred to this practice because Miriam had offended the Lord in criticizing his servant Moses. She had suddenly become leprous as an act of judgment, and Moses had intervened interceding before the Lord for his sister to be healed. The Lord's response was that if her father had spit in her face, evidently a form of parental discipline, she would be unclean for seven days that would necessitate her remaining outside the camp during that time.

Could it be that this blind man was being disciplined for some reason? Perhaps he had sinned and like Miriam, his judgment was now being reduced. If the man had sinned resulting in blindness, having Jesus spit in his face (normally done contemptuously) would have been an act of compassion. It could have thus been a reduction of his sentence to merely suffering the insult of being spit upon. Jesus then laid his hands on him restoring his vision, albeit imperfectly! This too strikes me as being out of the ordinary for Jesus, therefore no accident. When asked what he saw he responded, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." (Mark 8:24)

Although this is readily understood to be faulty vision in the natural realm, it is a common problem when applied to spiritual matters. This condition is seeing people as being larger than they really are. This is a common condition of carnal men.

Even righteous Job in the Bible had a perception problem. He failed to see humanity in accurate proportion to God. His perception was revealed when he vowed his innocence concluding that all the trouble that had come upon him was judgment. He failed to see the vastness of God's purposes or divine prerogatives as being justified. Correction needed to come to Job, not because he was unrighteous, but rather, because his concept of God was too small, and his understanding of himself was too big! He believed that God was guilty of making an error in his case. He saw himself as righteous and therefore unworthy of judgment. Job didn't understand that suffering is not always because of sin. Job was a man perfect in all his ways and yet God allowed him to suffer. In Job's case, suffering brought him into a position before God where he was able to receive a revelation of the magnitude of the God he loved and served. It wasn't until he saw God accurately that he was able to see his own need. He, like the blind man before Jesus, needed to have a correction in his vision enabling him to see men accurately. When we see in true spiritual perspective, we understand the true nature of our need. It is not forgiveness alone that is needed by humanity; it is the restoration of a relationship based on mutual understanding and respect for who God is.

The man Jesus was healing of blindness needed a second touch. If we were to say that the first touch of Jesus resulted in the forgiveness of sins, but left him with inaccurate vision, then we would conclude that the second touch resulted in a changed perspective. Seeing men as they truly are is a prerequisite of a deep relationship with God. This is the foundation of repentance. It is only when we see our utter need of God, no matter about how many sins we have or have not committed, that we can truly reach for God without ulterior motives. Upon hearing God speaking and realizing how truly great he was, Job responded by saying, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) What was it that caused Job to repent? I believe it was because he suddenly saw the hopelessness of the lost condition of humanity. It is not because we are sinning but because we are dead spiritually that we need Jesus. We don't simply need forgiveness of sins; we need the impartation of life! It is only when we receive the Spirit of life, the Holy Spirit, that we become new creations in Christ Jesus.

It just may be that there are people who have sought forgiveness of sins but have stopped short of receiving the life giving Spirit. It is one thing to go forward in an evangelistic service and seek God's forgiveness and quite another to be truly born again as a result of a divine action. Will those who seek forgiveness but never proceed on to establish a relationship with God be saved? I cannot say. I can only observe that had the man left after the first touch of Jesus he never would have seen people as they really are.

# Chapter Twenty-one

## How Do We See Jesus?

Mark 8:27—9:1

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ. "

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

"And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

Blindness comes in many forms. When the people looked at Jesus, what did they see? A man? If so, what sort of man?

The importance or weight we assign to a person depends upon our perception of that person. If someone comes to town dressed in expensive clothes, driving an expensive car with an air of importance, the automatic reaction is to treat that person with respect. The person may be a good person whose life has earned the honor we give him, or it may be that he is a scoundrel baiting his hook to defraud innocent people. We know this and yet we show respect to such a person because, who can know? Better show respect, the person may indeed be very important; if not contempt can come later! Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8: 27) Various answers were given. The perceptions of the people were based on what could be observed, their conclusion was forced by what he said and did; yet it fell short of the truth. The apostle Paul said,

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! (II Cor. 5:16)

Yet, when we look at one another, we still evaluate upon the basis of what can be observed! To the people of Nazareth, Jesus could never be perceived to be more than Mary and Joseph's son, a carpenter. To the people who saw him minister, he was a prophet.

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29) What was their perception of Jesus?

Understanding the spiritual dimension of another human being requires the insight of the Spirit. To understand who Jesus really is takes a revelation that goes beyond what can be observed. For people to credit Jesus with the status of a prophet was the highest honor they could acknowledge without violating reason. Reason stands guard to protect us from strange ideas and impulses, which left unrestricted, would surely destroy us. Whereas spiritual impulses must be carefully weighed, we are not without guidance. Recognizing Jesus requires spiritual revelation but not beyond the bounds of reason.

The revelation of Jesus being the Christ begins as a spiritually imparted revelation but once received finds abundant verification in the scriptures answering to all that the prophets spoke!

For Peter to say, "You are the Christ," was to reach out into the unthinkable! Peter did not come to this recognition easily, and I suspect that impulsive though he was, it was something he had pondered often as he witnessed Jesus doing what mortals cannot do! To put it into words did not end the inner debate, however. Questions would persist but Jesus would grant further substantiation.

With that truth precariously in place Jesus would now move on to the next revelation that must be clearly understood. Jesus was the Christ, but his role was not to be an earthly king at this time. The role of his savior-hood was ignored by the teachers of his day who weren't even aware that one was needed!

This truth had not occurred to the disciples either. When Peter heard Jesus talking openly about his death, he was horrified! His perception of the revelation concerning Jesus was a faulty one. Peter was blinded by his worldview that saw no need for a redeemer, only a great leader.

Until our spiritual eyes are opened it's hard to understand that we are dead in trespasses and sin and stand in a hopeless place before God who alone can redeem us. Peter wanted no part of this message because it was not within his understanding of what was needed. His natural understanding of Jesus could not hear the message of the cross.

Few people, it seems, really understand the message of Jesus concerning the cross. Our hearts are hard and our ears are too dull to hear its message; and to those who are visual people, seeing what cannot be seen with the natural eyes is difficult.

There is a kingdom, the existence of which is just as real as anything that can be perceived by natural means. Actually, this kingdom is more real than the ones we visibly see. The present kingdoms are temporal ones, their substances being corruptible and decaying. Everything that now exists that can be touched, seen, heard or perceived, through natural means, will pass away, but the kingdom Jesus spoke about is a kingdom that is eternal, incorruptible and its reality never fades or spoils.

Entering this kingdom requires abandoning the old one. Not only was Jesus introducing a new understanding of God's program for humanity, but the whole concept of the cross and what it means to both us and himself, was being revealed. Peter's reaction to the teaching of the cross was, "Never Lord, this shall never happen to you." (Matt. 16:22)

Today's resistance to the message of the cross comes from Satan's hatred of it. He tried to stop Jesus from going there using the voice of Peter, to oppose him. If Satan could have persuaded Jesus to conform to the standard notion that the present life is what is of value, and to cling to it, pursuing its goals and seeking to develop himself into a great leader, he would have neutralized the mission of Jesus. Such was not the case. Jesus went to the cross without allowing the slightest tainting of what he came to do.

Satan still hates the message of the cross. His primary goal is to either eliminate the knowledge of it or to pervert it so that it is no longer a threat to his evil plans.

In the Christian world of our day, the message of the cross has been immortalized. We look upon this man of history who was so wrongfully killed, remembering him at Easter. We try to identify with his pain. We wear crosses in remembrance. We may even go to a church with a statue of him hanging on a cross as though that is what we ought to worship. Remember we should. Yet there is another part of this message that is just as vital, but do we comprehend its message?  
Jesus said,

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his own soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. (Mark 8:34-38)

Can we ignore such an important part of the gospel message? Satan used Peter to try to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. He failed, but Satan still seeks voices to speak his message of compromise, "If you must accept the message of the cross, fine, but don't apply it to your life." Let it be your object of worship, but don't allow it to deal a fatal blow to your sin nature. Satan couldn't stop Jesus but can he stop you? Has he?

Satan is very clever in his methods. If he cannot prevent us from following Jesus, he will then try to destroy us through wrong applications of truth.

What does it mean to take up your cross? Does this mean dying as he died? There is no doubt that there is a sense in which this is true. Nowhere, however, does the gospel teach that any person should suffer what Jesus suffered as the Lamb of God. He paid our penalty for the sins we committed. Our Lord made this sacrifice, never to be repeated again. Nevertheless, what he did is an example to all of us.

The cross was the place where Jesus was crucified as our substitute sacrifice; however, it is also a principle, in fact, more than a principle! The principle of the cross is the entry point into the kingdom of God. Jesus made statements such as,

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14-6) and "I am the true vine—remain in me, and I will remain in you." (John 15:1,4)

The principle of the cross is the point where, what we learn and what we believe about Jesus, his life, mission and call to us becomes meaningful producing life in us.

The principle I speak of is best expressed in Jesus' own words as the hour of crucifixion approached. In the garden he prayed,

"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

This is the vertical dimension of the spirit of the cross. It was his commitment to his Father's will to the point of death that took him to the cross. It is this principle that Jesus spoke of when he called for us to take up our cross and follow him.

There is a force assigned to this truth that is unmistakable though it is rather shocking to all who would want to merely adopt a "Christian" philosophy.

Jesus teaches a life changing experience. He is calling for a pact with death; something not commonly associated with established Christian culture.

What he taught was the way to the Father. This way does not merely consist of cultural changes, outward obedience or even inward dedication, but rather, a wholehearted pursuit of God. There is only one way to God; it is through Jesus! He is the ark of safety by which we escape the judgment and wrath of God! There are people in the world who are actively pursuing God, but not through Jesus. How tragic it is that a human being can seek after God and never reach him when the provision has so clearly been made. Satan's job is to keep people from the truth, and in this he has been all too successful. Those who know the truth are charged with the responsibility of spreading the good news, but here again Satan stands preventing our effectiveness by neutralizing our witness through selfish pursuits.

As long as we live our lives in survival concerns, we will never be able to please God. It is only when we put survival instincts aside and start living for the fulfillment of God's will that we really begin to live! Jesus predicted the coming of the kingdom of God. This kingdom was not of this world, yet it was not for some distant time period but would come before some of them would see death. The kingdom did come and is still here, but many people fail to comprehend its presence. What is looked for is an outward expression such as governments, nations, or organizational structures. The kingdom Jesus founded is not an outward kingdom that can be seen. It is not a government, a church structure or a denomination, neither is it of this world. It is God's kingdom, with Jesus as its head, its sovereign authority. When this kingdom is seen on earth it is seen in the sparkle in the eye of a person whose life has been touched by the Spirit's power. They have a peace that the world cannot give. There are people who have entered this kingdom having received eternal life, and their names are recorded in heaven.

Has your name been written in God's book? Have you given your heart to this Jesus who paid the penalty of your sins? Have you forsaken all concerns of this world and focused your heart upon that which is eternal? Have you picked up your cross and turned to Jesus and asked the life-changing question, "Where are you going Lord? I wish to follow you." Taking up one's cross is a symbolic statement that means to commit ourselves to God's purposes and not our own even if it results in death. Those who have chosen to follow Jesus know there is no real death to those who are in Christ. For the person who has been granted the Spirit of eternal life, death is release into the kingdom of which he is already a part. Death for a righteous person is no tragedy, but the loss of eternal life is another matter. Life on earth is temporary at best, but eternity is a reality we all must face.

Many people go to great efforts to enhance their life on earth. They want every comfort, pleasure, provision for safety and security possible, only to lose it all at death. How foolish! Or, is it ignorance of the truth? Lord, open our eyes that we might see and rejoice in hope, even when there is no outward cause to hope or rejoice. The people of this kingdom are found in every nation, tribe and likely every church where the gospel has been proclaimed. Entry into this kingdom comes upon belief in Jesus and is witnessed to in water baptism. We do not do the real thing that happens; God does it as he responds to us giving us the Spirit of Life.



# Chapter Twenty-two

## The Glory of the Lord Revealed

Mark 9:2-13

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, 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 to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

If we want to really see, we must be willing to climb a mountain! Only a few people have seen the real glory of the Lord. Many saw Jesus as he healed sick people, cast out demons and raised the dead but none of these people ever saw Jesus in his real glory. They thought they saw him in all his glory, but only Peter, James and John climbed to the top of a high mountain with Jesus where his real glory was seen.

High mountains are usually very solitary places. Why Peter, James and John were the only ones privileged to go with Jesus, I do not know. Perhaps all the disciples were invited and they were the ones who went, that seems likely, it takes a lot of effort to climb a mountain. I guess that is why not many people are standing around on the mountain peaks! Most people seem to like the valleys! Valley living is easy living. In the valley you can find all the delights of an abundant life. It all happened in the low lands, the miracles, the feeding of the multitudes, the great teachings—nevertheless Jesus took Peter, James and John up a very high mountain.

Some people think the glory of the Lord is seen in his miracles. These people rarely climb the mountain of the Lord! These men who went with Jesus up the mountain must have done it for Jesus. There are people who just simply love Jesus! They follow the Lord up the mountain to see his glory, and they follow him back to the valley to heal the broken people who have yet to receive even the first touch or hear the first message of the kingdom.

Some experiences are reserved for individuals who are willing to go beyond what is considered Christianity. In the scriptures, they are sometimes called the "Elect".

Speaking about the elect: Peter said they are strangers in the world! He said they had received new birth and a hope of an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for them and that while in this world they are shielded by God's power. These people suffer grief in all kinds of trials but rejoice in them because they know all this is producing something of inexpressible value. These people have great faith that has as its goal the salvation of their souls! (See I Peter 1:1-9)

People who are deeply in love with Jesus do not live for the excitement found in the valley, like superficial Christians, but rather, they live to please the one who calls them heavenward. Peter, James and John were privileged to see Jesus in a dimension of glory that had nothing to do with miracles. This was the sort of experience Moses had when he met God on the mountain in the desert. Moses said to God, "Now show me your glory." (Ex. 33:18) What people see on the mountaintop when alone with God is a comprehensive view of God.

When Moses was on top of the mountain with God, the Lord passed in front of him proclaiming,

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (Ex, 34:6-7)

Any true and accurate revelation of God includes both the grace of God and the judgments of God. God is a good God but he is also a God of judgment. Likewise, any true and accurate revelation of Jesus Christ will also be a revelation of both his grace and judgments. Jesus said,

The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has already come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:22-29)

The glory of the Lord is awesome to behold but whenever a person encounters a true revelation of God there usually is a reaction of self-consciousness. Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted and his response was,

Woe is me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king, the Lord Almighty. (Isaiah 6:5)

When Peter saw the Lord glowing and talking to Moses and Elijah, he reacted by saying,

"Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Mark 9:5)

This reaction is a common one. Many shrines can be found that mark spots where some great manifestation of a supernatural power has occurred, but the disciples were not left to wonder what response was the appropriate one. God said,

Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7)

This is still the appropriate response to any manifestation of God's power. Turn to Jesus; listen to him. He is God's Son, the object of God's love. He is the one who stood on top of the mountain, glowing in the presence of Peter, James and John, and is the same Jesus upon whom the Spirit came to rest. He is the one to whom we have been called, joined to, become one with, and the one with whom we share an inheritance beyond anything our wildest imagination can conceive.

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 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)

# Chapter Twenty-three

## Cast it Out!!

Mark 9:13-32

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

At the foot of the mountain, things were not going well. A man had brought his son that was possessed of a dumb spirit to the disciples. The spirit had often seized him and tried to kill him. The disciples tried to cast the spirit out of him but were unable to do so. This caused a stir among the people resulting in an argument.

The teachers of the law were there. The teachers of the laws always have an explanation for why things don't work. We don't know what they said to the disciples, but we know what they say today. Maybe you've heard them when someone has sought healing or some intervention in their life. The legalists say, "You must do it right, you must say the right words, think the right thoughts, and there must not be sin in your life. If you meet all the requirements you will surely receive healing!" Naturally, this leads to arguments, hurts, false accusations and disillusionment.

Healing like salvation is not an action of the law! Healing has nothing whatever to do with the worthiness of the recipient! Healing is an action of grace given either as a result of believing God or an operation of the gift ministries of the Holy Spirit. Always, it seems when healing is manifest there is an attitude of faith! Worthiness never was a prerequisite to receiving from the ministry of Jesus. He

touched people's lives as a result of either their faith, the faith of a friend or family member, or as a result of his compassion for them.

When the crowd that had gathered at the foot of the mountain saw Jesus coming toward them, they were amazed. There must have been something remarkable in the countenance of Jesus. Spending time on the mountain of God always seems to affect how we look to those around us. Jesus taking note of the fuss approached and inquired about it. They explained their problem concerning the boy. Then Jesus responded, "O unbelieving generation how long shall I stay with you? Bring the boy to me." (Mark 9:19)

Now that's good counsel! Whatever the need, Jesus can meet it! When will we learn, we can only do what has been given to us to do. It's the Father's will that determines what will be, not ours. Even Jesus declared,

"I tell you the truth the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing." (John 5:19)

If Jesus had to rely upon the Father doing the work, how can we do less? It is not our power that heals! It's not our faith that moves mountains. Faith is not a force. Jesus did not do the works he did alone. Jesus said,

"The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in me." (John 14:10-11)

The disciples, in this instance, should have been able to cast the demon out of the boy, yet they could not. There was a deficiency in their life that was evidenced in their lack of faith. These men needed to spend more time in prayer.

We have a resource available to us that, if we will use it, we will find all the power, faith, authority and wisdom needed to meet any need or circumstance. That resource is prayer.

When they brought the boy to Jesus the father of the boy said to Jesus,

"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us. 'If you can?' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.'" (Mark 9:22-23)

When we realize it is God who is the doer in every manifestation of his power and not us, we begin to see that our part in any miracle is to be in a state of faith in God! Those who experience the greatest measure of true success in their walk with God are those individuals who have learned the lesson that real faith is the result of knowing God.

The father of the boy said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) We all need help with this problem. Faith is not only the result of knowing a thing to be true but it is also the result of past experience. In the case of natural relationships, if someone has done something that has hurt us, it is difficult for us to trust that person again. If they let us down again and again, trust may be irrecoverable. So it is with our faith in God. If we have been misinformed and have attempted to believe God for something that God would not give us, not understanding the reasons why he would not, confusion and hurt are the result. It may appear to us that we were too insignificant, not being good enough, lacking sufficient faith, or that God could not do what we asked him to do. These sorts of experiences do great damage to our faith in God.

Many people live out their Christian lives with wounded faith. Perhaps it all started when some overly zealous Christian said, "Ask what you will and it will be done," failing to teach the truths about

our relationship to the kingdom of God. This invitation is not given to satisfy our lusts, but rather, to enable us to do our Fathers business.

We understand this in the natural world, but can we grasp it in the spiritual? If an employer gives an employee access to charge accounts, bank accounts, credit cards and company owned cars or equipment, we understand there are parameters of responsible management and privilege. Even though we have the authority to use these things, doing so irresponsibly will result in great difficulty. So it is with God. Promises and guarantees of provisions have been given with which to accomplish the work of the kingdom, yet many people think these are merely given to enhance their lives. There are some benefits that God gives us as gifts of love, where we get into difficulty is when we fail to realize that God expects us to understand the difference between gifts of love and equipment for service.

Having a mature understanding of these matters is vital to great faith. Faith is increased by success and success is always the result of the proper use of kingdom principles and precepts.

Jesus was ready to help this man's belief by granting success. I firmly believe he still will do the same. If we are willing to examine the scriptures, then look discerningly at our own life and motives and get to know God better through prayer; I feel sure our faith will be healed.

# Chapter Twenty-four

## Greatness Defined

Mark 9:33-50

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

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

"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' Everyone will be salted with fire.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Having returned to Capernaum; Jesus sat with his disciples. "What were you arguing about on the road?" Jesus asked. They didn't want to say because they had been arguing about who was the greatest!

Jesus knew what was going on. It wasn't surprising that the subject would be addressed. In this world we live by the rule, the higher the position, the greater the privilege. These men were being groomed for leadership in the spiritual kingdom. This kingdom is not at all like the kingdoms of this world. The rules that govern this kingdom are not compatible with the rules of human government! If the disciples were to be leaders, some radical changes must take place!

Jesus will now deal with some basic issues. When human beings are given power, authority and favor, something diabolical begins to happen! God created man with the capacity to be, in a sense, a god, that is to say; God created us with the capacity to not only be independent, but also to cast our influence upon, or take power over others! It is this capacity to dominate that is the foundation upon which human governments stand.

When man fell into sin his entire nature was affected. The nature of man that was fashioned after God's nature, corrupted. Just as a body without life goes through a process of decay, so the spirit

without life also goes through a process of decay. No condition provides a greater opportunity for the human spirit to corrupt than being in a position of authority.

The Holy Spirit has been sent into the world to give us back what we lost in the Garden of Eden. The Spirit gives us life. (John 6:63) What now exists in the people who have the Spirit is a power that instead of corrupting us is renewing us! This power is God's creative power, creating true righteousness within the spirit of man!

The Spirit of God does not live in the mind of man. The mind of natural man is at war with the mind of God! If man is to be at peace with God, some radical changes must take place. These changes start in the spirit affecting our attitude, and our thoughts. The outward educational process to which we are subjected also affects our thoughts. Since the majority of our education springs from a corrupting society, it is easy to see that a complete overhaul of the thought process is essential if we are to be fit for divine purposes. It was this need for a radical change that brought Jesus to the subject before us. Mark summarized what Jesus had to say on this subject by saying, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." (Mark 9:35) Now that's revolutionary! Did you know the janitor is likely greater than the preacher at your church? Can we comprehend such truth? People, who strut their stuff before the world and act and look so great, are likely very insignificant people in God's eyes!

Taking the truth one step farther,

Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:36-37)

Do you want to entertain Jesus in your home? Don't pick those people you think are celebrities or important in the community, pick the most insignificant people in your eyes, take them home in the name of Jesus, and you will not only take Jesus in that person but the Father as well! How do we treat those individuals who don't fit into our social liking? Do we see them as divine guests? If you were to see your report card of recent encounters, what do you think your grade would be?

On the basis of the teachings of Jesus, and the casual observance of the lifestyles of most people, it seems to me, there will be a lot of unclaimed rewards in heaven! Few people seem to take the teachings of Jesus seriously. Jesus never said we shouldn't seek rewards, neither did he say we shouldn't desire greatness. He did however warn us that it's easy to forfeit the eternal by collecting our rewards in this world. He also taught us that there is a price to be paid if we are to be great!

The conversation advanced broadening the scope of discussion. John reported that they had seen someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, so they stopped him. Here again we see the kingdom of God and the thinking of man at variance. Most people are very picky about who represents them but Jesus seemed to say, "Don't worry, as long as he's not an enemy, he's a friend." If his actions are for right reasons, he'll get his reward, but if he causes offense, woe to that one, "It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matt. 18:6)

What an awesome responsibility we have to conduct our lives honorably before others! Kingdom people have kingdom responsibility. How tragic if while preaching to others, we should become a cast away! Even the Apostle Paul saw this as a very real possibility. The language Jesus uses regarding those who cause another to sin should strike Godly fear in the heart of anyone. Jesus said,



If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:43-48)

It's hard to deal with passages such as this without falling victim to one of two temptations. If a person finds the subject of hell offensive, he will want to soften this passage by saying that Jesus didn't really mean that there actually is a Hell. It was, however, true that some of what Jesus said was obviously an exaggerated scenario to impress us with the seriousness of the subject of causing offenses. Can we then treat the entire passage that way? It would be very difficult to do that, though many have tried to do so. Consider this; is the Kingdom of Heaven a real place? If it is, then we would have to say that Hell is too.

Some will argue that the word Hell is translated from the word Gehenna that derives its meaning from a deep ravine south of Jerusalem, the valley of Hinnom. (Hebrew, *ge hinnom*.) During the reigns of wicked Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices were made there. Josiah desecrated the valley because of pagan worship there. It became a perpetually burning city dump and later a figure for the place of final punishment. Again, can we soften the subject of hell to mean something else than a place of eternal torment? I have heard and read several variations attempting to explain the subject away, but none can overcome the difficulty of how Jesus used, not only the word Gehenna, but also all the surrounding words that further describe what he meant.

The other temptation is to make the threat of hell so burdensome that it would seem no one would be able to escape it!

Hell is what hell is. The Lord Jesus Christ warned us that people go there. For me, I chose to believe what he said in as simple of terms as is possible. I feel forewarned. I have earnestly sought to follow Jesus. I have placed my faith firmly in him. I feel secure in him. Do you? Jesus concluded the subject with a statement that seems somewhat startling.

“Everyone will be salted with fire,” he said. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” (Mark 9 49-50)

Since this statement comes at the end of a discussion about hell with references to fire, we have to question what did he mean?

Too much of anything is not good. Hell in its full strength is not something anyone would want to experience. It is my belief that, God in his love for us so designed this present life so as to allow us to experience a little heaven and a little hell in this world. The expression, "everyone will be salted," pictures a person seasoning food. Salt by itself is distasteful but a little salt enriches what it is placed on. A little hell makes us appreciate heaven! I have noticed that people, who know Jesus, often react to suffering in a positive way. Often I see them in the midst of their pains, longing to be with the Lord in Heaven!

The use of the term salt in the Old Testament was in connection with everlasting covenants. Eternal covenants were said to be covenants of salt. Some have pointed out the preservative qualities of salt. Together these views seem to suggest, being preserved for eternity. Could it be that Jesus was saying that each person will be allowed to experience enough hell to know what it's like, and the last statement, "have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other," was meant to indicate that we have been enriched by a correct response to the knowledge about hell? In other words, keep the

awareness of eternity always before you and let that produce a condition of peaceful living. Salt is good. We need a little salt in our lives. It burns up our pride and self-sufficiency!

As for Hell, there is no need to go there. Jesus made a way of escape paying the penalty for our sins and giving us the invitation to believe on him and inherit eternal life! If, however, you don't want to believe on him, there still is Hell.

# Chapter Twenty-five

## So You Want a Divorce?

Mark 10:1-12

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

"What did Moses command you?" he replied.

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

As the ministry of Jesus attracted large crowds of admirers, so also opposition began to form. The religious leaders began to appear, probably to just check things out. As time went by, what began as a curious concern began to crystallize into more serious opposition. The result of this was a sequence of attitudes, decisions and actions, which led to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Ever notice how big problems start with almost imperceptible beginnings? Something causes a doubt to arise in a mind, doubts become questions, and questions form into judgments, and judgments produce actions. In some cases this is a necessary process, one needed to help us avoid evil. The problem with the people who challenged Jesus was; they didn't want to know the truth. They were not coming from the posture of a righteous heart seeking truth, righteousness, and justice. The human thing is, if you like someone, defend them, but if you dislike them for some reason, seek to discredit them! These were, no doubt, some of the motives that caused many of the confrontations between Jesus and his critics. The men who came to Jesus were of the sect of the Pharisees. They decided to test Jesus so they put a question to him, "What about divorce?"

If you want to start a controversy that's a good place to begin!

Jesus did a wise thing; he answered their question with a question, "What did Moses command you?" (Mark 10:3) They knew the scriptures. They knew Moses had allowed for divorce. Jesus, however, taught a righteousness that exceeded the righteousness of the law. What would he say? They were not disappointed. Jesus did not come to open doors of immorality. He came to pay the penalty of our immorality! Morality, especially sexual morality, needs clear definition. There is no area of sin so universally under siege as sexual morality.

Sexual sin is somewhat unique in the cataloging of available sins. It is the only one that finds a natural inborn source of need. All other sins are outside the arena of natural cravings. In the case of addictions, they are acquired! Pride, envy, greed, bitterness, hate, or murder are all sins of the soul.

Power seeking, arrogance, manipulations and cunning come from the spirit. They come from wanting to be a sort of god.

Sexual sin can indeed take very bizarre forms as it gets mixed with other forms of sin. The natural sexual drive is sufficient to induce curiosity that can lead to sin. How this is handled in a growing adolescent is of vital concern if we are to raise an adult who is capable of sexual purity.

Sexual cravings for devious behaviors are acquired appetites. This is why there is so much concern about how we handle such matters as sex education. Does sex education help the growing adolescent stay within the bounds of proper sexual expression or does it induce experimentation that leads to sexual addictions to the devious?

When Jesus was brought to the point of a positive response he said, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law!" (Mark 10:5) Hard hearts are sinful hearts. It's always sin in the heart that causes our problems.

There is never a divorce where sin is not the cause! There are so many reasons offered for why divorce is alright these days, but is it? I have often said, "I do not believe in divorce, but I do believe they happen." I also recognize that as long as we live in a society that teaches principles and life styles that glorify the notion that personal fulfillment takes precedence over moral responsibility; we will continue to have divorce.

Within our society we have seen the divorce rate climb to epidemic levels. At the same time this has been happening, we have been experiencing a radical shift in the value structure of the individuals of our society. Any culture that places personal fulfillment above family and community concerns is a culture heading for major problems.

Jesus continued,

"But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate." (Mark 6:6-9)

This subject seems to raise a lot of questions. What about the person that has been sinned against? Nothing tests the Christian principles we live by like problems within the home. Nothing is so devastating to our personhood as a romance gone sour.

Nothing in the entire spectrum of human experience gives us quite the same sense of completeness and fulfillment as romance. Romance affirms the personhood of an individual giving a sense of wholeness and completeness. The lack of romance in a person's life may leave that individual unsure of their value and appeal.

God designed romance and to meet very basic needs in us and to visibly demonstrate our relationship to him.

God created humanity in the image of God! What exists in this world is a shadow of what exists in the more glorious and enduring realm of the spirit.

God romances people much like a man romances a woman. We are the objects of his pursuit. Yet all the qualities that are found in the best examples of love, romance and marriage, are at best vague pictures of the God/man relationship.

The purpose of the man/woman relationship is two-fold in nature. The first is the natural, outward. This relationship serves to meet the social, emotional and physical needs of men and women and to provide the best possible environment to introduce new life into this world! The second is the object lesson it provides to show us the glorious nature of the relationship to which God has called us. There are differences of course, as the spiritual is never limited by the natural that pictures it.

The primary purpose of marriage surrounds the need for the creation of new life. So it is in the realm of the spiritual relationship to which we are called. When God and a person come into the union of acceptance through faith; a glorious relationship follows. This results in the formation of a spiritual life that is eternal and Godly in nature!

That life that is first born natural, temporal and subject to corruption, becomes of secondary concern as the new life being formed within takes dominance and orchestrates changes that affect every area of life.

There is sanctity in marriage both from a practical need and a spiritual purpose that demand its preservation. To tamper with it is to tamper with the oldest and most basic of human institutions. Divorce is a marring of the creator's intention; forgivable I am sure, but never acceptably.

# Chapter Twenty-six

## Children, Our Treasure, Our Hope!

Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "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." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

The man upon whom the Spirit comes to rest always goes to the heart of every matter. People look on surface issues, but the spirit takes us to the root of every matter.

Some may view their lives as being little boats tossed about on the surface of a restless sea. What happens to them may seem out of control, the result of the ebbs and flows of the movement of the waters—unpredictable and uncontrollable. Those who view life in this way are vulnerable, looking for easy answers that seem reasonable. Some will turn to artificial answers such as drugs, alcohol or other vices that promise relief from the stress of a faithless existence.

Man left to himself finds decision-making, at best, a guessing game. When we find ourselves acting and reacting to challenges around us, we may not even guess the effect that each little decision is having upon the total scene of our lives. Big ships are steered with small rudders; little keys open big doors; so each attitude we take on and each act we do, contributes to the end result of our lives.

Truth is, we are not helpless little corks bobbling about on the sea of life. We do have options available to us and "choice" is our rudder. We sometimes do encounter storms that we cannot control; but are we helpless victims?

To the person who has become the recipient of the Spirit's power; storms are merely challenges to our faith. We do not always calm the storms, but the storms are not permitted to destroy us. We must, however, stay within the Spirit's domain. It is when we panic and want to jump ship, taking matters into our own hands and disregard the counsel of the Lord that trouble gets out of control!

When parents forsake the ways of the Lord it is the children who suffer the most, having put selfish interests ahead of Spirit mandated responsibilities, they go their own way, and do their own thing. In the case of divorce, it's the children who suffer the most devastation. The damage done to children when parents are sinning is incalculable. Parents are the number one role models and if they are disqualified by sinful lives, children have no option but to look elsewhere. When there are no role models for children to look to for guidance the destructive result is often seen in chaotic lives. Jesus cares deeply about children, because children are the future of the kingdom of heaven! Serious judgment is assigned to those who cause harm to come to children. It is the parent's number one job to provide for, protect, and to nurture the children they bear. All of society also bears equal responsibility for the welfare of children.

In a world gone amuck with sin having found social acceptance, adults all too often are caught in the most disastrous of circumstances. It is not possible to remedy every situation that results from sin because sin gets such a devastating grip upon some human souls. Divorce seems to be the only hope

for the partner of one so possessed. And yes, there are times when because of sin it is in the children's best interest that parents go in separate directions. The outward damage rendered from staying in a circumstance where Satan has free reign is too great, and righteous parents must seek safety and peace.

There is a danger that every Spirit led parent who has been the victim of the sins of a wayward partner, must address. It is, what message are we giving to our offspring? Do we, by example, tell them that violence is all right? Or, that divorce is an acceptable answer? What message should we give? The moral aftermath, from wrong messages, is potentially more damaging than the original circumstance. We must weigh carefully each decision and act in accordance with God's word and the wisdom of the Spirit in application. Always seek Godly counsel when possible.

Was it an accident that Mark takes us from the subject of divorce with all its pains and traumas to showing us Jesus touching and blessing children?

Children are the world of tomorrow. What happens to them will effect not only their lives individually, but all of us as a collective society.

There is no doubt that our society today is the result of the actions, attitudes and creativity of what has preceded us. We were and are the results of all the many events and influences upon us. Some of us are blessed by what has preceded us; others have been greatly wounded.

The interest Jesus bestowed upon children may have been symbolic, but I do not doubt his total sincerity. This lesson is brought into the Gospel narrative for the express purpose of displaying the Spirit's concern for the little people we hold dear. They are our most precious treasure and they are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. They too, are recipients of the Spirit's work and all who have become a part of Jesus will also care about them.

# Chapter Twenty-seven

## Who is Good?

Mark 10:17-22

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "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 murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' "

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Travel in the days when Jesus was among us was not always a pleasant part of life. It was slow and often dangerous. Most people had to walk wherever they went. Jesus and his disciples often talked as they traveled about, providing an opportunity for them to discuss important matters.

The next event Mark reports happened on one of these journeys. As they were walking along, a man came running up to Jesus and fell on his knees before him. "'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Mark 10:17)

I wonder how many people in today's culture have the ability to identify with what happened in our story. This man wanted to know the answer to what must have been, for him, a very pressing question. What about eternal life?

Jesus listened to what this young man was asking, but seeing through the outer charade of religious fervor, he saw the theological lie that the man had bought into. When this young man called Jesus "good," it wasn't because he recognized Jesus to be God made flesh and dwelling among us, had he, Jesus would not have commented. This young man saw Jesus as an exalted teacher. To assign goodness to him was more than just a statement of courtesy, even though it was correct, it was still wrong because his reason for saying it was wrong. No mere man can be good; this is basic truth.

All men are mere men, unless of course; they really are God, as Jesus was. All men, no matter how enlightened or exalted in the eyes of others, are still mere men; therefore they are not good. This truth is further expounded upon in the book of Romans where Paul says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

Goodness with man is a relative condition. We consider something to be good, or judge it to be bad, on the basis of relativity to an accepted standard. Since humanity has no real standard by which to judge goodness, we must seek a standard outside ourselves. God being creator has set that standard for us. He is, in fact, the personification of goodness. Only God has achieved the state of total goodness. All other life forms are only judged to be good on the basis of how close they resemble the goodness of that standard, God.

Since God is the author of the Law of Moses, we must conclude it is good, and so it is. It is not surprising therefore that this conversation would turn to the commands or law.

Can we conclude that if we are good as judged by the commands that we are therefore good?



I feel sure that this young man considered himself good. I feel sure that he also believed that Jesus was equally good. The conversation seems to support the idea that this young man, at least by the standard made known, was to all practical purposes judged good by the law. Was he therefore good? If so, was that enough?

The original question was not about goodness, but it was a point. Truth is, obedience to the law does not make men good; in fact, goodness is not really the answer to our problem. The problem is humanity does not possess eternal life. God alone is the source of eternal life. Humanity lost that life through disobedience to God, but obedience is not the source of life. Obedience is a prerequisite to fellowship with God, and blessing results from his favor being bestowed.

God gives life, bestowing it by the Spirit, and since the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ are the same, it follows that to receive life one must be a follower of Jesus. To be followers of Jesus we are students of his words and recipients of his Spirit. Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63)

It is life that answers our real need. That is what we must find; but by what means? Doesn't this life come by the blessing of a man of God? Isn't it received when we receive some special rites of a church? Isn't it a statement of faith or some symbolic gesture or the proper use of symbols?

I propose that it is none of these, though they are sometimes helpful. It takes something more than surface words or deeds. Jesus knew what this man needed, it was basic, and it was deep.

Having concluded the discussion about being good; Jesus looked at this man lovingly and said,

"One thing you lack, go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21)

Can we understand the love expressed here? Does this offend the theology you thought was so right? Is this the price tag on eternal life?

Seeking to justify the humanistic teachings about wealth, success and present life fulfillments, a popular minister of our day once pointed out that Jesus didn't say give everything to the poor, only give to the poor—now really, are we really that hard hearted?

Not only does this teaching of Jesus threaten to offend the "spiritual" humanists, but it also violates the concepts of modern evangelism that is married to the wealth of the modern church to finance its grand endeavors. Have you ever heard a fund raiser ever counsel people to go sell all they have and give it to the poor and then come to them?

Are we all in some way represented by this young man? Are our good intentions directed by our bad theology? Do we still hold to what is offensive?

Why is it so difficult for us to see that this world is under a curse? Everything here is destined to destruction. Do we need the world? Does God need the world?

What is taught here raises questions. The literalists line up on one side and the spiritualizers on the other side, but can we see how pure, how right, how correct Jesus was?

The kingdom of God does not rest on the "lettered" men who fill our pulpits, nor does it rest on the pockets of the faithful. Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. The success of his career was not the result of finance; it was by the power of the one who took the form of a dove, the Holy Spirit. It was this Holy Spirit who took this unlettered man, without organization or recognition, and made him the center of all history.

Why do we tamper with simple faith? Isn't it because our hearts are hard and full of unbelief? Those who make the boldest proclamations about faith are often the most dependent on the system and resources of the world! Can't we understand that it is, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty." (Zech. 4:6)

There is a long line of people walking down the road away from this man called Truth. They're young for the most part, and many are rich, if not with money, certainly with dreams. The price of following Jesus is too unthinkable, there's too much life yet to live—too many possessions to gain or enjoy, and besides; it seems so impractical. This rich young ruler left Jesus sorrowful, perhaps still not understanding that fame, fortune and power are not what is to be sought, but rather, to those who lived under the law they were the result of obedience to the law. Seeking God who is the source of eternal life is the essential motivation of living godly lives. Obedience to laws should never be the goal of one's life but rather knowing God!

Can any one truly trust God? Isn't God too busy running the universe to bother with us? To know God is to trust in God. The rich young ruler could well have afforded to give all away and come follow Jesus, because to do so was to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with all the provisions of divine intervention at his disposal.

# Chapter Twenty-eight

## Why Couldn't He Keep His Riches?

Mark 10:23-31

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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."

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

As Jesus watched the rich young man leaving sad and probably confused, there was an obvious question that must be faced, why can't we have it both ways? If this young man had gained his wealth honestly and his life stood the test of the law, then how could it be wrong to keep it?

The message of Jesus wasn't a message of hope for a lost world, a new political agenda, or a new key to economic success. The reason for all the struggle, pain and suffering is to show us how futile it is to place our trust in anything other than God; yet mankind persists in doing everything but trust the Lord! Jesus watched this rich young man walk away then he turned to his disciples and said,

How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.' (Mark 10:23-25)

Incredible! In their amazement the disciples said, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26) Hasn't everything we have been won by struggle? We attach value to substances for a variety of reasons, but the real issue is to be found in our heart. We love riches because we see in them what we need to fulfill all our worldly desires. Without money we are seen to be weak, wanting and helpless. Money is power! Power to rent or buy the home needed or desired; power to buy food for our families, or the ability to enjoy an evening of dining and fun. Does Jesus want us to give up our very earthly existence? Obviously that is not the point.

What is at issue here is what makes riches, riches. What it is that happens to us when we have wealth, or a source of wealth. Isn't it true that the more secure we feel we are, the less we feel a need for anyone or anything?

It's hard to be arrogant when your money is gone and nothing is in sight that can be trusted. What do we do? It's not money that is needed in our lives, yet so much of life is lived as though money was everything.

You might ask, "If money isn't what is needed in life, when everything in life has a price tag on it, then what is?"

Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. Nowhere do we read about Jesus asking anyone for money! Did he need money? He evidently received money because Judas carried the moneybag. They evidently made purchases because when the discussion about feeding people came up, so did the price of food. What we see in the life of Jesus was faith in the ability of his heavenly Father to supply. The means was the generosity, concern and hospitality of the people who came to him.

The person who has learned to follow Jesus has also learned to walk in God's provision. God never wills but what he supplies! Following Jesus requires a unique attitude toward possessions. When a teacher of the law came to Jesus and wanted to follow him, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matt. 8:20) The Apostle Paul reported to the Christians of Philippi that he had learned to be content in every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Then he went on to say, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil. 4:11-13)

The discussion continued with Jesus assuring the disciples that the requirements of discipleship bring rewards in the present life as well as the eternal. He assured them that those who left anything for his sake, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and even wives, would receive much more in this present life and eternal life as well.

Now the question here is, what did Jesus mean in the practical application? Did he mean that his followers would become rich? Not likely! Those with greed in their heart or a love for the present life could try interpreting the words of Jesus in that manner; but if we look at the list of what is sometimes left behind, it becomes obvious what Jesus was talking about. Can a man have more than one mother? The answer is obvious, one mother, one father to each child, so all others who are mothers to us are merely filling a need in our lives. If it's nurturing we need, the Lord will meet that need a hundred times over! If it's a house we need, it will be provided. But, will we own it? Maybe, maybe not, but if we have the use of what we need, isn't that sufficient? Ownership of property may have its advantages, but it can also be an unnecessary weight shackling us to responsibilities that are more trouble than benefit. It is only when we are still attached to the things of this world that we have a problem with this truth.

Those who have opened their hearts to the Spirit's presence find their fulfillment in that which pertains to the eternal. Any clinging to substances or relationships becomes a source of conflict when the Spirit would ask us to reach beyond the limits of an ordinary life.

What are the limits of your commitment? Can you leave all to follow Jesus? The rich young ruler could not, to him it seemed impractical; the price was too great. Surely there must be another alternative, but there was none. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Following Jesus means making him God. Nothing can be held in reserve. All must be disposable that pertains to this world. No relationship can be withheld from him; all must go on the altar before him. What will become of us from that point onward is up to his discretion. We are his to command. What then will become of us? This is where the wonder begins! From the point of total surrender, the Spirit begins his work. First, he will erase much of what has preceded his entry. Then he will begin to lay foundations for what is yet future in our, now eternal life! Everything that will prevent proper

development of his plan will be dealt with or removed, with what remains being cleansed and refined. The end result will be glorious to behold.

If you are reading this pondering your own life, and it seems that God has done everything wrong. Instead of thing getting better, it seems to you, they have gotten worse, remember this one truth, the end is still to come. God is working with eternity in view; we tend to only see what comforts us. The work of creation goes on as long as we are in this world, and what we will be, after this life is over, is not readily visible. To commit your life to Jesus is to commit your life to the Holy Spirit and his work! If sorrow follows over the loss of some earthly treasure, be assured that he will make it up in a thousand different ways throughout eternity. We can all safely trust the Lord!

How hard it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom! Our trust in the present system is so deeply entrenched we cannot envision life in any other mode. Money is so closely connected to every activity of life that the very thought of trusting anything else seems beyond us. Without faith the words of Jesus are totally impractical. The idea that he might ask us to abandon a life style of comfort and security to walk into the unknown is frightening. But will he?

God is not the author of confusion, nor is he interested in destroying a well-ordered life. Actually, this has nothing to do with radical outward changes in most people's lives. It has to do with a deep change in our hearts, however. How we see the substances that sustain us, are they the result of our effort or are they the result of divine provision. If we see all that we have as being the result of divine provision, then leaving it behind when asked to, is as easy as exhaling the air in our lungs. It was needed when received, but it is no longer of use when God is leading us onward. All things are ours, yet we trust only in God! We receive and use what is needed, then move on, still trusting in the same source of provision, God.

The possessions of the rich young man who came to Jesus were likely the provisions of God in his life, the result of obedience to the law. When asked to dispose of them, Jesus was not suggesting that his good life was ending, only changing. This was a crucial point in this man's life. Turning away from what had been to follow Jesus, was as revolutionary as the call upon the life of the Apostle Paul. He too was required to forsake all and follow Jesus. Was it the end of his life? What had been in each of these men's lives was a part of the old religious system. They must leave it and follow Jesus. The blessings of obedience to the law were temporal, the blessings of following Jesus, eternal.

Can a rich man be saved? Can he cease trusting in his wealth and learn to trust in God? In the natural it is impossible to make the transition. However, with God all things are possible.

# Chapter Twenty-nine

## Straight Ahead to Crucifixion!!

Mark 10:32-34

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Resolutely Jesus and his disciples began the journey toward Jerusalem causing both astonishment and fear. Jesus also knew how the Jewish leaders felt about him. To turn his journey toward Jerusalem was to walk deliberately toward his death. Isaiah foresaw this event and said by the Spirit,

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint and I know I will not be put to shame. (Isaiah 50:6-7)

The disciples of Jesus did not understand what Jesus was doing or why, so Jesus told them plainly what would happen.

When the Spirit comes to rest upon a person, the road he walks is not always the road that is the most appealing. Pain comes to the person so led. The pain Jesus would bear was by the Spirit's consent. The prophets knew of each pain in advance, prophesying his suffering in detail!

The disciples too, would experience pain, but it would be of a different sort. There is pain involved in following Jesus. He is the rock of offense, and they would be offended because of him. When Jesus is rejected, we who follow him are also rejected. Fellowship with Jesus is fellowship with suffering! This suffering comes in many forms. It may be a cold shoulder, a comment of contempt, or an attitude of disgust that one with such earthly potential would live such a futuristic life style.

To believe that heavenly matters are of greater value and importance than those matters that pertain to our security, recognition, pleasure or comfort, is beyond the capacity of reason for most people, it seems. The temptation to hide our faith or to live as though heaven doesn't exist is ever present.

What value is a faith that has as its focus a life after death? Since we live in the here and now, shouldn't we apply our energy to the establishment of an earthly kingdom?

It is doubtless true, that the Kingdom of Heaven has an earthly manifestation. We see it in many forms and in many places, but the Kingdom of Heaven does not now, or has it ever, taken the form of an earthly kingdom. The Kingdom is a kingdom of loving, believing, faithful hearted people, who have understood the Spirit's call to follow in the footsteps of the man who set his face like a flint, and willingly walked into the jaws of death to obtain the eternal kingdom.

Does such a pursuit seem like folly? For Jesus it meant death in the very real sense. He would be mocked, flogged and killed. Is it any different today?

Does all this sound a bit bleak? Perhaps it would sound discouraging if Mark had not quickly added this promise of Jesus. "Three days later he will rise again." (Mark 10:34)

Resurrection, that's the hope, the Blessed Hope. It was the hope from which Jesus could draw his strength to endure the cross, and it is our hope as well. He did rise, and so will we!

This truth was no more real to the disciples of Jesus than it is to most people today. It's hard to believe what we haven't experienced. Most knowledge we hold to is based on experience. It's hard to believe strictly on the witness of another person.

Jesus tried to tell the disciples what was about to take place, but some truth is hard to grasp. The day for opening their understandings would come, but for now they could only hear with their natural minds. The day of the indwelling of the Spirit's power had not yet come.

The non-spiritual world has as its view of reality, only what pertains to the natural existence on earth. Life is still held between two unyielding barriers, birth and death. There are those who wish to reach past those barriers and to see themselves in a broader view. There are those who see themselves as part of a continuing human family that gave life to them and to which they owe a debt. They strive to leave something behind so that, after they are gone, something will remain. To them this is immortality. Others grasp at such views as reincarnation in a vain attempt to break the barrier.

It was Jesus Christ who gave the only real hope that reached beyond the death barrier. Whatever knowledge about the immortality of the human soul existed, was expanded and solidified through the teachings of Jesus who spoke of death as sleep, and resurrection as a present reality. He also spoke of heaven as a real home, and demonstrated resurrection reality by raising the dead. He demonstrated that our future bodies would be real, but different. After his resurrection, he passed through walls, appeared and disappeared at will, and was able to eat and be touched. Thus demonstrating that the laws of physics governing matter in the present realm do not apply in our future life.

We have a hope that reaches beyond the grave. Believing upon Jesus Christ as our Savior is the only means by which we can gain access to heaven. All other messages are false claims. Jesus said that he is the way. He did not say that there are many ways and they all lead to heaven, so pick one you like. It was Jesus who established his credentials to speak as an authority on such matters. His death and resurrection are the proof offered to validate his message. He is alive today, in heaven, where he is interceding for those who believe on him. Every person who puts their trust in him will find immortality and life eternal. That is the promise, the Blessed Hope of all believers.

# Chapter Thirty

## Greatness Redefined

Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Our worldview as taught by natural men is difficult to change. The disciples were just as slow to learn as any of us. The roots of our educational system go deep, nevertheless, Jesus patiently taught a different view of life on earth.

With the coming of Jesus, man would now receive the gift of eternal life that is energized by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The natural body is destined to decay waiting for the day of resurrection; but the real self, the soul, is energized to live with the Lord Jesus in his kingdom forever.

This kingdom is a kingdom where individuals enjoy varying degrees of honor and greatness. What it is that wins this honor is very different from what wins honor in this world. The disciples must learn that the spirit that governs this world is not at all like the Spirit that governs the Kingdom of Heaven. James, John and all of us, must be taught an important truth.

What is the road to greatness like? Is it wrong to desire greatness? Those whose concerns are earthy have difficulty understanding the teachings of Jesus.

In this world, greatness is based on achievements, and our social systems demand activities that involve creating perceptions. If we are to get ahead we must play by the rules. We must dress appropriately according to our position in life. Failure to conform to the social demands is to result in rejection, or at the least, a certain uncomfortable tolerance. If we are to become a leader we must create an "in charge" attitude. Individuals who exude confidence, who appear to know what others wish to know, find themselves being looked to by others who perceive that they are too weak to act on their own.

Those who are in authority in this world are usually such people. They either possess wisdom, power or economic advantage, or have learned to create such a perception. As long as people see a person as being in charge, they can stay in charge. Once confidence is lost, or fear is gone, open



warfare for power can erupt. These are the rules we live by. Those who understand them may do very well in this world.

We who follow Jesus have a choice. Will we pursue eternal purposes as the primary pursuit of life? Or, will we make career, family, power, influence or other earthly pursuits primary in our lives? There is another part to consider. Where do our true values lie? Do we value possessions seeing them as being our treasure? Do we find our gratification from what we possess or what we have achieved in life?

Jesus taught us to put our treasure in heaven and to rejoice in the fact that our name is written down!

To pursue possessions or positions of advantage in heaven was never condemned by Jesus; in fact, he encouraged such a pursuit! The problem we are confronted with is, in the Kingdom of Heaven the rules are totally different and the destination is also very different!

The term repentance is not a light or frivolous term. It is the most vital of concepts because what it implies is turning around! To long we have viewed repentance as being an action whereby we cease to sin and instead embrace the rules of our religious society. That may be good, but that is not biblical repentance!

Biblical repentance involves ceasing to live for this present world. This world that is corrupted, condemned, judged and soon to pass away. We are now to embrace the new and eternal Kingdom of Heaven, which begins in our hearts and finds its expression in the New Heaven and the New Earth! Once we repent, we live out our lives with a different view of everything. We are sustained and led, by the Spirit into pursuits that are understood to be our Father in Heaven's will.

In view of this change of kings and kingdoms, we now find a new definition of honor! Greatness is assigned to servant-hood, but being counted as first is measured by our slavery-hood!

To understand this concept we must first of all understand whose servant we are. We were once slaves to sin and servants of the world system. Now we are slaves of our Heavenly Father's will and servants in his household! We are now owned by a new master, subjects of a new king. Our new king is characterized by the titles, King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Thus, our activities are acts of righteousness and we live in a state of peace!

The extent to which we adapt to these new principles dictates the level of honor that is bestowed upon us!

To desire greatness is not wrong, but the road that leads there, is the way of death! Death, that is, to all that is earthy. Earthly loves, desires, values and all dependencies upon anything in this natural realm, must yield to the heavenly. The transition of thought, belief, dedication and pursuit is not an easy one, but the reward is great!

The power to achieve does not come from our natural strengths; it comes from the one symbolized by the dove, who first came resting upon Jesus and now comes to rest upon us. If our pursuit is not by the Spirit's power, it is not of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Woe to the person who would try to pursue this kingdom with his own strengths, gifts or talents, they will surely suffer loss!

This kingdom operates by the Spirit's power. Its mission is to fulfill the Father's will. The Spirit's first work is to conform us to that will and then to work toward its expression to those around us. All evangelistic endeavors that result in changes in the world around us, spring from the Spirit's work in us; conformity to the Father's will, thus being achieved.

# Chapter Thirty-one

## Healing Blind Men.

Mark 10:46-52

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

In Mark's presentation of the Gospel, one more miracle must be reported because in it we are taught a truth needed in our study.

Jesus has just dropped the teaching about greatness in his kingdom in the lap of the disciples revealing the depth to which we must be impacted if we are to truly follow Jesus. If we have begun to comprehend the message, we are aware of the difficulty we are faced with because though we hear truth we also need to see it clearly!

A blind man may hear extremely well, but his comprehension is limited by his inability to see. It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and so it is.

Thus, we are told that a blind man lived at Jericho. (Mark 10:47) Actually there may have been several blind men there, but Mark only tells of Bartimaeus.

Jericho is an interesting place. It was where a school of the prophets had been in Elijah's day. Even the name seems to come from two root words, one carrying the idea of teaching and the other of illumination. (See Strong's Concordance) To find blind men here may add another dimension to an already existing typological lesson. Isn't it interesting that there would be blind men at a place known for learning? Please understand that to be physically blind is no disgrace, but to be blind to important truth is disastrous! For Jesus to heal a blind man here at this place could be taken to say, "I have come to open the eyes of those who seek to understand and to give sight to those who would truly see."

Blindness to spiritual truth seems to be a common problem to all mankind. We, like so many blind people of that day, were born blind. Sin in the human race has robbed us of our ability to see.

In our story, Bartimaeus met Jesus just outside the town. There is some confusion as to whether Jesus was going into the town or coming out of the town. Luke tells the story and says Jesus was going into the town but he doesn't say who was healed. Matthew says that Jesus was leaving the town and that he healed two blind men, but he didn't name them. Mark on the other hand says that Jesus came to Jericho and leaving they encountered Bartimaeus. There have been several explanations offered to

explain this. The easiest is that Luke made a mistake because it sounds like Mark and Matthew agree, except that, Matthew says there were two blind men and Mark only mentions one. Another explanation has been offered that says, because there was an old city of Jericho, largely uninhabited, and there was a new town about a mile away, that Jesus probably walked through the old city and was somewhere in between when he encountered Bartimaeus! If that were true, Mark and Luke would both be right. It would be the old question of a half glass of water. Is it half empty or half full? That would then leave us with Matthew's account, was it simply a more detailed account or was it an account of two additional blind men who met him after he was leaving having completed his visit?

This we know; Bartimaeus had faith.

Faith is a word that refers to having knowledge of God, a true and accurate perspective of his love, mercy, and judgments. Faith believes in the righteousness of God, the care of God for his people, and the mercy of God for all who will call upon him. Faith is not some mystical power; it is a heart in proper belief relationship to God. It draws its virtue from its creator.

Who has faith? Does it belong to sighted people only? No, no, no, who among us could ever be healed if that were true? Faith is not proud. Faith recognizes human impotency, but sees God's all sufficiency.

Faith sees past Jesus of Nazareth and calls out to Jesus, Son of David! Nazareth was part of the disguise; Son of David was the reality. He was not just any son of David; he was the Son of David! How did Bartimaeus know this? The word was Jesus of Nazareth was coming, but those words came from the sighted blind! Bartimaeus had faith. Faith sees what intelligence cannot grasp. It was not Bartimaeus' intellect that was the means of his healing. It was not his right confession, though his confession was right. It was his faith that was the means by which he received his healing!

Remember what Matthew said, that there were two blind men who were healed when Jesus was leaving Jericho? Now, just suppose, for the sake of our story, that they really were different men and not Bartimaeus. Let's suppose also that they knew Bartimaeus and had heard about how he was healed. As Jesus was leaving the town he again heard voices crying out, "Lord, Son of David have mercy on us." (Matt. 20:31) Did these men also have faith?

There are people who, like these two blind men, seek Jesus. People have needs and when they hear that Jesus has met someone's need, they too, want to be healed. They may inquire into how the healing came about, was there some special thing done, or what words did you say?

If this is true, one thing they seemed to know, Bartimaeus called him Son of David! Isn't it interesting that people who are hitchhiking to heaven never can go beyond the prayers and faith of others?

Bartimaeus seemed to possess something special. Matthew didn't mention the names of the two men. Was it because they were unknown? Bartimaeus on the other hand is named. Could it be that by the time the book of Mark was written he was well known in the Christian community? Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "Go, your faith has healed you." Matthew on the other hand reports that Jesus had compassion on the blind persons and healed them. No mention of their faith is made.

If this was a separate incidence from the healing of Bartimaeus, the response was the same, at least in the beginning; they all followed Jesus. But, if what I am suggesting is true, was it also true that the reason the two were not named was that by the time the record was written no one knew who they were?

Borrowed faith does not last.

Jesus healed their natural eyes that day, but did Bartimaeus receive something more? It is my belief that he did receive much more.

Faith reaches for more than that which is physical! Faith wants the "better part" as well! Faith understands that the good gift that the Father gives is the promised Holy Spirit! Did Bartimaeus receive this gift? No, not at this point in the story because the Holy Spirit had not yet been given; however, Jesus answered his faith with sight.

Faith is more than belief. Faith has as its substance the body of truth that was personified in the person of Jesus Christ. This faith is stimulated to an action of believing when we see Jesus as the giver of good gifts.

If our faith is lacking in substance, it is probably because we lack sight in matters of the word. The scripture rightly says that faith comes by hearing the word; but the ability to see its message is by the light of the Spirit.

# Chapter Thirty-two

## Behold, Your King Comes!!

Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just 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 doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."

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"Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things! (Ps. 118:15-16)

Christ came to Jerusalem because it is the capital city of the kingdom of God's people. Jesus was now coming to take the throne of David as the King who will reign forever. He was the seed of the woman promised to Adam and Eve. He was the son of David, heir to the throne of David. He was the promised Son Isaiah prophesied, upon whose shoulders the government would rest. Jesus was now coming to Jerusalem to fulfill all that the prophets had spoken concerning this pivot point of history. All time previous to him, is counted backwards from this man and all time is counted forwards from his coming. This is the center point of eternity. This is the benchmark, the point of reference. No single event in history has even come close to it in historical significance. Nothing has impacted the world more than this man. He was about to arrive at his point of destiny. This point was not a happenstance, an evolutionary step in the religious development of the psyche of humanity.

This man was God incarnate. He was here to preach the message of reconciliation to this fallen race. Man is God's creation; he cannot exist without God! The further man drifts away from God the worse things get for him. When man has God, at least in his consciousness, he is properly restrained from evil. When man excludes God, anarchy results. Every man does what is right in his own eyes.

In our story Jesus Christ is coming to his city. His hour has come. This was not just a visit to Jerusalem; this was official business. What would happen here was known in his mind before creation. What is about to happen here is the next great step in God's creative plan. Human beings are unique creations. God has placed an eternal spirit in a substantive body, gave it a normal life cycle and determines its eternal form by what happens here.

Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to be crowned our King. He would be placed on a throne and from it he would reign.

Psalms 118 says so much about this event, and the people seemed to know it. They quoted from it as Jesus rode toward Jerusalem. The psalm goes,

"O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The Lord, he is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar." (Ps. 118:25-27)

With words such as this the crowd proclaimed the coming of Christ. Did they understand? Perhaps in a measure they did. For some it may have been merely a hope, no matter, they danced; they shouted for joy, they proclaimed him king.

Whether they understood or not, whether they received him or not, he would do what he came to do. What was happening here was not by man's decision, this was God's will. This was God's plan. A coronation would take place in a few days, but not like any that has ever taken place before, and none would ever be like it again. What was happening here was being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit's power and was designed to place God, in the form of man, on the seat of authority, not only over this realm of natural man, but also over that which exists in the kingdom that is eternal.

It was because this event was so uniquely designed, being done in this natural world, yet meeting the spiritual demands of God, that it bridged the gap placing Jesus on the throne of David, and at the same time securing redemption for the souls of all mankind.

The people seemed to sense something very special was happening. Jesus, the man who healed the sick, drove out demons, cleansed the lepers and raised the dead was coming. If there ever was a man who could raise the hopes, it was Jesus. He must be the Messiah!

The procession entered the gates of the city. The psalmist David had written a thousand years before,

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (Ps. 24:3-7)

This was the day those ancient doors had long awaited. This city was God's city, his capital on earth. His temple was his house. Jesus was coming; God incarnate. He had qualified himself as a man, his hands were clean, his heart was pure, he could ascend the hill of the Lord, but he was also God.

The Psalmist went on to ask, "Who is the King of glory?" (Ps. 24:8) His response was astonishing! A thousand years before this event he saw the incarnation and exclaimed,

"The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—he is the King of glory." (Ps. 24:8-10)

Through the gates they went, on up to the temple that was God's house. He was God, God incarnate, and it was his house! He arrived late in the day so he left and went back to Bethany where he spent the night.

# Chapter Thirty-three

## The Fig Tree Must Die!

Mark 11:12-14

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

On the way back to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree that was already full of leaves. It was early in the season, but fig trees should have some evidence of figs on them when their leaves are out.

This tree was different, it had all the appearances of a fruited tree, but when Jesus came to find its fruit it was barren. This tree had been planted here to bear fruit. Jesus could rightly expect fruit to be on this tree. As people walked by, if they were hungry they could go to a fig tree with leaves and expect to find figs. The fruit may not be ripe yet, but the figs should still be there. This tree had none. Jesus upon inspecting the tree and finding nothing but leaves, said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." (Mark 11:14)

This incident had more than incidental purpose. The man upon whom the Spirit came to rest was passing by. If he had cursed this fig tree simply because he was hungry and it failed to satisfy his hunger, there would be no purpose in this report. In fact, this incident seems inappropriate and out of harmony with the conduct of this man of peace.

This is the man of whom it was said,

Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. (Matt. 12:18-20)

Yet, here he is, using his supernatural power and authority to remove life from a tree!

To properly understand this incident, we must see the contextual setting. There is no doubt that, what happened was for parabolic purpose. This is not the first time trees or vines have found themselves in a parabolic role.

Isaiah wrote about a vineyard that had been planted on a fertile hillside. The owner had used the choicest vines. He took care to prepare the soil and even built a watchtower on it. All measures were taken to protect this vineyard. It had been nurtured and pruned, but when the time came to pick its fruit, it only had bad fruit.

In this Isaiah case, the author leaves no doubt about what is being referred to, the vineyard is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are called his garden. The conduct of the people is clearly the fruit. What could rightfully be expected from this vineyard did not appear; the good fruit that should have appeared did not come forth. This resulted in a harsh decision on the part of its owner to bring the vineyard to ruin.

The fig tree, in like manner, was also symbolic of this nation. Jesus Christ was the owner; these people were his people. If we recognize the incarnation of Jesus as being God made flesh and dwelling among us, then we can readily understand why the fig tree was cursed. Jesus had come to this nation disguised as one of them. He looked for the good fruit of righteous conduct, but what he found was the bad fruit of religious hypocrisy.

This nation was about to commit the ultimate crime; they were about to condemn their God to death! The penalty of this action would be that they, like the fig tree, would wither and die. Once more they would be scattered among the nations and the land would lay barren.

The lesson we must learn as students of God's dealings is that life on earth is not a fantasy; nor are we here by some fluke of evolutionary process. Our creator placed us here for purposes that reach beyond this life. We are being watched and monitored at all times. Our conduct is being weighed. No thought or motive goes unnoticed. We cannot hide in the crowd, lost in insignificance. God keeps the records and men must appear before him to give an account of themselves.

When the hour of judgment arrives when we must give account of our lives, what joy will come to our hearts when across the record of our life we find that something has happened to the writing that was against us. It is as though something was spilled on the page and the record is gone, and in its place we find a message written, compliments of Jesus Christ!!

What horror will fill each heart however, when the book is opened and there it is plainly written, forgiveness rejected. The Holy Spirit had knocked at the door of the heart, but no response could be found.

The house of Israel could have known who Jesus was, no man ever did the miracles he did, but it was too difficult to set aside preconceived ideas. Cultural fetters are very hard to break. Evil also blinds us, and Israel like all humanity had indeed been blinded.

They would rise in anger and cry for his blood! The fig tree would die and so would they.



# Chapter Thirty-four

## Cleansing the Temple

Mark 11:15-19

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

When evening came, they went out of the city.

Having spoken to the fig tree, Jesus proceeded on to the temple grounds. He had been there the day before. The event of the previous day was the festive entry into Jerusalem. It was a day in which history was being made.

What happened here was much more than an event of natural history, it had to do with what governs the heart!

The Holy Spirit had come to rest upon Jesus without measure, in the form of a dove. He came first to work within this man Jesus qualifying him to be the Savior of all humanity. This meant that he must fully live out every facet of righteousness. Flawlessly he moved from event to event, demonstrating each attitude of the righteous heart of God. When righteousness called for love, love flowed forth. When it called for compassion, compassion was there. When sternness and anger were the righteous response, he did not shrink back. Courageously he stood his ground. If judgment was in order he pronounced it.

He was now qualified to ascend to the very house that had been built for him. But, was this house really to be his dwelling place? Obviously not, it would be thrown to the ground. It was only a symbol. Objects, places, events or places of worship were never intended to be worshipped, that's idolatry.

The real temple was yet to be revealed, but for now; the symbol must be the focal point. What God was doing must be played out in human experience. Tangible objects were being used so that what is intangible might be clearly understood. What is in the heart of man is always clearly seen when the true nature of his conduct is revealed. If greed is in the heart it will find a way to express itself. If greed cannot satisfy itself with legitimate pursuits, it will embrace its friends, deceit and larceny. To legitimize its activity it will call upon another friend, disguise. The best disguise evil can wear is the religious one. This disguise is most effective when there is a real purpose in its existence! We have seen this when men raise funds for missions or charity and retain most of the money to support their own affluent life styles.

When Jesus entered into the temple, there they were, the greedy Levites selling offering-objects for profit! If this activity was symbolic of what is happening today, do we justify its existence? Do we

think that it's all right so long as the funds meet some real need? Better still, if the activity is providing a service to worshippers isn't it appropriate? Never mind if the person is pocketing enough of the funds to support an affluent life style.

Jesus had been to the temple the day before long enough to see what anyone could plainly see. God sees what men don't see, however, the motives of the heart. Here at the temple, what was in the heart was clearly manifest by what could be seen. It was a mess! The courtyard that should have been a reverent area for seekers to come to with their sacrifices was filled with activities resembling those of festival grounds. This area should have been for offering prayerful sacrifices, worship, and repentance before the living God.

When Jesus arrived at the temple, he did the appropriate thing; he drove them out! He went about over-turning tables, scattering money and saying. "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. But you have made it a den of robbers." (Mark 11:17)

To be sure, this did not go over very well. Just because the chief priests and teachers of the law wore priestly garments and were credentialed by the finest institutions of learning and religion, did not give them understanding of what was taking place here.

Jesus was the physical manifestation of the very God they claimed to serve. This temple had been built for him; it was his house! They did not recognize that truth to be fact; therefore his actions were viewed as criminal. In their eyes the activity in the temple was appropriate, but his actions were a sacrilege worthy of death!

These men wanted to kill Jesus. Feeling justified they now believed it was their duty! After all, were they not duty bound to protect their religion and their temple from desecration?

Without the Holy Spirit's guidance, isn't it always difficult to see events in true spiritual light? Do we know that every event that results from human action or decision is in some way an expression of our spiritual condition?

The need for money looms big in human experience. Our culture demands a medium of exchange. It seems that to exist without money would be virtually impossible to all but the most resourceful. It seemed only right to use the system of exchange to facilitate the giving of offerings. To have the money changers there to exchange foreign currency, and the animals used in sacrificing available for travelers to purchase, seemed like a reasonable service.

To all outward appearances, things were going well at the temple. The revenues were flowing into the treasury and everyone seemed happy with the arrangement. Prosperity and a good self-image are not evidence of spiritual well being, however. These people evidently were reasonably happy with the way things were. Politically they were under the domination of Rome, but there was a rather good relationship with the authorities. As a nation they longed for sovereignty, but Rome was powerful and Israel was a very small nation. Any serious effort to break free from Rome would no doubt result in a very devastating conflict and defeat would be swift and certain.

The talk about Jesus being a king sounded good to simple folk, but to those in authority it was viewed with alarm.

Jesus was not really a threat to Rome or the religious leaders. He had come for eternal purposes and his kingdom was of heaven.

Jesus was not against activities at the temple that were initiated by God. He was, however, very disturbed by what he saw going on in the temple courtyard.

Everything about the temple spoke typologically about Jesus. The very entrance to the courtyard was symbolic of our entry into Jesus by faith. What went on inside was originally designed to teach us about his works, our pursuit of holiness, the nature of God, and our place in his great plan.

To allow activities in this temple area that was contradictory to the nature of God toward his people was unthinkable. To allow activities that were carnally motivated in this place was offensive when viewed by the God who sits on the seat called mercy!

Every activity in the temple courtyard was intended to be worship, repentance, forgiveness, restoration and fellowship. Sacrifices were being made to remove the barriers between God and man so that fellowship might result.

Having activities for profit in the courtyard was clearly taking advantage of the religious desire of worshippers. This was an offense against the God who cares for his people. The tithes and offerings of the people were sufficient to provide amply for the temple. Any further effort to collect from them was purely greed.

The approved activities within the temple were all in some way designed to be prayer. When Jesus entered the temple, whip in hand, forcefully driving out the occupants of the temple it was for the purpose of restoring divine order to his house. "My house," Jesus declared, "will be called the house of prayer for all nations." (Mark 11:17)

It is still the same today. We are now God's temple! What we allow to occupy our hearts and minds should be pure in the sight of God. The scriptures put it very bluntly,

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (I Cor. 3:16-17)

How flippantly many of us treat this truth! It's not our cultural attitude to look upon our bodies as anything more than, "Our body."

When Jesus entered the temple and began to upset tables and drive out the pseudo sacrifices, there was more than casual irritation in his heart.

The leaders of the temple were stirred to anger. Are things any different today?

Many of us want a temple or a church to go to. We like everything to be comfortable and nice. We like padded pews, stained glass windows and robed choirs—but don't talk to us about our need to be holy! Do we still prefer to believe that God dwells in a building? If he did, then the only thing that would be important would be to act proper and keep things in order while we are in his house.

At the time of this visit to the temple, God dwelt in the Most Holy Place. It was important to keep everything just right, but they had allowed activity here that suited them, instead of God. When Jesus cleansed the temple it was because what was happening here was a form of desecration. The reason for this display was to show God's anger—not the human anger of Jesus. This display, very likely, was less important in view of the actual effect upon life in the temple than it was upon the symbolic values and lessons it taught.

When Jesus comes into the heart and life of an individual he comes with an agenda that requires change. The life, and body, of the person becomes a habitation of God's Spirit. I have observed that after the initial honeymoon experience of the newborn Christian; there comes a time of cleansing. Not only does this involve the outward visible conduct and styles of life, but it also gets into the motives, loves and even dependencies of the heart.

Prayer is the natural expression of people who genuinely love the Lord and who have learned that the Lord is the only true source of supply for their lives.

The person, who has been cleansed, always trusts the Lord seeing cause for thanks in all things, and is looking for where the Spirit is leading. There is an evident sense of joy, an abiding peace and a flow of love that flows from the heart of any person who has become the recipient of the Holy Spirit. We

are inspired, loved and adored by the King of Love and what comes from us is that same love that we have received.

There are many enemies of the Spirit's expression in our lives. Every attitude that stands against the free flowing of the Spirit in our lives must be dealt with. We often are blind to what it is in our lives that prevents this flow. We have reservations in our commitment, fear in our faith, and conflict in our love that all adds up to a mighty fortress of spiritual opposition to the purposes of the Spirit. Have you ever sensed that your love for people or perhaps "a person" seems to find resistance? Sometimes we know full well why these feelings emerge, but there are other times when it is so subtle we can only know something isn't right. It's so easy to just shrug it off and go on without ever considering what has gone wrong. The result of this is that there is a diminished sense of love, joy and peace.

When Jesus picked up the whip and began driving out those desecrators of God's temple it was to make room for prayer.

When our lives are filled with clamor, who can pray?

I once attended a church where spiritual worship was so intermingled with offering taking that it almost seemed that the purpose of every service was to collect an offering! Is that what church is for? Do God's people need to be prodded, begged, humiliated, intimidated or bullied, to get them to give an offering? Churches need money to pay their just bills, but can't this be done in a way that brings glory to the Lord?

The purpose of any meeting being held as a function of the worship of the church should be conducive to prayer. Ministry to people should always be the primary function of every church. If we have money considerations that interfere with, or dilute, the flowing of the Spirit's power among us, it's time to get rid of those evil practices!

There is an appropriate method for all the needs of both the church and individuals to be met. When all things are in order in our lives and churches, there will be sufficient time, money, strength and resources to accomplish everything our Father has purposed for us.

A cleansed temple filled with prayer will result in an outpouring of blessing. When such is the case, there will always be ample provision for what is God's purpose.

# Chapter Thirty-five

## Pray Believing and Forgiving!

Mark 11:20-26

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

As evening came, Jesus and the disciples returned to where they were staying and in the morning set out once more for Jerusalem and the temple. On the way they came to the site of the fig tree that Jesus had spoken to the day before. To their amazement they found the tree withered from the root!

Not only did this tree experience the cutting off of the source of life sustaining nutrients, but rather, all life functions stopped and death immediately came to the tree. So abrupt was this death that the leaves had already withered by the very next day! When life is gone, the evidence of death begins to appear. We are all familiar with the process. In the case of a tree, if you cut off a limb, the sap will stop flowing. It won't be long until the cells of the leaves will die of starvation, not having received the necessary flow of sap. Once death has occurred, the process of decay is initiated. The process may be slow or fast depending on environmental conditions. The very conditions that were so conducive to growth when the tree was alive, may now contribute to its rapid decay!

What is true of trees is also true of people who have been cut off from divine favor. There is no more fearful end for a person than to have come to a point where the call of God's Spirit has stopped reaching them, and all that is left is a fearful expectation of coming judgment.

When Jesus spoke judgment to the fig tree, as we have already stated, it was symbolic of the judgment coming upon the nation of Israel. This nation would also experience being cut off from God's favor and the cessation of life that resulted in being scattered among the nations once more.

When the disciples saw the fig tree and mentioned it to Jesus, he responded using the occasion to teach them about the power that can be released through faith. He said,

Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe in your heart that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:22-24)

The first observation I would like to make about this powerful scripture is that Jesus said, "Have faith in God." He did not say, have faith in faith, or have faith in prayer, or have faith in the Bible. He said, "Have faith in God!"

What does it take to have faith in God? Doesn't real faith have to do with really knowing him? Before we can really believe in our heart that God will do what ever we say, we need a good understanding of his character, purposes, and desires concerning what we are praying for.

There is a vast difference between what we imagine in our minds to be a good or right thing, and what we know is right as a result of our time spent with the Lord. Some people believe what others have told them about God's will, but are incapable of believing because they are believing with their heads and not with their hearts since the knowledge did not come from the Holy Spirit's work in them. Man can believe a lot of things with his mind, but when he speaks them, nothing happens because he is a mortal man speaking on the shallow level of a man.

Real faith, first of all, is faith in God. There is a form of faith that is not faith in God. It too, can be a powerful force. There are people who have a strong belief in themselves and this results in a successful attitude that can lead to many good things in their lives. I do not say this is a bad form of faith, but it is not what Jesus was talking about.

There is another form of faith that reaches for spiritual power, but it does not come from the Holy Spirit's work in us. Some people have learned that by concentrating real hard a certain power begins to work and things happen. It may seem innocent enough, and even fun. They may make objects float about, or be able to do some feat of strength that is beyond their real unaided ability. Practices of this sort are condemned in the scriptures as being evil. This may not be readily visible in the beginning, but beware; if evil looked like evil in the beginning, very little evil would exist in our world!

Jesus made some very significant statements when expressing this truth. The first was that their faith must be in God. The second was that what they were to say was connected to what they had asked for in prayer! And third, that faith was a heart thing and not an action of the mind.

If we pay strict attention to these truths we will gain greater results! When a person has entered into real prayer, interacting with the Holy Spirit, his mind will be brought into harmony with the purposes of God, and the result will be, real faith arising in his heart. It isn't hard to believe God when we know God in this way.

In this teaching we also note that what is seen to be true in the prayer closet must also affect us after we leave. If we have made the transaction in prayer, and we have confidence that God has granted our request, then we must also proclaim what has been secured! There is a wonderful power released when a person has been with God, and a mountain of hindrance has been spoken to in the name of the Lord. How quickly we defeat despair! How quick hope is born! How powerful are words spoken when God has given his sanction. Horrible gloom is defeated, and hearts are caused to rejoice when God's power has been set free by one so commissioned!

There is one powerful principle that must be addressed before this subject can be left. It involves what is always a potential hazard as we live out our lives in this sin filled world. What do we do when we have been sinned against? What is the proper response when a crime has been committed against us? Jesus gave us what seemed to be a hard pill to swallow when he said, "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mark 11:26)

Truths, such as this one, can seem very hard, but they are very liberating. What a load of ill will is left behind, when we truly forgive! It is sad to see people who have been the victims of a crime or misdeed, become a victim a second time because they hold such anger, hate and even murder in their hearts. Not only does the refusal to forgive cancel forgiveness from our Father in heaven, but it also removes us from any possibility of fellowship with his Spirit!

The Holy Spirit cannot fellowship with evil. Hate, violence, vengeance, and all such like, no matter how justified, come from the sin nature within us. It is not for us to execute vengeance; that right belongs to the Lord! The Apostle Paul commented on the subject saying,

Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

We can trust the Lord to always do what is right. Many passages in the Old Testament, deal with God's vengeance being executed on the enemies of God, or his people. God will not let the guilty go free, however, we are living in the age of God's grace and God sees all men as being potential recipients of his grace.

We have all been given an abundant measure of forgiveness, how can we then withhold such love from others? When we forgive, we clear the way for the Holy Spirit to deal freely with our enemy without concern that we will botch his efforts through bitterness. If we are to dwell in heaven, and our enemy is to dwell there too, there must be love or heaven wouldn't be heaven after all.

For those criminals who reject God's love, there is a certain judgment that cannot be avoided. God has made it clear; we are to pass on the same forgiveness we have been blessed with.

When our heart is right, God will hear us when we pray! "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

# Chapter Thirty-six

## By What Authority?

Mark 11:27-33

They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'" (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

The day of the crucifixion of Jesus was very near. The events we are now dealing with are all within the final week of the crucifixion. What Jesus was doing and saying was lighting the fuse for an explosion of violence, hate and murder. Jesus was stirring the hostilities of the leaders of the Jewish people. This was necessary because it was God's plan that Jesus be crucified.

It was probably Tuesday morning when Jesus arrived again at the temple. The day before he had done the unthinkable, he had upset the tables of the moneychangers and opened the pens of the animals being offered for sale to be used as sacrifices at the temple.

This time when he walked in, things were different! Apparently there was a contingent of chief priest, teachers of the law and elders waiting for him. One of the group approached Jesus with a loaded question, "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" (Mark 11:28)

We can understand their anger even though we know how wrong they were. It's easier to see in retrospect than it is to see what is at hand. We have the advantage of being able to see with the help of history; they could only know by what they could observe. Had they known God, they would have known him. These men were religious, but they had never experienced a changed heart. They were merely custodians of the traditions handed down from their elders. Religion was their occupation and Jesus was seen as an intruder.

Jesus chose to deal with this situation non-confrontationally, and cut a deal with them.

"I will ask you one question. Answer me and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it of heaven, or from men? Tell me!" (Mark 11:29-30)

They were on the spot, and immediately they recognized the trap. They were caught between their sense of perceived duty and their desire to be looked on favorably by people.



Jesus understood what effect this question would have upon these chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people. When individuals live with this world as the focus of their attention, they care about things like this. It is important to have people think well of you.

These men were caught between their erroneous doctrine and their desire to look good. Fear froze their actions, but hate festered in their hearts! The spirit of murder is a welcome guest in the heart of such people!

They were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people, yet their actions demonstrated that they were just as lost as the people they were supposed to help. Rightly Jesus had charged them, "Blind guides." They were in the same pit of ugliness that those they served were in!

Those who have experienced the Holy Spirit coming to rest upon them are changed people. The very core of the human spirit has undergone change! Life is now resident where death once reigned. The Holy Spirit is now present to express himself. The work of the Holy Spirit within the life of an individual is a work of cleansing prompting pure actions of love, tolerance, and correction when needed. These men demonstrated none of these.

They had no apparent concern for Jesus, even as a person. All they were concerned with was the preservation of their traditions, doctrines, and religious forms. Had they had concern for Jesus really thinking he was in error, the appropriate thing to do would have been to call him in, and in love and friendship, explained what they perceived to be a problem.

Fear is at the root of hate, murder, intolerance and prejudice. We fear what we do not understand or cannot control.

Troublemakers are ruled by fear. They see some threat to what they want to protect, so they lash out, rationally or irrationally, against it. They will try to contain the problem, but if it cannot be contained, they will seek to destroy those responsible for it.

The underlying problem in this confrontation probably had very little to do with authority as an issue. It is my guess that what was really at issue here, was fear of Jesus' popularity with the people and where it might lead, rather than a question of authority.

Jesus had authority, but these men weren't ready to receive that understanding.

# Chapter Thirty-seven

## Parable of the Tenants

Mark 12:1-12

He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Having completed the discussion about authority; Jesus began to teach them with the use of parables.

One of the parables was sure to impact the religious leaders assembled. The parable was about a man who planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower. He then rented the vineyard to some farmers and went on a journey.

To the religious leaders this was no doubt strikingly similar to the passage in Isaiah chapter five. The passage was about a vineyard that had many of the same features as this parable. In Isaiah there is no doubt about whom the vineyard refers to. It's the house of Israel.

It didn't take a lot of imagination to determine that God was the owner in the parable Jesus was teaching, and that the house of Israel was the vineyard. They also could see that the tenants were the religious leaders, and the prophets were the servants sent.

The parable then takes a direct turn as he speaks about God sending his son whom he loves. Once more the connection was too much to be a coincidence. It is not clear at this point if these men knew he claimed to be the son of God, but they must have known about how the demons cried out that he was God's Son. It is also likely that the subject had come up in conversations as the leaders heard reports about his ministry. At the trial of Jesus a few days later, the high priest would ask Jesus very pointedly about this very point and in response Jesus confessed that he was God's Son. Up to this time Jesus had suppressed this sort of talk except among those who were close to him.

As I ponder this parable I realize there is no doubt about whom Jesus spoke about. Those listening knew as well. We could pass by this parable without thinking about it any further, but to do so would leave us lacking. It seems that we should at least investigate the lessons to be learned.

First I note that the owner of the vineyard had gone to considerable effort to prepare this vineyard to produce a crop. Second I note that he expected to get a return on his investment. It also seems evident that there was an agreement between the owner and the tenants that involved some sort of crop sharing.

Is it unreasonable for a landowner to expect to receive a share of what is produced on his land and from his vineyard? Was it unreasonable for God to expect to receive something from the nation of Israel?

There is a saying, "Out of sight, out of mind." In trying to understand the sort of mindset these tenants had, we might speculate that since this landowner was no longer around they probably thought he had forgotten about this little vineyard. They may have reasoned that it was their efforts that were now being spent on this piece of ground, so why pay a man when he hasn't done any work?

It's easy to forget the efforts of those who have preceded us. Humanity seems to have a tendency to forget the value of the heritage we have received. We may move into a house or apartment and never consider the builder. We may work for an employer and never appreciate the sacrifices he endured to develop the business. We live in a nation where many amenities are already in place. We may attend a church whose existence is the result of the efforts and sacrifices of many others.

These men, at the very least, did not respect the owner of the vineyard.

Greed was evidenced by their behavior. This sort of evil is more common than most of us care to acknowledge. We see this sort of greed being manifest when an employee cares only for his own salary. There is a common assumption among employees that the boss is making a fortune at their expense. It is this assumption that is behind most labor disputes. My experience with business has shown me that it often is a very wrong assumption. Most businesses that I know anything about, work on a very slim margin between profit and loss. Success often swings on very small hinges. Little things such as employee attitudes or efficiency can make all the difference between profits or losses. It is "little mindedness" that resents the boss when he prospers.

The prosperity of a nation is dependent upon the prosperity of the business community. When businesses prosper they will employ the working people who do not themselves possess either the resources or the knowledge to create a business of their own.

These men may have held the owner in contempt for a variety of reasons, but according to the facts related, he was a good and just man.

There is still another truth that we ought to take note of. When the time of harvest arrived, the owner sent a servant to collect from the tenants, but instead of giving him what was due, they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty handed. The owner then sent another servant to them; this one they struck on the head and treated him shamefully. He then sent still another; this one they killed. The owner then sent many more servants; some they beat others they killed. Finally the owner sent his son to them thinking surely they would respect him but when they saw him they said, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." (Mark 12:7)

When evil enters the heart of man, no sin is too great to commit. When these men started on this road of evil, their first act was a little violence and intimidation. Then the next incident was even more violent and bizarre. What was intimidation was now shameful behavior; intimidation was now being replaced by humiliation. Having done all of this, there was only one thing left, murder.

A church I once attended wanted to build a new building. The property had been purchased and the plans were drawn up. They applied to the planning commission for the appropriate permit and the project was approved. All seemed well until just before the appeal date expired. A protest was lodged against them. Because the protest had been filed, the matter had to go before the county board of supervisors for a vote. The day arrived for the hearing and the room was soon filled with

representatives of several pressure groups known to be in opposition to the evangelical point of view. TV cameras were brought into the room and the opposition alienated itself against this little church congregation. The result of this was that the board that had previously given "off-the-record" assurances to the pastor that there would not be a problem reversed themselves and defeated the project. After the hearing was over, it was reported that a member of the board commented that they had set a precedent in the county by saying no to God!

This is only one small incident, many more such things are happening all over America today. Is it any wonder that violence is filling our land?

The natural flow of everything is from order to disorder, from the beauty of life to corruption, and from energy to stagnation. It is only in the presence of an intervening intelligence that order can come from chaos.

The men in our story may have been intelligent honorable men when the vineyard was given over to them, but the end result was corrupt and evil.

The main focus of the story was directed toward Israel. It was a vivid description of how they had been given a sacred charge. The nation was God's nation; the people were God's people. The nation was expected to produce the good fruit of righteousness but instead they were producing the wild fruit of the flesh. Repeatedly God had sent his servants to them; they beat some, wounded others and killed still others. Now standing in their midst was Jesus, God's one and only begotten Son. This parable should have pricked their consciences but instead they sought to kill him!

# Chapter Thirty-eight

## Pay Taxes?

Mark 12:13-17

Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

Persistently, the religious leaders tried to stop Jesus who was no small threat to them. They were convinced that if something weren't done about this man from Galilee, there would be big trouble. Everywhere Jesus went large crowds followed him. His popularity was growing as he went about healing sick people, casting out demons, and ministering to those with troubled lives. Standing up to the religious leaders was also, no doubt, appealing to many of the people. It seems that a strategy meeting must have been called. The problem they had to solve was how to discredit Jesus.

Someone had an idea; call some Herodians. The Herodians were a political sect that favored the rule of Herod. The Pharisees normally had very little to do with the Herodians, but they each had a common fear.

Fear has a way of forming strange alliances. These two groups shared one common agreement; Rome should not be angered. Talk of Jesus being a king was no doubt viewed as equally troubling. They each had an interest in discrediting Jesus.

Psychology wasn't a recognized science in that day; nevertheless, basic psychological skills were understood. The approach these men used was the old "butter-him-up" technique. Jesus however, saw through their charade, but answered their question.

They thought they had him between a rock and a hard place, as the saying goes. Many of the religious people resented having to pay taxes to Rome, and some even refused to. The Herodians, on the other hand, were in sympathy with Rome.

They came to Jesus with this question, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay taxes or shouldn't we?" (Mark 12:14-15)

Jesus saw through their hypocrisy, but answered, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription? 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then Jesus said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.'" (Mark 12:16-17)

There is a place for government. Without good government, chaos is the result. A stable government usually provides a good environment in which to live. All societies need boundaries to live within. Christians generally support governments so long as the governments don't interfere with their faith in God or ask them to do something that is in violation of their moral or spiritual conscience.

Paying taxes should not be viewed as any kind of endorsement of governments then or now. Those paying taxes have very little say, if anything, about how those taxes will be spent. The rule seems to be the same as it is in any other transaction. If someone has something and we buy it from them, we have absolutely no responsibility in what they do with what is given to them.

Those whose lives have come under the Spirit's control recognize the responsibility they have both to the government and to the Lord. Giving to the Lord is an expression of the heart.

"One man gives freely, yet gains more, another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:24-25) These and other scriptures reveal the correct attitude concerning giving. Resentment over having to pay taxes to a government that indulges in many excesses is understandable, but giving to the Lord is sure to bring blessing and joy to the giver. Generosity is still being rewarded, and the person upon whom the spirit has come to rest, still listens to the still small voice of the Spirit when he speaks regarding giving.

Although tithing is not directly addressed in the New Testament, this passage came very close to making a very positive statement regarding it. When we consider the context of who Jesus was speaking to, we immediately see that tithing was, without a doubt, what he was speaking of. Tithing was regarded as God's part; so saying the word, tithe, was not necessary. The giving of tithe in the days of the law was for the purpose of the support of the house and work of God. Since the work of the Lord is not finished and his workers still need to be supported, tithe is still a reasonable and needed practice. Whether we view tithing as a requirement or a blessing, it is without a doubt pleasing to the Lord; and very much needed by those who are responsible for the bills of the church.

II Corinthians chapters eight and nine have much to say on the subject of giving. In them we find these words,

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (II Cor. 9:6-8)

# Chapter Thirty-nine

## Marriage in Heaven?

Mark 12:18-27

Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him 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 and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

The efforts to trip Jesus up continued to intensify. The Pharisees and Elders had been taking their best shots at him, and now the sect of the Sadducees came forward with their pet doctrine.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. They had searched the scriptures (they only accepted the first five books as being canon) and hadn't found any evidence of it being taught so they deducted that it couldn't be.

They were of the same mind set as those who teach "soul sleep." That is a doctrine that says there is a resurrection, but that those who die are in a state of death-sleep until resurrection day. This is based on some of the same scriptures that the Sadducees were looking at, scriptures that speak of the dead as knowing nothing. What each of these failed to take into account was that what those scriptures are talking about is that the dead body is truly dead. So far as living persons are concerned, death is the end of any part in the affairs of this life. All connections are severed and the dead are not to exercise any further control over those still living.

King Saul demonstrated the existence of a belief in the living soul when he wanted to communicate with Samuel the prophet after Samuel was already dead. Saul went to the witch of Endor and asked her to call up the Spirit of Samuel so he could talk to him. Samuel or an impersonation of him did appear and gave him a prophecy of doom. (Normally witches do not call up actual spirits of departed souls but rather demonic impersonations.) Even though, what Saul did was wrong, and whether it was Samuel or an impersonation, I cannot say; the story does say that Samuel appeared. From this story we can see that the people of Saul's day understood that the dead did not cease to exist.

With the understanding that the Sadducees believed this way, it is even more evident that they were trying to pick an issue with Jesus.

Moses had written a command concerning what to do if a man should die having a wife, but having had no offspring. In such a case, if the man had a brother he was to marry her and have children by her for his brother.

The Sadducees had concocted a hypothetical situation to try to show a contradiction between these teachings. The question was one that is still a concern to many people today, in spite of this teaching.

When a person goes to heaven and they have had more than one spouse what will happen? Will the former spouse be jealous of the second spouse? Or, as in the case of the story of the Sadducees, whose spouse will she be?

There was an obvious error in the thinking of these men. Heaven is a place where death is not present. Since there is no death in Heaven, there is no need for reproduction. The angels do not die, therefore; there is no need for a male-female arrangement. Sexuality is an invention for the earth; it has no part in heaven.

Our thinking needs to be lifted to a higher level of understanding. When we understand the power of God, we understand that heaven is different from the earth. The laws of physics that govern this world are not the same in heaven. The sense of attachment that we feel in this world will not be the same in heaven either. There will be love, but that love will be an unselfish, non-possessive love that will not care about such things as marital status. That concern belongs to the earth, and will remain with the earth.

Many people suffer great stress over this matter. In the heat of romantic passion they worry about what their spouse will do when they are gone, will they marry again? Others who have lost a spouse and have remarried, perhaps against the expressed desire of their former spouse, worry about what will happen when they meet in heaven; will there be war in heaven? How foolish we are. Marriage is until death alone shall part us. No matter how beautiful the relationship has been, it is still of the earth!

Those who walk after the Spirit don't try to violate those areas that they do not have authority over. To try to enslave the mind, emotions and will of a spouse in such a way as to control them after they are left behind is a violation of the principle of marriage itself. The apostle Paul speaks to this matter, "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." (I Cor. 7:39)

Jesus concluded the discussion with the Sadducees by referring to a scripture that clearly teaches that the dead really are still living, even though they are no longer of the earth. "God said to him (Moses), 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" (Mark 12:26) In referring to this statement by God to Moses the whole question of the state of the dead was put to rest once for all on a sound Biblical base. He ended the discussion with the comment, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken." There is no need for further comment. Dead does not mean dead in the total sense, those departed are very much alive, and God is still their God. They are now with him in heaven, if they indeed belong to him. (See, 2 Cor. 5:6-10) The rest await their final doom in the place of torment! (See, Luke 16:19-31)



# Chapter Forty

## The Greatest Commandment

Mark 12:28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

While Jesus and the Sadducees were debating the issue concerning marriage and the resurrection, a teacher of the law became interested in what was taking place. He too, had a question for Jesus. He wanted to know which of the commandments was the most important. Jesus responded,

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:29-31, Duet. 6:4, Lev. 19:18)

For the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest, there was no question about this point. The Spirit's focus is always upon the relationship of the believer to our Father in Heaven. His second concern has to do with human relationships.

In quoting these scriptures, Jesus was also affirming the teaching concerning the unity of God. I have heard accusations against those who believe in the Trinity, that they believe in three Gods. This of course is not the case. The plurality of the Godhead does not in any way distract from the "one-God" principle. Those individuals who hold that believing in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit believe in three Gods, need to consider one simple fact. My wife and I have five children, yet we are one family. We have been united in holy matrimony, therefore; we are one in the flesh. The apostle Paul in his argument concerning not committing sexual immorality made these statements:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in Spirit. (I Cor. 6:15-17)

These verses demonstrate the Biblical use of the “one” concept. “One” can have a different meaning according to the contextual setting and what is implied by its use. In the Hebrew language there are two words used that are each translated one. “Yachad” speaks of absolute unity, a mathematical or numerical one. “Echad” on the other hand, speaks of a compound or collective unity. Examples of its use in scriptures are: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” (Gen. 2:4) Other references, Ezra 3:1 and 1Chron. 12:38 all demonstrate this truth. This collective singular as opposed to an absolute singular is what has confused some people. Where God is concerned it is always the collective singular. One (Yachad) God means; God, though three persons is still one God.

When Jesus said that the Lord is one, it did not mean that he was not God made flesh and dwelling among us. Nor did this mean that Jesus was the Father in physical form. What it did teach however, was, that the whole issue about what is a God, is a closed issue. Even though we as Christians are said to be the children of God, and dear children at that, we still are not gods! The Godhead is complete we are not a part of that. The status we enjoy as being one with Christ, though great, does not mean that we can in some way act outside the parameters of our relationship with Christ. To be in Christ is to be one with him, and that oneness with him gives us special benefits as we act in his behalf by the power of the Holy Spirit that indwells us.

Those who act outside the parameters of the Spirit’s power and directives have become a god unto themselves. To do this now is as dangerous as it was in the beginning. When Satan tempted Eve to become like God, he cunningly failed to tell her the truth about one issue; she would become a god simply because she was in rebellion against God! It is no compliment to be called a god. To be a god, one must be in rebellion against the true and living God! Man can never be a god really, but when he acts in independence he is exercising that god quality of self-determination. To do this is pure folly. Jesus Christ is the only source of life for man. We must stay in him to be the recipients of that life. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Remaining in Jesus is an essential teaching for every Christian to understand. Even Jesus taught that he would not act outside the revealed will of his Father.

The nature of fallen man is self-serving to the core. Jesus quoted two commandments that attack the very nature of fallen man, the commands to love God and our neighbor. To obey these commands requires a death to that fallen nature. This is something no man was able to accomplish until the Holy Spirit was given. Now that the Spirit has come to indwell us, we are able to produce the very righteousness of God by the Spirit's power that dwells in us.

We are not under the law as a legal force, however; we are still under the law as a righteous principle. I, personally, view the law as a definition of the righteous nature of God, and what constitutes a violation against that nature. Because I view violations against God as sin, I see all sin as a violation against the very nature of God. David seemed to have had a similar view of sin when he wrote that it was against God and only God that he had sinned. (Ps. 51:4)

When God created man, he created him with many of the same characteristics as himself. (We know that we are not an exact reproduction of God because God has characteristics that man does not have.) We were created with a nature patterned after God's nature. It is this nature that was affected after the fall producing the activities we have come to know as sin. Thus, a regenerated nature is capable of producing the righteous acts of God! When a man continues in activities of sin after he has received God's Spirit, discipline will follow since God cannot fellowship with sin. The Holy Spirit is grieved by those who persist in walking after the flesh instead of walking after the Spirit.

To walk in love for God is to walk in obedience to his words. To walk in love for our neighbor is to walk in obedience to God's words as well. Jesus said, the second greatest command was like the first. Obedience to each requires the power of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore, the ones upon whom the Spirit has come to rest who are enabled to live and walk in the Spirit.

# Chapter Forty-one

## Whose Son is Christ?

Mark 12:35-40

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and 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."

John states the fact that Jesus was pre-existent, in his gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

Jesus was an active participant in the creation of the world. Many have tried to tamper with this teaching about Jesus. Everyone who dares to dilute this truth will ultimately find himself in the very uncomfortable position of being on the outside of God's favor, looking in. The teaching that Jesus is God is the cornerstone teaching of the gospels concerning him. Jesus also credited prophecy with being given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The teachers of the law had overlooked a very important truth about the coming Christ. That truth was that Christ was David's Lord! They had correctly assigned this prophecy, found in Psalms 110, to the coming Christ. Jesus was asking the question about how the Christ could be the Son of David if he was David's Lord. This meant that he would have to be pre-existent even to David! He was not denying that he would be the Son of David. What he wanted to point out was that the Christ would be God made flesh. Matthew opened his gospel with the introduction of Jesus as being the son of David.

There could be only one correct conclusion concerning the Christ; that being, he would have to be God made flesh and dwelling among us. This would lead us to the conclusion that this man would be a one of a kind, never to be duplicated, human being who would also be God! Humanly speaking, he would be the son of David, but in reality he would be God among us. Though he didn't apply this truth to himself at this time, he was laying the theological ground for that understanding.

Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. This truth in no way takes from the fact that Jesus was "Immanuel" which means, God with us. This was stated to Joseph by the angel who visited him at the time that Mary conceived Jesus. He was all human yet he was all God! As a man he was able to be our example of what it is like to be a human being without sin. He, though God, did all the things humans do, except sin. He was every bit human, and he functioned as a human being with reference to his relationship with the Father. This meant he prayed and received his instructions from his Father. He also was the recipient of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was this relationship that became most instructive to us as we function as children of God.

# Chapter Forty-two

## Teachers of the Law—A Widow Gives a Gift.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18) The teachers of the law were noted for their love of position and acclaim. They walked around in flowing robes, being greeted in the marketplaces, and seated in places of honor at banquets. They prayed long prayers for show, but where it counted, they were corrupt.

Pride comes in many forms and degrees. It will manifest in all sorts of arrogant behaviors. It is selfish and self-seeking. Never try to correct a person with pride; pride is never wrong in the eyes of the one so possessed, nor can the person so possessed receive instruction. Pride has a close relative, greed.

Perhaps this was the reason Mark reported that Jesus went to the place in the temple where the people put their offerings in the treasury. As he sat and watched the crowd putting their money in the temple treasury many rich people threw in large amounts. One can only guess how these people may have done this. One thing is certain; it was done visibly leaving no doubt that the gifts were large. I suppose human nature is still the same today.

Yet, there are those wonderful exceptions! As Jesus sat watching, a widow woman came and deposited two very small copper coins in the temple treasury. They were only worth a fraction of a penny! How embarrassed some people feel when they do their little bit for the Lord! I do not think this woman thought very much about what she did. She probably thought it was very insignificant, but it was all she could do. There was, however, one sitting near by who saw and understood. He saw and knew the full significance of what was taking place. He knew it was all she had and from this, Jesus set forth a most astonishing teaching about how God views giving. It was not the quantity that touched his heart; it was what the gift represented. The rich folk that were there that day could not begin to compete with this kind of giving!

This poor widow woman did not come to display her gift. Poverty does not allow pride to do very well. This woman may have been rich one day; we do not know. Almost certainly she had known better days. She had suffered the loss of a husband. For women in the cultures of the East, losing a husband is a fate, in some cases, worse than death!

There is something very remarkable about this woman, she may have lost her pride, but she did not lose her faith! Giving must have been a way of life for her so she gave what she had to give! I feel sure that Jesus knew she was coming. He did not go there to count the amount of money going into the treasury that day; I feel sure he went there to see the widow!

I once read the account of a vision someone allegedly had of heaven. In the vision this person was being shown around heaven. The angel and this person came to a street corner and saw a mansion of astonishing beauty. The person reporting the vision asked the angel whose house it was, thinking it was probably some famous person. The angel replied that it was the widow's house that Jesus saw giving at the temple!

I do not know if some people have nicer mansions than others in heaven, or even if there are mansions as we would think of them, but I am convinced that no one can possibly give anything to the Lord out of a pure heart of love without a very special note being made of it. Jesus said,

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 6:38)

And if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward. (Matt. 10:42)

This woman, humble as she was, set a standard of giving that no one has ever been able to more than just match.

A truth is set forth here in this passage that is of great comfort to those individuals who are deprived of the wealth of the world. You can give to the Lord what you have to give, and it is counted as being great on the basis of how it compares to what your ability is. Gifts or sacrifices are not measured by amounts; the spirit of giving measures them! This truth is confirmed by the Apostle Paul in chapters eight and nine of II Corinthians. Here is an example of what is said, "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not what he does not have." (II Cor. 8:12)

Giving to the Lord is an act of worship, "No one is to appear before me empty handed" (Exodus 34:20b) is a scripture that expresses the heart of God regarding giving. There are many more passages that confirm the heart of God regarding the giving of his people. Some people object to the teaching of tithing saying, "that's law" but they fail to recognize that the law reveals the heart of God. If God loved the cheerful giver under law, how much more must he love one under Grace!

# Chapter Forty-three

## Look at these Buildings!

Mark 13:1-2

As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!

Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.

Jesus, the man upon whom the Spirit had come to rest, had come to the temple that had been built in his honor. Perhaps, not even the disciples comprehended this truth! These buildings had big massive stones and ornate columns; they were very impressive buildings! The rabbis called this place "the light of the earth." It was the heart of the city. There always was a large crowd here in the outer courtyard that covered thirty-two acres.

I can almost see the disciples who were not accustomed to seeing this sight, standing in amazement. They were Galileans, and this was the big city, the hub of everything that these people held dear. The temple was especially precious to them, so they traveled long distances just to come and worship here. I don't know if Jesus seemed oblivious to the beauty of what was here—perhaps that is why the disciples called attention to it.

Such things as beautiful buildings impress natural man.

I remember when I was in India visiting a missionary work. We went to a town in Rajastan that had an interesting history. There was a man made lake that a king had made for one of his wives. In the middle of the lake was an island with a building that was once her home. It is a tourist attraction now with a restaurant. My friends wanted me to take a boat and go out and have lunch there. They didn't want to go; I suppose they didn't feel right about spending that much money, but they encouraged me to go anyway. I am sure it would have been an interesting experience, but I really was not interested. I did not go to India to see the sights; I went there to minister to people. What excited me was seeing an entire village turn to Jesus when one of their young men, who had been terribly demonized, was set free from demons! Seeing their culture was an experience that I will never forget, but remembering the people who came to Jesus was the outstanding feature of the trip.

When we have been touched by the Spirit's power we sometimes see what others do not see. This was the case with Jesus. He was not on a sight seeing tour, there was much that needed to be said and stones were of more value as teaching tools than objects to be admired!

Stockton California has an avenue on which a junior college and a university are located. It also has several malls and shopping centers. In short it is an avenue that, at least locally, is something to be proud of. Our ministry was once located on this avenue as a street outreach. One day while I was in the prayer room praying I began to call to the Lord to come to Stockton in a special visitation of his presence. All at once I saw in vision, the Lord coming through the air toward the city but as he got close I saw him turn his head away in a gesture that a person makes when they have suddenly been struck by a very unpleasant odor. At this point, I wondered about this and then as I looked down I saw what the problem was. In the vision I saw raw sewage running in the street. This was spiritual, of course, this part of town is not dirty, but spiritually it was a stench! A few days later I saw another

vision. Again it was this same avenue; this time I saw desolation. There were no buildings only the street. Sand and tumble weeds were blowing across the street. What I learned from these two visions was that what humans see and are so proud of, in God's sight, are a stench and desolation!

We, as human beings are often very proud of our achievements, but a day is coming when none of the things we hold so dear in this world will give us any comfort. Jesus said of the stones, "Every one will be thrown down!" (Mark 13:2b)

We cannot leave this place of viewing and discussing the buildings and the great stones of the temple, without calling attention to the fact that Jesus was also speaking in the prophetic voice. It happened some forty years or so later, depending on whose calculation of time dating we might use, that this was literally fulfilled in the destruction of the temple and all the adjoining structures by the Roman army in AD 70.

All these things that seemed so indestructible were really only temporary. The permanency of anything in this world is dependent upon God's power to sustain it. When God's power is lifted from anything, it is only a matter of time until it will meet with destruction. God often deals with people for long periods of time, and then finally, when no response is found to his tender dealing, he lifts his hand and destruction comes.

Those individuals, upon whom the Spirit has come to rest, always seem to see from a different perspective from all other people. This can be somewhat uncomfortable at times, but its rewards are outstanding!



# Chapter Forty-four

## What the Future Holds

Mark 13:1-37

As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

"But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 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.

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away:

He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Chapter thirteen of the Book of Mark is written to answer questions about what the future holds.

As they were leaving the temple, one of the disciples called attention to the magnificent buildings and huge stones of the temple and its surroundings to which Jesus responded that not one stone would remain on top of the other! The balance of the chapter deals with other matters of interest concerning the general theme of Eschatology. There were warnings about things they would have to suffer and how they should react to them. Jesus talked about natural disasters and conflicts between nations and people. These things must come, but they are not what signal the end. Their role with reference to the end is nothing more than a labor pain that proceeds the hour of the birth of a baby. Labor pains do not tell us when a baby will be born, only that the time is near!

Some of what is spoken in this chapter had its fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Rome under the command of General Titus, of the Roman army, in AD 70. The destruction of the city was devastating to the population of Jewish people who lived in Jerusalem and through out the land of Israel. The nation had been under the authority of Rome for many years and the desire to be free had resulted in uprisings from time to time. At this particular point in history a group of rebels took control of the city of Jerusalem. There were a large number of people in Jerusalem at this time. It has been estimated to be between two and three million people, although modern scholars realize this was not likely accurate. The rebels fought among themselves and the innocent people of Jerusalem were victims, first of the rebels, and later of the Roman army.

Food became a major problem in the city as the rebels set about to burn the supplies of each other. Starvation claimed the lives of many people that also led to many related atrocities. The morale of the city was so low that a deep sense of hopelessness resulted in cannibalism.

The end result of the war was the total destruction of the temple and much of the city. What Jesus had prophesied came to pass, not one of the stones remained on the other. The power of the people to rebel against Rome was virtually broken and within the next few years they would be scattered among the nations of the world. Had it not been for the Roman army entering the city there likely would not have been any survivors. As it was, only a remnant survived to be carried into captivity.

Jesus had warned the Christians who lived in Jerusalem and when they saw what was happening and being warned by the Spirit, fled to Pella in Perea.

Just how much of this chapter was fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, and what remains to be fulfilled in the last hours of this present age, is the subject of much debate. There is, however, one important inescapable message in this chapter, "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!" (Mark 13:33-37)

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of prophecy forecasting and forget that there is a world that needs to hear this gospel message. Our job of proclaiming the message of the love of God for lost humanity is not finished and will not be finished until every soul that is to be won has been won. God has a predetermined plan that he did not share with man or angels nor even Jesus, while veiled in human flesh. We are commissioned to proclaim this gospel and to be alert, watchful and ready!

# Chapter Forty-five

## A Woman in Tune with the Spirits Desire.

Mark 14:1-9

"Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot.

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

The appointed hour of Jesus' death was now very close at hand. The chief priests and teachers of the law were plotting the death of Jesus. Jesus was also making preparations for his final hours. What needed to be done was being done, outwardly by Jesus, and behind the scenes by the Spirit's direction.

The Holy Spirit works upon the spirit of people; while outwardly, we are being challenged by circumstances. By these two means, the Father's will is being worked out, and his eternal purposes are thus served.

The story before us is one of those stories where people are acting out the purposes of God in a very natural manner. Whatever part the Holy Spirit had in the process, we can only guess. This meal may have simply been the plan of some very grateful people, but it is my guess that the Holy Spirit had a great deal to do with it! It was one of those moments when too many events were coming together at one time to be a coincidence.

The meal was put on in Jesus' honor. There were some very special people present. Simon, who had been a Leper, and Lazarus who had been dead, buried and raised back to life by Jesus! Martha was there also serving while Mary was busy about another matter. Martha, who had once complained to Jesus about her sister's preoccupation with him, was left with all the work of preparing the meal. On this occasion, however, she seems to have been at peace with herself and her role. We do not know the entire guest list, but we do know that the twelve were there.

Somehow Mary got an idea. We cannot know for sure why, but she did a very remarkable thing. She took a jar of very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus! How did she come to have it with her? Was it planned?

Consider this, while sitting listening to him it could have occurred to Mary that she should thank Jesus for all he had done, and especially for raising her brother Lazarus from death. Being moved with

a surge of gratitude, she may have returned to her home to find something that would express the immense emotion she was feeling. Upon arriving home she began to look about at her most treasured possessions for just the right gift to give to Jesus. As she searched, nothing seemed to do. What could she give him? It would have been at this point that the Spirit drew her attention to the perfume! It probably made absolutely no sense at all, but she must take it and pour it on Jesus! This kind of perfume was purchased by people of means, and kept for the day of their burial. To pour it on a living person would seem like irrational waste! Yet, she must do it! Mary's love, gratitude, and desire to do something for Jesus, put her in a position to act in a prophetic role. Did she know that he was about to die? I do not know for sure, Jesus had spoken about it, but I don't think anyone really understood his words. Jesus knew why it was being done, this we do know. It was being poured on him in advance of his burial. Mary may not have known it, but this was her last opportunity to express her love! After his death she would not be permitted to go to where his body lay. When she finally could go, it was too late; he had already risen!

Sensitivity to what the Spirit of God is seeking to accomplish is what sets certain individuals apart as privileged participants in God's plan. Judas by contrast was at cross-purposes with the plan of God. It was this condition of heart that apparently led him to become a traitor. Mary's heart on the other hand was in harmony with the Spirit's desire on this all-important night in history!

Those who receive the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, experience fellowship with the Lord Jesus through the ongoing dealings of the Spirit as he works out our Father's will in and through us. To be a vessel so used is a privilege of the highest order. Not only did Mary reap the reward of being used in a unique way, she also was blessed with the special favor of the Lord Jesus as he promised that her story would be told wherever the Gospel would be preached.

The story of Mary is a source of encouragement to all who feel less fortunate than others. Can they ever hope to achieve notoriety or favor from the Lord? In the kingdom of God everyone has equal potential for recognition and greatness! No one is so sinful that he cannot be cleansed, healed, delivered and restored to a position of favor with God! God's grace abounds to all who will receive, and the Holy Spirit will work in every heart that has been cleansed by the blood of the Savior! Once sin has been washed away, it is removed forever. A vessel once cleansed is a pure vessel and the Holy Spirit fills pure vessels. All vessels washed in the blood of Jesus are pure! We can follow in the steps of Mary, and bring our gift of love to him. He will receive us and honor us for his love reaches us no matter how twisted and complicated our lives have become. He will take us as we are and use us for his purposes.

# Chapter Forty-six

## Betrayed

Mark 14:10-11,17-21

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me."

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?"

"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Judas was a man who would sell his hero to a mob! He represented a large crowd of people who had a similar attitude.

We wonder, "How could he do it? How could he sell Jesus to that mob?" At one point Jesus had called him a devil! But was he really a devil? Not in the sense of a Satanic embodiment, but a devil in the sense that his very heart of hearts was so in tune with Satanic purposes that it could be said of him that he was a devil! This condition is not unique to this man called Judas Iscariot; there are many such individuals. Some people feel sorry for Judas thinking that he was in some way forced into this role because it was a fulfillment of prophecy. I personally do not see it that way at all. It is my belief that Judas was chosen because he was a Son of Perdition. God did not make him one, he was one, for whatever reasons; we can only speculate. There are so many who are like him, he was no special creation, only one available to demonstrate to the world the seriousness of being one who harbors thoughts and attitudes that have their origin in hell.

Judas was chosen to be one of the twelve. There is no indication that he was treated any differently than any of the other disciples. He was commissioned along with them to go preach the gospel of the kingdom, heal the sick, cast out devils, and all the other works of God they had been seeing Jesus do. He heard all the same teaching, witnessed all the same compassion, and I feel sure felt the same love that they all felt.

It is speculated that Judas was a man driven by a lust for power who genuinely believed that Jesus was going to become king of the Jews, and thus overthrow the power of Rome. As one of his closest companions he was sure to be in a position to receive a high office, perhaps even treasurer. Jesus had already given him the responsibility of carrying the moneybag.

It is further speculated that Judas could have felt that his act of betrayal would force Jesus into taking a position politically.

Judas knew that Jesus had escaped mobs before, and likely expected him to escape again. If this is true, then one can understand why he acted the way he did when it became evident that Jesus was going to indeed be crucified.

It is not at all unusual for people to act against God, believing that their actions are helping God in some way! Judas was not living with the kingdom of heaven as his primary concern. He was concerned with the here and now!

Money was a powerful motivator to Judas. It was Judas who objected when Mary anointed Jesus with the perfume. He used the excuse that it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. The observation was made however, that he wanted the money to come to the bag he carried because he was a thief, and helped himself to what was put into the bag.

It's a dangerous thing to allow our hearts to be consumed with the interests of this life. To do so is to be concerned with what is being used by Satan to divert us from what we are called to do. The apostle John said,

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (I John 2:15-17)

Judas' downfall seems to have come simply because he failed to comprehend that this was not a political game, but rather, he was dealing with Almighty God.

# Chapter Forty-seven

## The Lord's Supper

Mark 14:12-26

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?"

"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Nothing provides a better opportunity for friends to communicate with each other than the atmosphere created by sharing a meal. Jesus had many things to share as the hour of his death was now approaching. Mark doesn't give us the profound teachings that were reported in John's Gospel but rather centralized on two issues, the first being the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot and the second the symbols of his body and his blood. Mark also notes that it was a large upper room where they met.

I find this a most remarkable incident although some commentators have tried to make it quite ordinary.

Apparently the owner of the house was expecting them to come. Why he was expecting them is not clear. It isn't known if Jesus had talked to the man in advance or if he just had the room ready in case someone would need it.

People gathered at Jerusalem for the occasion of this Passover feast from all over this region of the world. It was customary for the local residents to entertain these people and provide for them as best they could.

No matter, this man was willing to share his home with Jesus. We don't know who he was, but we do know of his hospitality.

It is not known how the man knew they were coming or if he even knew Jesus. Possibly he was a faithful follower who they all knew, but it seems that if that were the case, Jesus could have simply said, to go to a certain place and meet Joe or Tom or who ever it was. It seems reasonable to believe that this man's heart had been prepared for this occasion, perhaps by a visitation of the Holy Spirit in a dream or an angelic visit. God has a way of preparing hearts. Sometimes God uses very simple things, such as desires to share with others what God has graciously bestowed. If that was the case, all Jesus had to do was reveal to his disciples who he was, and they would be met with a ready heart to give!

What a thrill this man must have received, when looking back on this event, he realized his house had been selected by God to serve divine purposes! We can speculate about a lot of things, but one thing is certain, Jesus needed a place to meet with his disciples and one was provided!

Since we have already spent time talking about Judas, we will pass over this point except to say that the betrayal cast an ugly dark cloud over an already deeply emotional moment in the life of Jesus Christ. How tragic that one of the inner circle would be the one used by Satan to turn Jesus over to his enemies!

This story seems to show us that not even Jesus was allowed the luxury of not having to deal with false brethren! Not only did God allow it to happen but also it was foreordained. Despite the fact that this occasion was overshadowed by the betrayal incident, it was still a very intimate and important occasion.

Jesus was spending his last hours with his faithful followers, sharing with them this Passover meal. All over Jerusalem people were gathering to remember what had been done for the nation on the night they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt. However, in this upper room where Jesus was, something more was taking place!

While Jesus was serving the meal it became apparent that what was being done, not only looked back, but it also looked to the present! When Jesus took the bread and gave thanks for it and broke it and gave it to his disciples, he said, "Take it; this is my body."!! (Mark 14:22) This was not what he was supposed to say! Whether the disciples understood the meaning at the time or not is doubtful, yet I am sure it didn't come as a total surprise. They had become accustomed to Jesus teaching in a different vein. It wasn't until after the resurrection that they began to understand events such as this.

“Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14:23)

The profoundness of this event escaped them that night I am sure, yet there was a seriousness about the occasion that filled the air. The Lord had been speaking to them about the fact that he was going to die, and grief filled their hearts, but so did a resolve in the heart of Peter!

"When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Mark 14:26)



# Chapter Forty-eight

## Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

Mark 14:27-31

"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same."

What we see in Peter was a worshipful attitude toward Christ. He respected him as being the Christ and held to the hope that all Israel held to, that the Christ would become their king and set the nation free from the domination of other nations. This however, was a flawed view of the mission of Christ resulting erroneous thinking and hearing.

We hear what we wish to hear. That is the plague of the human condition. We are a three part being, spirit, soul and body. What we consciously think is deemed important if it satisfies what is most urgently pressing us. We have needs that arise from each of these levels so what we value, believe or understand to be truth will temper all decisions we make. What we think about is important because it is a reflection of our beliefs. What we say is also important for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The things we think about, talk about, and are entertained with, all speak of what value system we hold to.

If we hold to values that spring from an understanding of who God is and what God is like, and that understanding is an accurate one; then our conduct will be the outgrowth of convictions based upon those concepts.

Peter had a flawed concept of God's plan, making adjustments in his thinking concerning the cross of Christ difficult. The Lord had already rebuked Peter, but he evidently still didn't understand why! Old deeply rooted beliefs are hard to change. Even now after all Jesus had said about going to Jerusalem and suffering at the hands of the elders, all the disciples were ready to take up arms and fight for Jesus. They thought he was preparing for war and that he was just being fatalistic in his talk. They were set up for disillusionment and despair because; they could not comprehend the redemptive mission of Jesus.

Had Peter been able to hear the words of Jesus in the manner intended, he would likely have asked Jesus what his role ought to be, or what he should do. Had he asked him instead of trying to tell him, he likely would not have denied him!

It's our preconceive ideas that get us into trouble, where God is concerned. It's when we think we have learned it all, and have settled back to simply judge everything by our own understanding, that we begin to stagnate. There is always something that needs to be seen in a new light. We should never

cease to be the student and always have hearing ears directed heavenward listening for those special teachings and insights that come from above.

Knowledge is filtered through the maze of previously learned precepts. Sometimes this is a good thing and sometimes it is a handicap. It is when we have learned from highly regarded sources and find that those sources are flawed that the struggle begins.

I recall dealing with some folks who came into our fellowship from a different theological background. Much to my alarm, after experiencing what they had been taught was a wrong doctrine, and finding that what they were now experiencing was a very real and credible experience, became open to the exploration of all sorts of ideas and doctrines that they had been taught against. This was a very dangerous response to the acceptance of new light. The end result of such abandon often is the acceptance of error as truth. Whereas we need to have a teachable spirit, we also need to recognize that there are very clever deceivers waiting to take advantage of the doctrinally naive.

Peter's preconceive ideas got in his way of hearing the words of Jesus, and his heart became bent upon trying to defend Jesus with fleshly means. It is interesting to me that Jesus not only permitted Peter the opportunity to act out on his desire to use force, but, according to Luke, also inquired to make sure someone had a sword. From this we learn that Jesus was concerned about Peter learning this lesson well. However, it wasn't just Peter who needed to learn it, but all the disciples.

The weapons of our warfare are not guns, sword or any other natural means. We are to recognize that there is an adversary the Devil who is our enemy, and the way to fight him is through the name of Jesus!

Peter would learn his lesson well that night, but it was a very painful lesson indeed.

# Chapter Forty-nine

## Agony in the Garden

Mark 14:32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?" Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

The time had come for Jesus to fulfill the mission that had brought him to this world. He was about to be betrayed into the hands of those who would crucify him. After instructing the disciples to wait where they were, he took Peter, James and John and proceeded to another place of prayer where Jesus requested that they keep watch while he went a little farther and prayed. After about an hour Jesus returned and found them sleeping. Humanly speaking, sleeping at a time like this left them vulnerable to an attack by those who sought to kill Jesus. Even after being awakened they returned to sleep, and had to be awakened two more times, demonstrating the lack of discipline they possessed in both natural and spiritual matters. They were neither dependable watchmen nor partners in prayer.

The attention in Mark is more on the behavior of the disciples than on the agony of the Lord. However, Mark does give us very important glimpses into the intensity of the emotion and the prayer offered by our Lord. They are very instructive glimpses to be sure, and it is fitting that they would be reported here in this book that is about the man upon whom the Spirit came to rest. We are told that Jesus prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.' (Mark 14:35-36)

The night had been long and very emotional. John reveals that much of the dialog of the evening and the meal was filled with intense emotions as well. Jesus had confronted Judas who got up and left. The serving of the cup and the bread was also an emotional moment with very serious words as the Lord revealed the purpose of these emblems for use in the church. These weren't ho-hum events as the Holy Spirit was right there burning these words into their remembrance for use throughout the church age!

By the time the disciples got to the garden they were in desperate need of some sleep! It was dark and quiet except for the Lord who was obviously much more affected by the occasion than the disciples.

It's hard to grasp the significance of the times in which we live! These disciples had an idea about what was going on, but the impact was yet to hit them. It is doubtful that any of them thought this night would turn out the way it did! Only Jesus was fully aware of what was happening, and he tried to tell them.

How important it is to be attentive to the Lord at all times. When Jesus said, "pray" he had very good reasons. Do we always understand why the Spirit calls us to prayer? It is not for us to ask the reasons why, only to obey.

Luke tells us that they were exhausted from sorrow, nevertheless; Jesus needed them to pray! Luke tells us that as Jesus was praying an angel appeared to him and strengthened him and that he then prayed all the more earnestly! Could it be that if the disciples had been intent upon obeying the Lord that an angel would have strengthened them as well? Probably; but we will never know for sure. They did what humans do. They slept!

Jesus was different from his companions in that he had the Spirit without measure. His behavior that night revealed that he was focused, in spite of the fatigue he no doubt felt. He was able to rise above the cry of every cell in his body for sleep. If his disciples were exhausted from sorrow, how much more must it have been true of the Lord! This occasion called for more strength than the natural body of Jesus could supply. It required help from what the Spirit could supply and that help was granted.

Divine intervention is ours to draw upon when the purposes of God go beyond what we have to offer!

Many people conclude that they are unable to reach beyond what they perceive to be their natural limits. When challenged to perform a task that calls for emotional commitments, or commitments of resources or talents, they evaluate what they can readily see, responding according to those resources, rather than upon the power of the Spirit! We will never know what the Spirit will do for us and through us, until we step out in faith, and reach beyond those limits!

The person upon whom the Spirit comes to rest is a person who has limitless power available in times of need. Power to solve problems is never in short supply to the person so filled. If there is a short fall in what we experience, it is in matters of faith, knowledge of God's purposes, failure to pray and inattention to the Spirit in our lives.

Jesus went to the cross as a result of his willingness to obey the will of his Father who loved him beyond measure. It is hard for people to understand how God could send Jesus to the cross knowing all about the suffering he would endure, but suffice it to say, they still don't understand the intensity of the love God has for the human race. We cannot grasp that God actually loves us so much that he was willing to commit Jesus to the cross so that we could have life eternal.

It wasn't just Jesus whose resolve was being tested that night; the Father was also being given an out if he did not wish to go through with the plan of our salvation. Can you imagine the pressure that came to bear on the heart of God, Jesus praying in earnestness, with sweat mingled with blood dropping from him? This was no easy matter for Jesus to submit to. He would be betrayed, interrogated, mocked, lied about, beat and crucified, but one more event even more devastating was also coming; in the final moments of his greatest suffering the Father would have to turn his back on him! Yet it would happen because it had to happen, just as it will happen to all who reject this great sacrifice. They too, despite the great love God has for all members of this human race, will experience God turning away from them and condemning them to the final judgment. Sin requires a break in

fellowship, therefore; when God turned his back on Jesus, it was because of our sin. Jesus became sin for us.

These three hours in the garden were hours when the destiny of all humanity hung in the balance. Would Jesus do it? Would the Father permit it? The decision was made, the die was cast, the plan must proceed as scheduled; the soldiers were now on their way.

# Chapter Fifty

## The Kiss of Betrayal

Mark 14:43-52

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Then everyone deserted him and fled.

A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind."

How is it that treachery lurks in the heart of all humanity? Ever since the fall, violence has been a part of the human experience.

It is not just people that have suffered, but creation itself; all forms of life experience treachery in some form or other. Every form of life feeds on other forms of life or life products, such as eggs, milk, seeds, nuts or even the decayed remains of previous life forms. Violence and treachery have filled all accounts of history.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:22-23)

This night was Satan's night to have his way with Jesus. Jesus said to the chief priest while being interrogated, "This is your hour—when darkness reigns." (Luke 2:53) Darkness had already begun to reign. Judas was continuing his betrayal behavior. While in the upper room he had received the breaking of the bread with Jesus, an act that said in effect, "You need not ever fear me, I am your friend." This charade continued in the garden and his behavior became even more offensive as he came to Jesus and called him Rabbi and kissed him, the customary greeting of student to his teacher.

One may wonder why Judas even needed to identify Jesus, but considering the times in which these events happened, it was understandable. There were no televisions, newspapers, or photographs. Communication was largely word of mouth. It is conceivable that these men sent to arrest Jesus didn't even know who he was. Even if they had seen him before, it might be difficult to identify him by torch light in the night. Judas was providing an important service to them as he was so well acquainted with Jesus that all possibility of a mistake was eliminated.

Having thus identified Jesus, the arrest was made and Peter proceeded to cut the high priest's servant's ear. We know it was Peter because John tells us it was, and the servant's name was Malchus.

"Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me." (Mark 14:48-49)

What a scene! You would think that Jesus was leading a rebel army of some kind! Was it really necessary to come after Jesus in the middle of the night and interrupt his time of prayer? Does a person of prayer and preaching present that much of a threat that it is necessary to come after him with an army? Yet that is what they did, invading his place of prayer, as though it was a rebel camp, a launching place for a violent attack!

This was not an army; this was a group of disciples. They had two swords and it was evident that they didn't even know how to use them properly! Peter took a swipe at one of the servants of the high priest and evidently missed his mark cutting only a part of his ear off. The Greek language suggests that he didn't cut the ear off cleanly, but rather cut it or cut part of it off. If he was trying to cut off his ear, which is highly unlikely, he did a bad job of it. It is more likely that he aimed to take off his head and the man saw it coming and did an evasive move resulting in a cut to his ear!

Mark says the disciples all fled. From Luke's account we learn that Jesus healed the man's ear and asked that they be allowed to go, at which time they fled. (None of these accounts tried to give all the events, but rather what they felt was important to report.)

It was likely that Mark was focusing upon the next statement that is only reported here. There was a young man who was only wearing an outer garment who was seized by one of the group and who slipped out of it and escaped naked. It is speculated that this was Mark himself. The garment was of the type that was worn by people of means and it is believed that the family of John Mark was a family of means. It is also speculated that the house where the upper room was located was the home of Mark's parents. Later, after the day of Pentecost, the church used to meet there and it was where Peter came to find the church people after his release from jail by an angel.

Perhaps Mark used this means to put himself in the narrative as an eyewitness to at least some of the events of his gospel.

Why did the disciples all flee? Was it because they were afraid? Perhaps, but more likely they were confused by the surrender of Jesus who they evidently fully believed would fight back. Jesus was the man upon whom the Spirit had come to rest. He was ready to do the will of the Father and that will was to go with these men. His hour had come and surrender was not to the men, but to his Father's will.

# Chapter Fifty-one

## Crucify Him!

Mark 14:53-64

"They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death.

The decision was made by God before the fall of man; the crucifixion was the only possible remedy for sin should Adam fail in the garden. That decision had been confirmed in Gethsemane when Jesus prayed in agony before his Father. The processes necessary for the salvation of believing humanity had begun.

They took him to Annas' house first, and then to the high priest Caiaphas. Here the Sanhedrin was called into special session to condemn Jesus to death.

This session was not being called because someone had lodged a complaint against Jesus and they wanted to discover the truth, but rather, they wanted to kill Jesus and they were trying to find a charge against him to justify their actions.

They were having a hard time with their false witnesses, so the high priest turned to Jesus to try to get him to say something they could use to condemn him. I think the Lord must have looked at all this and thought, "These poor fellows are really having a hard time with this; I'll give them what they want so they can get on with it!"

The high priest asked of him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62)

He didn't have to say that! If he had just said nothing, all this would have likely come to naught.



These men knew better than to just kill Jesus without a legal right to do so, so they asked him if he claimed to be the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One, which would make him God! To say that he was, was true, but because they refused to believe it, it was judged to be blasphemy! At this point, Jesus did the unthinkable, he not only responded in the affirmative, but also continued with a prophecy concerning what was ultimately going to happen at the end of this age! At this the high priest went ballistic!

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. (Mark 14:64)

And so it was, and so it is! The heart of man is still the same today.

Belief in Jesus is judged to be a mere religious option by those who influence the educational establishment and popular media. It's okay for Jesus to be regarded as a religious icon, or symbol of morality, but to take his claim seriously, that he sits at the right hand of the Mighty One, and will come on the clouds of heaven, is to go beyond reason, they insist.

What Jesus implied by that statement was that he was going to come back as God and hold all the world's governments accountable for their actions! What government takes that seriously today?

If we judge by the conduct of most nations and people, we have to conclude, not many.

Belief in Jesus in the United States is a matter of religious tolerance. It has not always been this way. There was a time in this country, when the leaders of our government considered governing to be a sacred duty, and believed they would have to give an account to God. If that belief were held today, political games would be out, and honesty and integrity would be in!

The Lord Jesus is not held in any higher esteem today by the governing powers in this world than he was in the Sanhedrin on the day of crucifixion. If Jesus was here today and appeared to be a threat to the governing powers of the world, he would either be killed or demonized. The attempts to demonize true Christianity is not new; it was done in the life of Jesus, in the age of the Apostles, and is being done today!

The ruling powers of the world are no closer to recognizing Jesus as Lord today than they were when he was crucified. Never mistake tolerance for belief; it is not the same. If they truly believed, they would have to repent and worship Jesus.

"Crucify him" was the cry then; it still is the cry today.

# Chapter Fifty-two

## Peter Denies Jesus

Mark 14:65-72

Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Heart broken and confused, Peter wept in a torrent of shameful emotion. Failing the Lord in a most crucial moment was unthinkable, yet the seeds of denial had already been sown in his heart! In the theological structure of Peter's value system, there was no place for the message of the cross. Peter was adamant that Jesus would not die. All efforts to warn Peter, and the other disciples about what was going to happen were turned aside in the apparent belief that either Jesus was being fatalistic, or that he was simply trying to test their loyalty and willingness to stand with him, should a battle break out.

Peter and the other disciples had forsaken all to follow Jesus. What that meant in terms of lost wages, respect of their peers, family support or other goals that had to be abandoned, we can only speculate. When people drop everything they have spent their lifetime building, and run off after some new teacher or pursue some far-fetched dream, they often suffer contempt from those they love most. Whether they enjoyed enthusiastic support or reluctant tolerance, we just don't know, but if it was one of us, I feel sure, we would be scrutinized and counseled to be cautious about this stranger from Nazareth.

We probably would argue back that after all his teachings are great, and his miracles are spectacular! He must be for real; no man could do such things unless God was with him!

"Just be careful" is the expected response from parents and friends.

They were all men. Men always know what their doing, right? If anything started to go wrong, they could pull him aside and counsel with him. There was safety in the fact that they were mature enough to see through anything that didn't seem just right. These are all the normal kinds of ideas and attitudes we take. I don't think they were any different. I think there was a subtle pressure they all felt to keep Jesus on track. He was too good to abandon; if he said something that was hard to understand,

they would tolerate it and let him make his own mistakes. They were there for him, they would protect him; such is the masculine ego in such matters!

It is highly unlikely that any of the disciples believed that Jesus was above a mistake now and then. Everyone makes mistakes, right? Life teaches us lessons like this. We know that we do, and therefore we learn to tolerate the failures of others. To conceive the idea that anyone could be perfect is beyond us. Surely every human being has a flaw or two. Most people see themselves as being badly flawed, and even spend a great deal of time trying to improve themselves, or at least covering up so their flaws don't show too much!

Even though the disciples loved Jesus to the point that they were willing to lay down their lives for him, it is unlikely they ever even began to understand his redemptive mission. They could have thought that their visit to Jerusalem was badly timed, and that they were ill prepared, but they likely hoped that somehow they would get out of this alive and live to see Jesus actually become king of Israel.

I think they expected trouble in the immediate future, they had been with Jesus long enough to know that when he said something it would come to pass. It was just this part about him, dying without a fight that seemed beyond them.

When all this began to happen, I believe their will to stand with Jesus crumbled when they saw him heal the servant and without resistance surrender to the soldiers. Why didn't he use his supernatural power to escape from them? Hadn't they all fallen to the ground just at the sound of his voice? Didn't he realize that he could use his power in a combat situation instead of always just healing people?

Selfish ambition has a blinding power. Those who are possessed with it can seldom see facts in true perspective. It's easy to criticize the disciples for their conduct that night, but when we look at the record of their lives, we do not see cowards.

It is my belief that they ran because they were bewildered and confused. When a person is in a life-threatening situation and everything that is happening seems out of control, the logical thing to do is run for cover. And run they did, only Peter, and perhaps John, followed along. It was not an act of courage or loyalty that caused Peter to follow along. His commander had let him down and it seems he only wanted to witness what was going to happen next. Some people, so disillusioned would even think, "Whatever he gets he deserves!" We can only speculate about Peter's state of mind that night, but this dear friend had only to look at him to jar him back to reality. Suddenly the blinding stupor left him and he realized what he had done. Heart broken at the thought that he had denied Jesus caused bitter tears to overcome him.

This was a tragic night humanly speaking, one for which there is no preparation. In spite of the efforts of Jesus to explain it, how could they understand? Jesus loved the disciples and would heal their wounded hearts in due time.

We too often experience what cannot be anticipated. Sometimes we too, falter and fail. It is good to know that "our God" understands the infirmity of our flesh, and how it is that we lack perfect understanding. He admonishes us to watch and pray, but experience has taught us that often it is too little or too late. This is the nature of our weakness just as it was for the disciples that night.

The disciples abandoned Jesus and fled, but Jesus did not abandon them. He would come to them again, just as he said he would!

# Chapter Fifty-three

## Pilate Condemns Jesus to Crucifixion

Mark 15:1-20

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of."

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted.

"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

The day of the crucifixion of Jesus was at hand, and while the multitude that had gathered at Jerusalem slept, a cloud of demon spirits invaded the city. On this night, all hell was in one accord, even though evil spirits are the source of contention, discontent, strife, hatred and envy, always stirring up trouble and fighting. The people were being bound together by a common cord of hatred that would express itself against the Lord Jesus. Their hatred would blind them to good sense and reason, making them willing accomplices to satanic purposes.

Didn't the demons that inflamed these people know that if they killed Jesus, atonement would be made for the sins of all mankind? Even Satan was not smart enough to figure out that killing Jesus was going seal his own doom! The hatred of this mob of demon spirits was so great that no amount of violence against Jesus could satisfy them. They moved into the city with a vengeance that is incomprehensible. The very air must have felt heavy with evil intentions as the whole Sanhedrin gathered with the elders and teachers of the law.

This group of men had been envious of Jesus for a long while and their wicked hearts were fertile soil waiting to be inflamed by this cloud of darkness hanging over the city. Jesus must die, that was their predetermined mindset. No evil device was viewed as wicked; lies were considered justified by the greater need they felt to kill Jesus. No one raised an objection as one false witness after another came and testified against Jesus.

Where were the men who criticized Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath? Could it be true that lying, and murder was considered okay and defiling one's self by entering the house of Pilate was not okay? (See John 18:28) The natural mind of man sees so little when bound by religious decorum. What fertile soil for satanic wishes to be sown into.

Not only did the Sanhedrin, elders and teachers become willing subjects of evil intentions, but also all the people that gathered in the early morning air. It seemed that the whole city was caught in the influence of this spirit of hatred that inflamed them. The only one that seemed to be aware of the evil of the hour was this hard hearted Roman named Pilate!! Time and again he sought to have Jesus freed, but this mob would not hear it!

All through the night and into the early morning this ordeal dragged on, Jesus stood serenely in the presence of his accusers and tormentors. He hardly spoke, and when he did speak it was to help them in their cause as they sought to find some legal grounds on which to convict him. Finally, blasphemy was their charge. He had claimed to be the Son of God, and yes, it would have been blasphemy, except for one fact; he really was God's Son!!

When they went to Pilate, they had a different charge to bring against him. Pilate wouldn't be impressed with the charge of blaspheme, so they accused him of claiming to be a king. This was troubling to Pilate so he asked Jesus privately about it. Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." (Mark 15:2) Still Pilate seemed unimpressed, obviously Jesus didn't seem like a threat; he didn't have an army or even a political following. Those who followed Jesus were not the sorts of people to pose any great problem. Their interests were of a spiritual nature rather than political.

The chief priests, however, were unrelenting, accusing Jesus of many things; still he remained silent! Pilate was amazed. The behavior of Jesus was so unnatural. How could he do it? Any normal human being would have argued against every charge in an effort to save his life from such a cruel fate as crucifixion.

The crowd that gathered that day quite possibly was there to try to secure the release of a man named Barabbas. There had been an uprising, and he had committed murder. These uprisings were quite common, and this one was probably very minor as other historical records don't mention it, yet it was important to the writers of the New Testament because it was part of the story of Jesus. This could account for why these people were so easily persuaded to call for Barabbas instead of Jesus. They were probably political zealots and Barabbas was one of their own. Apparently they knew about the good will policy of releasing a prisoner on this occasion. So they came to seize the moment and secure his release.

This situation speaks to a condition in the heart of humanity concerning what we are likely to do when faced with a question of expediency as opposed to righteousness! Jesus was an innocent man, Barabbas was a murderer, yet because Barabbas was a part of what they were about, he was their choice. This had nothing to do with right or wrong, not for the chief priests, teachers of the law or elders, and certainly not for the crowd that gathered.

Why the fury, if my conjecture is correct? Why didn't these people just take Barabbas and leave? Oh, I think I'm right; but whether they realized it or not, somewhere in the events of that night, their human spirits were influenced by evil spirits that enflamed them with a hate that was totally irrational. None of these events made one ounce of sense. Why kill a man who heals the sick and casts out

devils? Why hate a man who can take a few loaves and fish and feed a multitude? Did his teachings really make him that dangerous?

Why are we Christians being persecuted today when we speak the truth about moral issues? What threat are we? Isn't it a spiritual battle after all? Where does this kind of hate come from?

I believe that the hate of the crowd came from the world of the demonic. We humans are caught in the middle between a God of love and a band of outcast demons that hate God because he cast them out of heaven. I believe Satan especially hates Christians because we have been given the gift of salvation, and thereby have been given the gift of life! He didn't get this chance once he sinned; therefore he hates God! Do you realize what a precious gift salvation is?

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Flogging with a cat-o-nine-tails with the strips of leather having bones or metal tied to them was usually carried out by stripping the victim, binding them to a post, and whipping them making it a brutal beating. This was an unusually cruel form of punishment and often led to the death of the victim. Jesus survived it and then received further torment as they proceeded to mock him by placing a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe on him. Now the abuse turned from his torso that was pulverized and began to strike him repeatedly on the head with a staff. Not content with the physical abuse, they mockingly bowed before him and said, "Hail, king of the Jews!"

Then changing him back into his own clothing they led him out to crucify him.

# Chapter Fifty-four

## The Crucifixion of Jesus

Mark 15:21-39

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Jesus was moving painfully along the way that led to the site of crucifixion. He was carrying his cross, that is, the part of the cross called the "patibulum" that was the cross beam. He was evidently so weakened by the beating that he was struggling as he walked. Somewhere along the route a certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. The load was thus taken from the shoulders of the Lord and placed upon Simon. On they went until they came to the place where the crucifixion was to take place, it was called Golgotha (which means, the place of the skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Simple words, but let's look closer.

The following is a quotation from the Expositor's Bible Commentary that was taken from, Crucifixion Of Jesus, by Davis: This is his description of what likely happened.

Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backwards his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. the patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes (the vertical beam)....

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim is now crucified. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails through the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward.... Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen....

Hours of this limitless pain, cycle of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber: Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart....

It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level—the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues—the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air...

The body of Jesus is now in extremis, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues... His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally he can allow His body to die.

All this Mark describes with the words, "And they crucified him!" This is what Jesus did for us. It was love that brought him here to this world, and it was love that held him on that cross. God's power was more than capable of setting him free anytime he would have called out. Jesus himself had told Peter that he could have called to the Father who would immediately put twelve legions of angels at his disposal! (Matt. 26:53)

Not only did Jesus suffer the physical sufferings, but he also suffered further psychological torments as well.

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (Mark 15:31)

According to Mark it was the third hour; that would have been 9 o'clock in the morning when they nailed Jesus to the cross. It was now the sixth hour or 12 o'clock noon when Mark reports an event of major magnitude. "At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour." (Mark 15:33)

As the life of Jesus began to fade, so did the light of the sun! It seems fitting that as Jesus' life was ebbing away that this would happen, after all he was the light of the world! The sun is a testimony to who Jesus is! We look at the sun and find there the source of light in the natural, but in the world to come; there will not be a need for a sun as the Lord Jesus will be the light! Perhaps this happened so that we would all know the significance of what was happening here. The world was crucifying its very source of life and light. Love, light and life were nailed to the cross, but it was a work of redemption. Atonement was being made for all humanity, and darkness gave somber testimony to that truth. As our death moved in, the death of sin, the Father had to turn his back and withdraw his



presence. A righteous God cannot fellowship with sin. Jesus experienced the reality of separation from the fellowship of the Father, hanging there on the cross.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

We are left with the distinct impression that either Jesus didn't know that this was going to happen or the pain of it was overwhelming! Perhaps both were the case. There is a depth of implication here that we can barely begin to understand. The Father and his Son had never been separated before. Sin alone separates and sin never existed in the Godhead. It was our sin that drove the wedge between the Father and the Son! The pain of it was immeasurable; some believe that in this experience, Jesus experienced the agony of hell, which is separation from God.

An attempt was made to give Jesus a drink of wine vinegar that would help deaden the pain he was suffering. This was an apparent further attempt to humiliate Jesus as they referred to the coming of Elijah to deliver him, the idea being that perhaps they could prolong his life and give Elijah a chance to come. These men were totally oblivious to what was really happening. While they jeered, Jesus was paying the debt of their sin!

It was finished; the work of atonement was complete. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. Suddenly the veil in the temple tore from top to bottom! We are told in Hebrews that this signified that the way was now open into the Holy of Holies. What Jesus had come to do had been done.

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39)

# Chapter Fifty-five

## Burial of Jesus

Mark 15:40-47

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."

Not all the people in the crowd were mockers that day. Jesus had some loyal followers as well. John was there and Mary his mother, along with some women who had traveled with him doing things that women do, prepare meals, do laundry and such like. They not only did these things, but also bore much of the expense themselves. This was God's provision for Jesus and the disciples. These loyal women did not forsake him in this hour, nor did Jesus forsake them. Luke shared with us how Jesus, in spite of his weakness and pain, stopped along the way to speak kindly to the women of Jerusalem warning them of the trouble that was soon to come upon the nation. These women were weeping for Jesus as he moved along the streets. On the cross Jesus paused to speak to John concerning his mother and her need to be cared for. Such was the love and compassion of Jesus in the midst of great pain and suffering.

Then there was Joseph of Arimathea who was a member of the council, that is the Sanhedrin. At the risk of serious reprimand, he stepped forward and boldly asked Pilot for the body of Jesus. One can only wonder what must have been going on in his mind as he witnessed the injustices of the trial and crucifixion. Whatever his personal feeling, he was there now to minister to the need to bury the body of the Lord Jesus. Whether he had ever met Jesus prior to this occasion is not recorded, never mind, he was a just man and Jesus needed to be taken care of, he would do it!

Joseph no doubt had a helper who goes unmentioned. They went to the cross and removed the body of Jesus, quickly wrapping him in pieces of cloth along with spices, and placing him in his own new tomb that had never been used. It was located close by, and having placed his body there; he rolled a hug stone into place sealing the entrance. These tombs were constructed in such a way that a stone would roll down an incline within a channel, thus; it would be very difficult to open it again. There were also witnesses to this fact, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of the younger Joses.

After all of this had been done, the chief priests and Pharisees got worried that the disciples might come and steal the body of Jesus! They went to Pilot and expressed their concerns so Pilot gave them a guard. They went to the tomb and placed a seal on it and posted the guard.

It was very important to record all of this as it virtually eliminated the possibility of fraud surrounding the story of the resurrection! The very efforts made by the priests made their later explanation about the disciples coming and stealing the body of Jesus unbelievable!

Jesus died; there is no doubt about that. He didn't merely go into a coma, later to stagger off and recover as some have suggested, nor did the disciples come and steal his body as the chief priest claimed; they made sure of that. No, Jesus died; it was real. He was buried and remained dead, Friday until dark, Saturday night, Saturday all day, Sunday night, and Sunday morning until after sunrise! (In those days they calculated a day as starting at sun down.)

There is some discussion about the prophecy attributed to Jesus in Matt. 12:40, that Jesus would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. If that were an authentic prophecy of Jesus and not a later addition to the text as some see as a possibility, then some would say that Jesus didn't fulfill that prophecy. Assuming that the text is fully accurate and was not tampered with in the copying process as some passages were, then how do we account for the fact that Jesus was only dead about half the full three days and three nights this prophecy seems to indicate?

One explanation is that in rabbinical thought, a day or any part of a day is equal to the whole, therefore according to Jewish tradition, three days and three nights need mean no more than three days or the combination of any three parts. By this Jesus having died on Friday he would be credited for all of Friday; Friday beginning at sunset the night of his arrest and ending after his death Friday afternoon. He would be credited for all of Saturday and all of Sunday, thus three days and three nights.

We can also note that the people in Biblical times were not as time conscious in exact terms as we are today. This statement of Jesus could well have been meant to be taken in a parabolic sense more than a literal time conscious sense. Because to a western mind this statement seems very straight forward, this passage could pose a problem, especially to any person that cannot allow for the possibility of errors having been made either by the writers themselves or those who copied their work. (Note. We know this is a possibility because there are many manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts, and some of these have later additions to the text that probably happened when copyists wanted to strengthen a point do to a doctrinal debate at the time of their work.) To take a dogmatic approach to matters of this sort is to set ourselves up for questions as to the credibility of the entire Bible. This would be foolhardy. There are so many unchallengeable truths, teachings, prophecies with their fulfillment, and unimpeachable historic data in the Bible that anyone who would allow Satan to challenge their faith over a few minor problems in the text that likely have very reasonable explanations anyway, are only hurting themselves.

What Jesus did was a magnificent thing, the very pivotal point of history, the most important event ever; it was the redemptive work of God for humanity. It was love expressed more profoundly than it had ever been expressed before or ever would be again. What a personal tragedy it would be if we allowed our faith to stumble over one minor little problem that, according to the mode of expressions of that day, really wasn't a problem at all!

The important information concerning the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus is that it happened just the way they said it did! For that reason we have hope of eternal life today. All we have to do now is receive this message, believe in it, and invite Jesus into our heart. We will then experience the wonderful miracle of the new birth.

# Chapter Fifty-six

## The Resurrection

Mark 16:1-20

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

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When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

Jesus had been dead; this had been witnessed and verified. All agreed, the Roman soldiers, the centurion, the priests and Pharisees and the crowd that had stood by that was made up of enemies and friends and family. They saw him die. They witnessed the spear pierce his side. They saw water and blood come from the wound. There was no doubt about it; no one of that day questioned the fact of his death. The idea that it might have been otherwise has come from people of later times who do not want to believe in Jesus, or want to believe in him in a different light than his redemptive death.

Those who loved the Lord were totally surprised by what happened that wonderful morning of the resurrection. Even though they had been told, somehow it didn't register in their consciousness. They were all mourning the death of Jesus.

Sometime early on Sunday morning, the Spirit of Jesus reentered his body. Some of those who have studied the Shroud of Turin, and believing it to be authentic, have observed that the impression of a human body seemed to have been imprinted into it by a strong blast of energy. Others say that it is a fraud, that the impression was a painting and that the paint having deteriorated over time, left the imprint. If it was authentic, it suggests an energy entering the body of Jesus strong enough to scorch the cloth. I admit that it is still in question as to whether it was the actual grave clothes of Jesus, but it does serve to remind us that something mighty happened that morning. No doubt a forceful energy did enter his body, strong enough to reconstitute it, and to also change it from the composition of a body subject to the laws of physics as we know them, to a body of quite different capabilities and yet tangibly real.

The power of the Holy Spirit is an energy that is not easily measured by scientific instruments.

I once read an account of a scientific experiment that was conducted at a research hospital. As I recall the story, the purpose of the experiment was to study what happens to a person at the time of death. They set up their instruments to measure what happens when death is experienced, heart rate, blood pressure, brain waves, all the usual. Then they brought in another instrument that had the capacity to measure any energy transmissions that might occur. This instrument had the capacity to measure from very small energy transmissions to extremely strong transmissions. It also had the capacity to register energy drain in the negative digits. The article said that when this instrument was used at an atomic bomb blast site the transmissions of power were in the low digits, meaning the instrument's capability to measure energy went beyond the amount of power emitted from such a blast. They also put a microphone in the room so they could hear anything that might be said.

Having prepared the room, and an adjoining room with a window; it was now time to bring in a person who was nearing death. They brought in a woman who was a Christian. Her hour of death was near. She had agreed to participate in the experiment and apparently didn't have family members present. She was placed in the bed and all the instruments were connected and activated. As the hour of her death drew near the adjoining room filled with scientists who wanted to be there to witness what would happen to the woman. As her time of death grew nearer, she began to pray. She prayed the usual prayers a person might pray if they knew they were about to die. Prayers for family members and friends were offered. She prayed concerning her own relationship with the Lord, and then she began to worship the Lord. As she was worshipping the Lord, these hardened scientist's eyes filled with tears as they listened to this woman in this dying state. All at once she died, and when she did, the scientists who had been preoccupied with this worshipping woman, suddenly became aware of their instruments, and especially the one that measured the power transmission. The dial that had never registered power over low digits was now pegged out at the highest possible level. The scientists were amazed to say the least. They wondered had they encounter divine energy? Was this God?

They then decided to try another experiment. Since this woman was a Christian, they would look for someone who definitely was not a Christian. They found a man who was a victim of venereal disease and was also about to die. Being a man who was given to lustful encounters, they decided to try to agitate his sinful nature. The purpose of this was to see if what they witnessed in the previous woman was just a phenomenon of the dying experience, or if it had something to do with her faith. As this man was nearing the end, a nurse came in and began to stir the man's sexual desires. When he began to demonstrate interest in her, she suddenly and abruptly left him without explanation. This angered the man, and he began to curse, then in this state of anger and cursing he died. As these

scientists watched their instruments, the same instrument that had measured the power transmission of the previous woman, now went to the opposite pole!

It was the conclusion of the scientist reporting the incident that they had actually measured God's power in manifestation. Many people want to deny the manifestations of God's power, but I for one, do not. I have seen his power touch people with remarkable results. I have prayed for people who have been healed. I have dealt with demon possession. I have prayed for people who have been slain in the Spirit and I have seen people yield their lives to the Lord Jesus. It is my belief that all of these manifestations of God's power are nothing to what will be manifest at the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of this age. Any manifestation we experience here in this present age is like a drop of ocean water as compared to the ocean itself.

Whatever power entered that tomb that morning was the same power that has come to the life of every person who has been born again. 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. 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)

Human eyes did not witness what happened inside the tomb, but outside the tomb angels appeared and a great shaking took place. The stone either was shaken away from the entrance of the tomb or the angels rolled it. The soldiers became terrified and fled. Sometime later some women approached the tomb, seeing the stone already rolled away; they entered the tomb. Mary Magdalene ran back to where Peter was and told him about what was happening. Peter, John and Mary ran back to the tomb. Meanwhile the other women who stayed at the tomb saw two angels standing by where the body had been lying. One of them apparently sat down and they spoke to the women. The women then left the tomb, and shortly Peter and John arrived. John outran Peter and stood looking into the tomb, but Peter went right on in. They witnessed the place where he had been, and the grave clothes still lying there, then they left. Meanwhile, Mary arrived at the tomb and was standing outside weeping, she bent over and looking into the tomb, saw the two angels that the other women had seen. They spoke to her and they asked her,

"Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:13-17)

At this point Jesus evidently ascended to his Father and having made his appearance in heaven, returned again to appear to the others. Mary Magdalene then ran to tell the disciples the news that she had seen the Lord. The other women who had been there must have been lingering somewhere in the

garden, perhaps pondering what was taking place and were unaware of Peter and John's appearance at the tomb or that Mary Magdalene had returned and seen the Lord. They weeping and afraid had evidently pulled themselves together and set out running to take the news to the disciples. Jesus was back now and suddenly appeared to them somewhere along the way. They fell at his feet and took hold of them and worshipped him, something he wouldn't permit Mary to do just a short time before. The women all went to where the disciples were and reported what they had witnessed.

Sometime that same day two of the disciples were walking along a road leading to a town called Emmaus when they met a man who walked along with them. As they walked they talked about what had just happened. The man began to expound the scriptures explaining to them how it was that the Christ must suffer the things he did. When they got to their destination, the man made like he was going on, but the disciples invited him in to stay the night with them. When the meal was served, Jesus took the bread and gave thanks for it and broke it. Suddenly their eyes were opened to the fact that it was Jesus. Up to this point they didn't recognize him. Then having made his identity known to them he disappeared.

The disciples immediately went to where the other disciples were assembled and reported what had happened. While they were still talking to them Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. They were startled and thought they were seeing a ghost, but Jesus identified himself and assured them that he was really alive. He told them that ghosts do not have flesh and bones as they could see he had. Then he asked them if they had something to eat. They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it. From this we come to understand that a resurrection body is a body of tangible matter, capable of eating and being touched even though it has the capability of disappearing and appearing. This was very kind of the Lord to reassure us of this fact concerning our future post resurrection state.

A week later, Jesus again appeared to the disciples as they were gathered together in a house. This time Thomas was present. Where he was the first time a week earlier is not clear, nor is it clear whether they were now in Galilee or still in Jerusalem. I speculate that they had followed the instructions of Mary and returned to Galilee where he is now meeting them in greater safety. Perhaps Thomas had left immediately in his grief and therefore was absent for the events of resurrection day. No matter, Thomas would be given his opportunity to be an eyewitness to the Lord.

Jesus once again appeared to all of them in the same manner as he had before, only this time Thomas was invited to touch his wounds so that he would be able to believe. Thomas was determined to only believe if he could actually touch the Lord. He needed to touch the wounds and then he would believe. Many have criticized Thomas for this, and yes, he did draw a remark from the Lord about it, yet the fact that Jesus demonstrated that he was a tangible body, has been one of the centerpieces of the resurrection story. Without this evidence the story would easily be discarded as a vision, and the power of the evidence would have been greatly weakened.

Once more, while the disciples were out in the lake fishing, the Lord appeared to them standing on the shore next to a fire with fish on it being prepared for the disciples along with some bread. It became a very touching experience for them, especially for Peter who had denied the Lord. It was on this occasion that he was fully restored and commissioned by the Lord.

Some of these incidents are reported in a manner that makes it difficult to exactly fit each event into logical order, as they are somewhat sketchy. It seems likely that the lake appearance actually came before the last appearance of the Lord in the house. They also had been instructed to go to a mountain in Galilee that also no doubt occurred during this time. Then after these events they evidently went south again to the region of Bethany where he was taken into heaven.

These facts are drawn from all four gospels in an effort to assemble them into an understandable series of events. Each of the gospels recounts unique events of the story, and in an effort to keep a long

story brief, they would either leave out facts that someone else thought were important or add details others skimmed over. When all the facts are assembled, we get a much clearer picture of what actually took place.

Mark gives us very little to go on concerning post resurrection events, in fact, the earliest and most reliable manuscripts end with verse eight. This has led some to believe that the ending of Mark is missing; others believe that he deliberately ended there having made his point about the resurrection. Mark gave us no information on the birth of Jesus and he gave us nothing beyond the declaration of his resurrection. The remaining verses were added later as an attempt to complete the book, however some believe that it already was as complete as Mark wrote it.

I favor the idea that it was completed. I view the theme of the Book of Mark as, The Man Upon Whom the Spirit Came to Rest. The work of the Spirit was completed in the life of the Lord Jesus upon his resurrection. There was no further need to comment except to verify that he had indeed been raised from the dead. Others related the rest of the story as they told their story as it related to the theme of the books they wrote.

In this book we have seen Jesus in action, living among us, feeling what we feel, hungering with us, thirsting like we thirst, becoming weary and pressing on in spite of fatigue. We've seen him challenged, mocked, betrayed and beaten. In every situation we saw him triumph over his enemies. Even in crucifixion we saw him take control of his circumstance, nothing being left to chance. Jesus did nothing on his own; everything was done as the Father revealed his purposes to him. He was dependent on the Father, but always acted as one having authority. Nothing turned him from his mission; he was here to teach us, to live a righteous life in our behalf, and to make atonement for us. He completed his work on earth, died for us, and was raised again by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, God's one and only Son, my savior and my God!!