



Scripture Studies in
The Gospel of Matthew

By Scott Sperling



Vol. I

*“Come now, let us reason together,”
says the Lord. . .” – Isaiah 1:18*

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

IN

**THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW**

VOL. I

BY

SCOTT SPERLING

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“Oh, the depth of the riches
of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
‘Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?’
‘Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?’
For from him and through him
and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

– Romans 11:33-36

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1 - MATTHEW 1:1-17

The Genealogy of Our Lord

¹ A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

- ² Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
- ³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
- ⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
- ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz,
whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed,
whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
- ⁶ And Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon,
whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

- ⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
- ⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

- ⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,
 Jotham the father of Ahaz,
 Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
 Manasseh the father of Amon,
 Amon the father of Josiah,
¹¹ And Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers
 at the time of the exile to Babylon.

- ¹² After the exile to Babylon:
 Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

- ¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
 Abiud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,

- ¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Eliud,

- ¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,

- ¹⁶ And Jacob the father of Joseph,
 the husband of Mary,
 of whom was born Jesus,
 Who is called Christ.

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

— Matthew 1:1-17

MATTHEW BEGINS his Gospel, appropriately to one of the purposes of his Gospel—that is, to show Jesus as the promised Messiah for the Jews—with the genealogy of Jesus: **“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son**

of Abraham” (vs. 1). This may seem to us a strange way to start a book, even a biography; however, this was not so strange to the Jews, to whom genealogies were very important (witness the many genealogies in the Old Testament). Moreover, to establish that a claimed Messiah had the proper credentials, a genealogy was indispensable. After all, it was necessary that the Messiah be **“the son of David, the son of Abraham”** (vs. 1). Promises were given to both Abraham and David that a descendant of theirs would be the Messiah. After offering his own son, Abraham was promised by God: **“...[B]ecause you have done this and have not withheld your son ... through your [seed] all nations on earth will be blessed”** (Gen. 22:16,18). Likewise, David was promised by God: **“Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever”** (II Samuel 7:16). The Lord tells us through Isaiah that the Messiah **“will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom”** (Isa. 9:7). Therefore, the Messiah must legally be in the royal line of David. To establish that Jesus had the qualifications to be the Messiah, Matthew gives his genealogy beginning with **“Abraham”**, through **“David.”** Apparently Matthew (and Luke as well, who also contains a genealogy of Christ in his Gospel) had access to genealogical records to establish that Joseph, and so also Jesus (by adoption), was in the royal line. We know that such records existed at that time. In fact, Josephus (a first-century Jewish historian) alludes to such records in his autobiography: “Thus have I set down the genealogy of my family as I have found described in the public records” [*The Life of Flavius Josephus*]. Such records no longer exist so, interestingly, if anyone nowadays claimed to be the Messiah, he would have no way of proving that he was descended from David in the royal line.

Now, while any Jew could be called **“son of Abraham”**, relatively few Jews could be called **“son of David”**, and fewer still belonged to the royal line. And because the reign of the kings of Israel had ended for the time being, the Jews were waiting for the next **“son of David”** who would rule: the expected Messiah. For the Jews, the Messianic title **“son of David”** would probably conjure up memories of David as a warrior, subduing his enemies. Perhaps, this is one reason that the Jews expected a militaristic Messiah, one who would rid them through war of their Roman rulers. They forgot, however, that David was forbidden by God to build the temple of the Lord—not because of his sins of adultery and murder—but because of his militarism. The Lord told David: **“You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.”** (I Chron. 22:8-10). Since the Lord in this passage refers directly to Solomon as the man of peace to build the temple, it should not surprise us that the principle would hold that He who was to build the everlasting Temple, and establish the everlasting throne over Israel, would also be a man of peace.

In verses 2 through 17, beginning with Abraham, Matthew gives us the names of many of the ancestors of Jesus. Abraham is an appropriate place for Matthew (in detailing the genealogy of the Messiah of the Jews) to begin, since Abraham was considered the father of the Jews. The Jews are unique of all the nations of the world in that they are able to trace their

lineage to one ancestor: father Abraham. They are unique in this because God chose them to be unique in this. They are His people, and so, have a unique history.

In studying the Gospel of Matthew, it would be tempting to just skip over the genealogy. After all, of what value could this list names be to us. However, Matthew (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) presents the genealogy in a very interesting way, and says a lot worthy of study in this list of names. These names serve as a worthy introduction to many of the themes in Matthew's Gospel (as we shall see). To a student of the Bible, just a cursory reading of the names cannot help but conjure up many images and recollections of the events of the history of God's people: their faith, their faithlessness, their victories over evil, their stumblings into sin, their strength of character, their weaknesses in the midst of an idolatrous world. In these names, we see a history of God's dealing with His people: His judgment, His mercy, His redemption, His grief, and above all, His faithfulness throughout the history of His dealing with His people, signified most by the last name of the genealogy **"Jesus, who is called Christ"** (vs. 16).

As we read the genealogy, we see that, in general, Matthew follows a formula, saying, *A* **"was the father of"** *B*. The word that Matthew uses for **"was the father of"** (translated "begat" in the King James Version) would be rendered more appropriately "was an ancestor of", since it does not necessarily specify a direct father-son relationship, but rather an ancestral relationship. Matthew's genealogy, like most genealogies in the Bible, was not meant to be a complete genealogy. Matthew does not enumerate each and every ancestor of Christ, but selects significant names to carry on the thread of the genealogy.

Rather than studying each and every name in the genealogy, for the sake of time, let us look specifically at the places in the genealogy where Matthew departs from his primary formula of

saying “**A was the father of B.**” When he does depart from this formula, Matthew is underscoring events in the history of God’s people, usually to suggest to the reader a theme that he will present more fully later in the Gospel.

The first departure from the formula occurs in verse 2: “**Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.**” Certainly, Matthew makes mention of Judah’s “**brothers**” because “**Judah and his brothers**” were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Messiah was to be the Messiah for the nation of Israel, all twelve tribes. Also, when Matthew says, “**Judah and his brothers**”, one cannot help but recall the history of the brothers as related in Genesis: the favoritism of Joseph by Jacob, the mistreatment of Joseph by his brothers, the selling of Joseph into slavery, the journeys of the brothers to Egypt, and their eventual settlement there. Through this history we see the providence and grace of God at work in saving the brothers, His chosen people, from the famine, in spite of their sin of selling Joseph into slavery.

The next departure from the formula occurs in verse 3: “**Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.**” Again, in this departure, we are reminded of an episode in Genesis; and again, rather than being a heroic episode displaying faithfulness and obedience to God by His people, it is an episode full of deceit and sin (see Genesis 38). Tamar was Judah’s daughter-in-law, who was married first to his eldest son. That son died, so, following the custom of what was later known as “Levirite marriage” and codified in Deut. 25:5-9, Tamar was given Judah’s next eldest son. He also died, so Judah promised Tamar his third eldest son, when he grew up to marrying age. Judah, however, reneged on his promise. Tamar, desiring to have children, disguised herself as a prostitute, and Judah slept with her. Tamar became pregnant and gave birth to the twins, Perez and Zerah.

In mentioning Tamar at all in the genealogy, Matthew is calling special attention to this episode. Women were not normally mentioned in genealogies; and when they were mentioned, it was usually one of the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel or Leah. To mention Tamar is to deliberately call to one's mind the disgraceful history of Judah and Tamar. It is as if Matthew is conjuring up this episode to reenforce that the nation of Israel needs a savior—not a political savior—but a savior who will save them from their sins.

The next departure from the formula occurs in verse 5: **“Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.”** Again, Matthew mentions a woman; and again, the woman mentioned has a suspect history. Rahab was a prostitute by trade, but by the grace of God, she was redeemed from her sinful life through her obedience and faith in God when she hid the Israelite spies from the Canaanites. Later in Matthew's gospel, we will be introduced to many (including Matthew the tax collector himself) who repent from their sinful ways and become disciples of the Lord Jesus.

The next departure from the formula occurs also in verse 5: **“Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.”** Again, Matthew mentions a woman; this time, however, he mentions a very honorable woman, always faithful to God. The story of Ruth is a story representative of redemption. The story of her redemption by Boaz is typical of the church's redemption by Christ. It is significant that she was a Moabitess, a Gentile (as was, by the way, Rahab). God has always shed His grace upon people of all nations, even though the Jews are specially His chosen people. The special mentioning of Ruth and Rahab is a subtle way for Matthew to allude to the fact that Jesus is the Savior and Redeemer for all people—Jews and Gentiles.

The next departure from the formula occurs in verse 6: **“Jesse the father of *King David*.”** Matthew reminds us, in mentioning **“King”** David, that this is the royal line. And then later in verse 6: **“David was the father of Solomon, *whose mother had been Uriah’s wife*.”** Again, Matthew mentions a woman. Significantly, Matthew does not call her “Bathsheba”, but the woman who **“had been Uriah’s wife”**. This is to purposefully remind us of the great sin of **“King David”**. He not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, but also murdered Uriah to hide his sin of adultery (see II Sam. 11-12). David, the great king, needed a Savior from sin as much or more than any of us.

The next departure from the formula occurs in verse 11: **“Josiah the father of Jeconiah *and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon* .”** This reminds the reader of the significant turning point in the history of Israel, when the whole nation, **“Jeconiah and his brothers”**, were carried away to Babylon. This was the end of the kingdom that had been so great in the times of David and Solomon. The nation had gone from greatness to destruction because of their disobedience to God. The nation of Israel greatly needed a Savior from sin. Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin, see II Kings 24:8ff) was the last of the kings. In fact, God cursed his bloodline, saying that none of his offspring would ever be kings: **“This is what the LORD says: ‘Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule any more in Judah.’”** (Jer. 22:30). Significant here is that the Messiah (since He will sit on the throne of David) cannot be a blood descendant of Jeconiah. This means that, if Matthew is recording the blood line leading to Joseph, Jesus cannot be a blood relation to Joseph. And Jesus isn’t! The virgin birth of Christ allows this prophecy to be fulfilled, even if Joseph is a

blood descendant of Jeconiah, since Jesus did not come from Joseph's seed, but only the **“seed of the woman”** Mary.

Now, all this being said, we are not at all certain that Matthew is enumerating the blood line of Joseph here. It is quite conceivable that Matthew is giving in this genealogy the *royal* line of the kings on the throne of David, which may or may not always correspond to the *blood* line (depending upon whether there are any sons of the legal heir to take over at the time of the death of the current legal king). The main reason that we are not sure that Matthew's genealogy is the blood line is that Luke also gives a genealogy in his Gospel (see Luke 5:23ff) and, as any reader can see, Luke's genealogy is different than the one given by Matthew.

Those who have no respect for the Bible as the Word of God, when they see the differences between Luke's and Matthew's genealogies, are quick to cry out: “Contradictions! Contradictions!” However, rather than being left with a contradiction for which there is no explanation, the real problem is that there are too many possible explanations for the differences between the two genealogies, especially given the custom of Levirate Marriage (which would yield two different legal fathers for a given person), given the fact that double and triple names were routinely given to the same people, given that the genealogies are incomplete (not enumerating every ancestor), etc.

There are two explanations which are widely subscribed to for the differences between the genealogies. One explanation (as alluded to above) is that Matthew's Gospel gives the *royal* line of David through Joseph (not necessarily the *blood* line), and Luke's Gospel gives the *blood* line of David through Joseph. In other words, Matthew's genealogy gives the legal heirs to the throne of David, including those who were adopted as the legal heirs because there was no available blood heir to throne.

Given that Matthew's purpose is to show Jesus as the promised Messiah, and Luke's purpose is to show Christ's humanity, these differing types of genealogies would suit each Gospel writer's purpose.

The other explanation is that Matthew's Gospel gives Joseph's blood line and Luke's Gospel gives Mary's blood line. In this case, Joseph's blood line would correspond to the *royal* line of David through Solomon down to Joseph. To give Mary's blood line would make sense given that a primary theme in Luke's Gospel is the humanity of Jesus, because Jesus gets His humanness (so to speak) through Mary. Some think this explanation is negated by Luke's mentioning of Joseph in the genealogy; however, Luke only gives the names of Jesus' male ancestors, and he specifically states that Joseph is not Jesus' blood father: **“[Jesus] was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, [etc.]”** (Luke 3:23ff). Note also, that Luke does not necessarily say that Joseph was the son of Heli. He could be saying that Jesus was the son of Joseph, and Jesus was the son of Heli, and Jesus was the son of Matthat, etc. This explanation is also supported by the fact that many verses in the Bible refer to the fact that Jesus was in the *blood* line of David, not just the *royal* line of David (see Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30; Rom. 1:3; II Tim. 2:8). This means that Mary had to be a *blood* descendant of David because Jesus was not a *blood* descendant of Joseph (due to the virgin birth).

So as it stands, we have two very plausible explanations for the differences in Matthew's and Luke's genealogies. The real answer could be one of these, or could be something else. I am not too concerned with convincing you of the validity of one explanation over the other. I agree with John Broadus on this point: “We are little concerned to show which of them is best, and under no obligation to prove that either of them is certainly

correct; for we are not attempting to establish from the Genealogies the credibility of Matthew's Gospel. When the object is simply to *refute an objection* to that credibility, founded on an apparent discrepancy between two statements, it is sufficient to present any hypothetical explanation of the difficulty which is possible. If the explanation be altogether reasonable and probable, so much the better. And if there be two, or several, possible explanations, these reinforce each other in removing the ground for objection, and it is not necessary to choose between them" [Broadus, 7]. So, let's not be stubborn and say we *must* know what the true explanation is. Remember, this is the Word of God. It is arrogant for us to assume that we will be able to understand everything in this Grand Book. It was (in effect) written by God Himself, whose intelligence is incomparably beyond ours. God had His reasons for including both genealogies. Certainly, by including both, and the (at first glance) seeming "contradiction", God has urged us to study very closely these two genealogies. And well we should, for these genealogies describe the earthly heritage of our Lord. If there had been no discrepancy in the genealogies, we may have just skimmed over these names and effectively ignored this section. The seeming "contradictions" in the Bible are impetuses, urging us to a deeper study of the Word of God, thereby increasing our knowledge of God and His ways through our close scrutiny of His Word. Behind every seeming "contradiction", I have found a gem of insight, leading me to a greater respect for the Word of God, and a greater appreciation for God's wisdom.

To move on, the final departure from the usual genealogical formula occurs in verse 16: **"...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."** Matthew's wording here is very precise. He is subtly introducing the fact that Mary was a virgin

when she bore Jesus, and that Joseph was not the blood father of Jesus. So as not to imply this, Matthew does not follow the usual genealogical formula and say, "...and Jacob the father of Joseph, and Joseph the father of Jesus." Rather, he brings Mary into the picture, saying specifically that she bore Jesus.

Now, at that time, Jesus was a fairly common name, being the Greek form of the name "Joshua" (see Acts 13:6; Col. 4:11 for instances of other men named Jesus). So, Matthew distinguishes this Jesus by saying that He is the one **"who is called Christ"**. "Christ" is the Greek word for "Messiah", or "anointed one", which was a common way that the writers in the Old Testament referred to the Messiah (see I Sam. 24:6; Ps. 2:2; Ps. 105:15; Isa. 45:1; Dan. 9:25-26). Jesus was commonly called "Christ" (using it effectively as His proper name) in the Epistles after His ascension. However, we find the term used sparingly of Him by His disciples during His life on earth. There were three notable instances when His disciples used the term: 1. Just after Andrew was called as a disciple, he told his brother Peter: **"We have found the Messiah"** (John 1:41); 2. When Martha confessed Jesus as Christ just before the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:27); 3. When Peter proclaimed Jesus as **"Christ, the Son of the Living God"** (Matt. 16:16) in response to Jesus' question: **"Who do you say I am?"** (Matt. 16:15). Jesus often used the term of Himself, thereby boldly proclaiming Himself as the Messiah (Matt. 23:10; Mark 9:41; John 4:26; John 17:3). The angels called Him the Christ when they proclaimed Him to the shepherds (Luke 2:11). Sadly, many of the references to Jesus as Christ were statements made in mockery (see Matt. 26:63; Matt. 26:68; Matt. 27:17; Mark 15:32; Luke 22:67; Luke 23:39). Significantly, after Jesus' death and resurrection, He was known as Christ by even non-disciples. Josephus, a non-Christian, Jewish historian, refers to Him as such: "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise

man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ” [Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18; Chapter 3].

Matthew sums up the genealogy in verse 17: **“Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.”** Matthew has divided the genealogy into three sets of fourteen. This was probably done to aid in the memorization of it. In his divisions, Matthew highlights the three great periods of the history of the Jews up until that time. It has been noted that there are not enough names given in the genealogy to make three sets of fourteen unless someone is counted twice. Matthew tells us whom we are to count twice. He says in verse 17 there were fourteen **“from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile...”** So, we are to count fourteen starting with Abraham and ending with David; then fourteen starting with David and ending with Josiah; then fourteen starting with Jeconiah and ending with Christ. To achieve these three sets of fourteen, names have been left out of the second and third periods, as was usual in the genealogies of the Bible (the first period contains all of the names, however, for Matthew says **“in all”** when referring to that period).

The Birth of Jesus

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

— Matthew 1:18-25

HAVING IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION looked at the genealogy of the Messiah, here we learn about the miraculous events surrounding the conception and birth of the Messiah. Matthew begins: **“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ**

came about: **Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit**” (vs. 18). So, we first learn of the miraculous conception of Jesus. He was conceived in Mary, while she was still a virgin, **“through the Holy Spirit”**. The phrase, **“through the Holy Spirit”**, implies some miraculous act of creation of the seed in Mary by the Holy Spirit. For some reason, many people have problems believing the virgin conception of Jesus. However, a far greater mystery lies in how the Son of God, through whom **“all things were made”** (John 1:3), limited Himself so as to be able to dwell in a fleshly body and become a man. This is the real miracle. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and is fully man and fully God, we should have no problem believing that Mary conceived while still a virgin.

Matthew’s narrative focusses on the episode as seen through Joseph’s eyes (as opposed to Luke, who focusses on the episode as seen through Mary’s eyes, see Luke 2). Matthew continues: **“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly”** (vs. 19). This situation must have been the greatest trial ever faced by Joseph. Think of it. The woman to whom he was pledged to be married is found to be with child. What could he do? Even though Joseph and Mary were not yet married, but only pledged to be married (or betrothed), in that culture, a divorce was required to terminate the betrothal (notice that in verse 19, Joseph is called Mary’s **“husband”**). In other words, the betrothal was just as binding as a marriage. Since Joseph **“was a righteous man”**, he could not go through with the marriage, because that would bring guilt upon himself. Yet, Joseph **“did not want to expose [Mary] to public disgrace”**, so he decided **“to divorce her quietly.”**

Joseph no doubt thought that he had come up with the best solution to the problem; and, given the facts that he knew about the case, who could argue with his solution? He could continue to be considered **“righteous”**, and at the same time show mercy to Mary. According to the law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned (see Deut. 22:23). However the Law specifies that both adulterers, the man and the woman, be stoned. In Mary’s case, the man was nowhere to be found (because, of course, Mary was a virgin), so Joseph chose to show mercy upon Mary by **“divorcing her quietly”** (interestingly, this same mercy is shown by Jesus to the adulteress in John 8:1-11).

So yes, Joseph’s solution to the problem was commendable; however, God had a better solution: **“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit’”** (vs. 20). God’s solution was for Joseph to take Mary home as his wife. At times, we think we have everything figured out, and we come up with our plans to handle certain situations, and then God comes along and changes everything! “Lord!”, we say, “What are you doing?” We must realize that God knows much more about the situation than we do. At times, God asks us to act on faith, not giving us all the details for doing things His way. Joseph was blessed by God in that he was given the reason that it was OK to go ahead and marry his betrothed: **“Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”** All is OK. Mary is blameless in the situation.

God not only gave Joseph information about Mary’s blamelessness in the situation, but gave him a command. The angel of the Lord continued: **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will**

save His people from their sins” (vs. 21). By commanding Joseph to **“give Him the name Jesus”**, God was in effect commanding Joseph to adopt the son as his own. By doing so, since Joseph was in the royal line of the Davidic throne, Jesus would also be in the royal line. This was necessary to fulfill the prophecies that denoted that the Messiah would rule on David’s throne.

The angel gave Joseph a reason for naming his son **“Jesus”**: **“Because He will save His people from their sins.”** The name **“Jesus”** is the Greek form of the name **“Joshua”**, which means, **“the Lord saves”**. The name **“Jesus”** at that time was a fairly common name. Perhaps parents named their sons **“Jesus”** with the secret hope that their **“Jesus”** would be the Messiah. Joseph was commanded by God to give the true Messiah the name **“Jesus.”**

Now, the angel is very explicit in specifying what sort of salvation Jesus the Messiah would bring: **“He will save His people from their sins.”** The Jews at that time were primarily looking for a messiah who would save them from the tyranny of the Roman Empire. God is better than that: He gives us the more important salvation. Yes, salvation from the tyranny of Rome would have made the lives of the Jews on this earth better, but such a salvation would have had no effect on their eternity, their existence after they leave this earth. Salvation from sin is the greatest gift that we have from God. Without it, we cannot be reconciled to God, and so, must spend our eternity out of His presence. With it, however, we can enter God’s presence, even be adopted as His child, and thus, enjoy all the benefits and blessings of being His child throughout eternity. Many in this world, like the Jews, look to God for salvation from trials in this world, while ignoring the most valuable salvation that God offers them: salvation from their sins through His Son Jesus Christ.

That the Messiah was sent to save His people from their sins fulfills a number of prophecies from the Old Testament, among them: “[**The LORD**] **Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins**” (Ps. 130:8); “**But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation**” (Isa. 45:17). Notice that the angel speaking to Joseph said that Jesus would save “**His people**”. This refers specifically to the Jews. As we read the Gospels, we notice that Jesus’ ministry on earth dealt primarily with the Jews. God offered His salvation through the person Jesus Christ to His chosen nation first. Then, just as it was prophesied that through the seed of Abraham all nations would be blessed (see Gen. 12:3), so Christ commanded that the salvation from sin be offered to all nations, when He said: “**Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations**” (Matt. 28:19). As Paul says, the gospel message is “**the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile**” (Rom. 1:16).

By the way, when the angel said to Joseph: “**He will save His people from their sins**”, he means “*He* and only *He*”. There is no one else in heaven and on earth who can save people from their sins. Jesus is the answer to the great “**mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God**” (Eph. 3:9). The mystery: How could sinful man be reconciled to Holy God? Ever since Adam, because of man’s sin, he has not been able to enter into full communion with God. Our Holy God cannot allow Himself to be tainted by the sin of man, lest our sin compromise His perfect holiness. Because of this, “**the wages of sin is death**” (Rom. 6:23). However, God had promised (as cited above) that “**Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation**” (Isa. 45:17); He promised to “**redeem Israel from all their sins**” (Ps. 130:8).

But how was God to do this, and yet at the same time, maintain His holiness? The answer to this mystery is Jesus

Christ. As Paul said (providing the answer to the mystery alluded to in Eph. 3:9): **“In [Jesus] and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence”** (Eph. 3:12). God sent His Son Jesus to earth, to live as a man, a sinless life. Since He was conceived miraculously through the power of the Holy Spirit, He did not inherit man’s sinful nature. Since He was in constant obedience to His Heavenly Father throughout His life on earth, He could fulfill the role of the spotless lamb, and could be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of all people. Long before Jesus came to earth, in the Law that God gave to Moses, He established a way that the sins of His people may be covered through the blood sacrifice of unblemished animals. God established this law as a **“shadow of the good things that [were] coming”** (Heb. 10:1). However, since what was offered was only the blood of unblemished bulls and goats, these were only imperfect sacrifices, shadows of the perfect sacrifice that was to come. Being imperfect, their sacrifices had to be offered over and over in order to cover the sins of the offerer. You see, the blood of unblemished goats and bulls was necessarily an imperfect sacrifice because the goats and bulls themselves knew nothing about God’s law, and so were only unblemished in their outward appearance. A perfect sacrifice would have to be unblemished inwardly, obeying perfectly all of God’s law. Jesus is the only man in history, who has obeyed God perfectly throughout His whole life on earth. Thus, He is the only one worthy to be a sacrifice for the sins of others, since He is the only one who did not deserve to be punished for His own sin. This is why the angel said emphatically to Joseph: **“He”** (and only He) **“will save His people from their sins.”**

Matthew put all this into perspective: **“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and**

they will call Him Immanuel—which means, **‘God with us’**“ (vss. 22-23). Matthew here cited Isaiah 7:14, saying that it is the birth of Jesus which fulfills the prophecy contained in that verse. Many people have difficulty in seeing the verse in Isaiah as referring to the birth of the Messiah. They see this verse as being a sign given specifically to Ahaz, a sign that was to be fulfilled in the lifetime of Ahaz. This is not so. Isaiah 7:14 is a sign given to *all* of God’s people, not just Ahaz. In Isaiah 7:11, the Lord graciously allowed Ahaz to ask for a sign that would confirm that Judah would not be destroyed by the Arameans. Ahaz (disobediently) rejected the Lord’s offer for a sign (Isa. 7:12). The Lord was upset by this (Isa. 7:13), and so, rather than giving Ahaz a sign, He gives all of God’s people a sign, saying: **“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you ”** (note: this **“you”** in the original Hebrew is plural, denoting that the Lord was not just speaking to Ahaz, but to all of God’s people) **“a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel”** (Isa. 7:14). If one continues reading the full context of this prophecy, one will see that **“Immanuel”** is twice more referred to (see Isa. 8:8 and Isa. 8:10). These references more clearly link **“Immanuel”** to the Lord Himself, not to a child in Ahaz’ time given that name. Then later, in Isa. 9:6, the child spoken of in Isaiah 7:14 is more clearly identified as the Messiah in the famous passage: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”** (Isa. 9:6). In summary, many people have problems in identifying the **“Immanuel”** spoken of in Isaiah 7:14 as the Messiah, because they do not read the entire context of the prophecy, which goes from Isaiah 7:1 all the way through to Isaiah 9:7.

Matthew tells us that all these events surrounding Jesus' birth fulfill the prophecy: **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel”** (vs. 23). This prophecy not only predicts the virgin conception of Jesus, but also gives Him an additional name: **“Immanuel”**. Now, as far as we know, no one during His life on earth called Jesus by this name. However, **“Immanuel”** expresses the nature of Christ, for it means **“God with us”**. And so, when we state that Christ is Son of God and Son of Man, we are in effect calling Him **“Immanuel”**, **“God with us”**.

With the two names in this passage that are given for the Messiah — **“Jesus”** and **“Immanuel”** — we are greatly blessed. The first expresses His office, the second His nature. With the first, we are reminded that He came to save us from our sins, to bring eternal life to us, to reconcile us to God through His sacrifice. With the second, we are reminded of God's great love to send His own Son, the second person of the Trinity, to earth, so that through Him, God is indeed **“with us”**. What a blessing! Praise be to God!

This chapter is concluded by showing Joseph's obedience to the Lord: **“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus”** (vss. 24-25). Notice that Joseph obeyed God immediately: **“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”** Notice that Joseph obeyed God completely: he did everything the angel had commanded of him. This obedience of Joseph was non-trivial. Undoubtedly, gossip had spread around the village concerning Mary's being with child. By taking Mary home as his wife, Joseph was opening up himself for suspicion. But, apparently Joseph was unconcerned about this. The Lord commanded him, and he obeyed. We

must always make sure that we are more concerned about what the Lord thinks of us, than what men think of us. At times, we must obey the Lord, even though the world misunderstands our actions.

3 - MATTHEW 2

Visitors from the East

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.””

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

— Matthew 2

HERE WE HAVE the familiar episode of the visit of the Magi to Jesus. However, despite its familiarity, most of us have many misconceptions about the Magi and their visit to Jesus.

These misconceptions have crept in through traditions that have evolved over the years concerning the celebration of Christmas. These misconceptions include: the Magi were kings (in fact, they were not kings), there were three of them (in fact, we do not know how many there were), they visited Jesus while He was in the manger (in fact, they visited Jesus some time later, after the Holy family had taken residence in a house, see vs. 11). The reason I bring this up is not to disillusion you concerning our Christmas traditions, but to use this as an example of what can happen when we stray from consulting the Bible for the truth concerning biblical matters. As we can see from the story of the Magi, humans have a way of embellishing the truth so that, in the end, they have embellished it so much that it no longer resembles the truth. While the details concerning the visit of the Magi are not theologically significant, there are many theologically significant truths that have been embellished by man and the traditions of various faiths, such that they also no longer resemble God's truth. And so, we must be careful to seek God's truth in God's Word, not in the traditions of men. On questions concerning the tenets of Christianity, we should turn to the Bible as the final authority. We should only turn to men for such answers insofar as they can help lead us to the truth in God's Word.

So now, let's look at what really happened: **“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him’“** (vss. 1-2). At this time, Herod was ruling Israel under the authority of Rome. He was given by the Senate in Rome the title “King of the Jews”, even though he himself was not a Jew (he was Idumean). Thus, as we shall see, he felt threatened

when the Magi asked: **“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”**

The Magi were **“from the east”**, probably Persia (formerly Babylon). It is quite possible that this group of Magi were descended from the astrologers and magicians that Daniel ruled over in Nebuchadnezzar’s court (see Dan. 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). If so, they quite possibly had access to the writings and prophecies of Daniel. This would explain their knowledge of the coming of the Messiah to Israel, especially since Daniel 9:25 is very explicit as to when the Messiah would come. Possibly because of these prophecies, contemporary historians (Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius) tell us that there was a widespread feeling that a world ruler would come out of Israel. God Himself must also have spoken to the Magi in some way so that they related the **“star in the east”** to the coming King of the Jews, for the Magi called the star **“His star”**.

There has been much speculation concerning what exactly this **“star”** was. Many people have exerted much effort to try and find a *natural* explanation for the star. They have looked at the paths of comets to see which ones may have been near the earth at the time of Christ’s birth; they have determined what conjunctions of planets and stars may have occurred at the time that might account for an abnormally large looking star; they have speculated that a supernova may have occurred, that would generate a large looking star. In my opinion, none of these explanations is adequate, especially given that the star later **“went ahead of [the Magi] until it stopped over the place where the child was”** (see vs. 9). The best explanation for the star is a miraculous one, not a natural one. The **“star”**, given its un-starlike behavior, must certainly have been a special creation of God to lead the Magi (and others) to the Lord of the universe. Certainly, there were many other miracles surrounding the birth of our Savior: the virgin conception, the

annunciation by angels, the special guidance by God of Joseph and Mary through dreams and visions, and for that matter, the knowledge of the Magi from Persia that a Jewish king was coming, could all be considered miracles of God. Why not also a miraculous star?

We may ask, why did God go to so much trouble in guiding the Magi to Jesus? We could give many reasons. First, though Jesus was specifically a Messiah for the Jews,—**“King of the Jews”**, as the Magi called Him--He was also sent so that **“all peoples on earth would be blessed”** through Him (see Gen. 12:3). Therefore, it makes sense that His birth was an event that God would not leave unheralded among the Gentiles. Though they were not Jews, the Magi sought the King of the Jews, somehow knowing His kingship would apply also to them.

Second, the response of the Magi to the birth of the King—that they embarked on a long journey to **“come to worship Him”**—in contrast to the response of the chief priests and of Herod, is valuable for us to study. It is significant that the Magi, Gentiles from a faraway land, were the first men to announce the birth of the Messiah. Where were the chief priests and teachers of the law? As for them, they did not seem at all interested. After the Magi had inquired of Herod concerning the birth of the **“king of the Jews”**, Herod inquired of the **“chief priests and teachers of the law”** concerning where the Messiah was to be born (vs. 4). They were well acquainted with the prophecies that foretold where the Messiah was to be born, and cited one of them to Herod: **“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel”** (vs. 6; cf. Micah 5:2). Sadly, though they knew the Bible, they had no desire to know the King. One would have thought that they would have been interested in what the Magi had to say,

that they would have marveled that a star guided the Magi to Israel, that they would have pleaded to accompany the Magi to see if, indeed, the King had been born. Certainly John's words are borne out in the behavior of the chief priests and the teachers of the law: **“He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him”** (John 1:11). It is a sad truth that it is not always the “religious” leaders who serve God best. Perhaps the chief priests and teachers of the law had grown too accustomed to the teachings of the Bible: the Word of God no longer stirred their hearts. We must be careful that apathy concerning things spiritual does not set in in our lives and service. “The scribes should be a warning to all religious teachers, in the pulpit, the Sunday-school, the family; they told others where to find the Savior, but did not go to Him themselves” [Broadus, 21].

Herod's response to the inquiries of the Magi was not apathy, but opposition: **“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed”** (vs. 3). Herod, considering himself to be the one and only king of the Jews, felt threatened by **“the one who has been born king of the Jews”** (vs. 2). Note that Jesus was **“born king of the Jews”**, He did not have to wait to become the king. Herod, on the other hand, had to petition the Senate at Rome to be given the title “king of the Jews”. So Herod was, in a sense, a usurper. Herod demanded the worship of the Jews; the Jews should have been worshipping the true king of the Jews, Jesus Christ. Even given all this, though, it is surprising that Herod could have felt so threatened by an infant. Herod, being aged, must surely have realized that he would be dead and gone well before this infant king could become any sort of threat to him. Herod had the paranoia that power and riches can bring. Power and riches can oftentimes be dangerous to the soul. Given that this new **“king of the Jews”** was prophesied in the Word of God to be born, did not Herod realize that in

opposing the child he was opposing God? It is a very stupid thing to fight against God. One can never win such a battle. It is especially stupid to fight a loving God, such as we have. Why would one fight a loving, forgiving, gracious God?

Herod put on a show to the Magi, pretending that he desired also to worship this new king: **“Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him’”** (vs. 7-8). Herod’s reply notwithstanding, the Magi must have thought it strange that there was not more interest in Israel to worship this new king. They had travelled hundreds of miles to worship, yet the people whose king the child was, including the religious leaders, did not seem to care. This behavior of the locals is evocative of those who live in so-called “Christian” nations, and yet, have no desire to learn about the Christian faith, to learn about their Savior Jesus Christ. It seems that it is much easier to get a total stranger to the faith interested in the Gospel message than those who have been exposed to it in some form or another all their lives.

A third reason that (I believe) God sent the Magi was to show us that He can and does speak to those of other lands who are not exposed to the truths of God through more conventional means of revelation. Clearly, the Magi were given some special revelation by God. Not only did they have the star to guide them to where Jesus was born, but they were given the knowledge to relate the star to the birth of the king of the Jews. They said: **“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw *His* star in the east”** (vs. 1).

It also seems that they were given some sort of revelation from God concerning the gifts that they should give Jesus: **“On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother**

Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh” (vs. 11). The gifts can be seen to be prophetic to the offices of Jesus Christ. The gold speaks of His royalty; the incense (which was commonly used in sacrificial offerings) speaks of His deity; the myrrh (which was used in the embalming of deceased bodies, see John 19:39) points to His death and thus speaks of His priesthood. And so, it seems that somehow God inspired these gifts given by the Magi. Most importantly, the Magi were inspired to **“worship”** Jesus. Their actions disclose the fact that their worship was true. They travelled many miles, went to great trouble to seek Him out, were overjoyed when the guiding star reappeared, and then, when they found Him, **“bowed down and worshipped Him”** (vs. 11). All this suggests that the Magi had a saving knowledge of Jesus. They must have understood who He is, and that salvation comes through Him. In addition to the Magi, there are others in the Bible who have come to a knowledge of God without the benefit of His normal means of revelation: witness Melchizedek, Jethro and Job. Let’s not underestimate God. Many people ask, “What about the guy in a far-off country who has not heard of Christ? Can he be saved?” The knowledge of God as demonstrated by the Magi implies that, yes, God can reveal Himself to them.

A fourth reason that (I believe) God sent the Magi was that their visit set off a chain of events that led the Holy family first to Egypt, and then finally to Nazareth, where God wanted them. This course of events began when the Magi visited Herod. News of the birth of the true **“king of the Jews”** disturbed Herod. After finding out from the chief priests and teachers of the law where the Messiah was prophesied to be born (vss. 4-5), Herod **“called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared”** (vs.

7). We learn later that Herod wanted this information in order to determine how old the child would be (see vs. 16). Herod also told the Magi: **“As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him”** (vs. 8). Herod of course had no desire to worship the king, but was already planning to kill Him.

God foiled Herod’s plan, though, and warned the Magi in a dream to not return to Herod. God also sent an angel to warn Joseph: **“Get up...take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him”** (vs. 13). Joseph, as we have always seen him do, obeyed God to the word: **“So he got up, took the child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod”** (vs. 14-15). Matthew uses this event to teach us about Old Testament typology. He states: **“And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’”** (vs. 15). This passage is taken from Hosea 11:1, and if one turns there and reads the context, he will find that the Lord is speaking through Hosea concerning the disobedience of Israel. The passage upon plain reading does not at all seem prophetic of Christ. So, why would Matthew cite it then? Didn’t he know that the context of the passage concerned the history of disobedient Israel? What has this to do with Christ? Of course, Matthew knew the context of what he was citing, yet he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to cite the passage anyway.

This passage was cited not to confirm an obvious prophecy, but to teach us concerning a not-so-obvious prophecy. If we delve into the question, “How does this prophecy relate to Christ?”, we can learn something about prophecy and typology in the Old Testament. Since the passage in Hosea obviously concerns the history of Israel, Matthew must be telling us that

the history of Israel is typical in some way of the life of Christ. A cursory inspection of the history of Israel and the life of Christ reveals some similarities: as Matthew tells us, they both were exiled to Egypt; they both faced trials in the desert (Israel for forty years, Jesus for forty days); Christ is God's son, Israel was also called God's son (see Ex. 4:22-23; Jer. 31:9). We also find passages of prophecy in the Old Testament where prophecies concerning Israel and prophecies concerning Christ are intertwined (most notably, see Isa. 42 through 53). There, of course, is a noteworthy difference between the history of Israel and the life of Christ: Israel was disobedient, Christ was obedient. Jesus is what Israel should have been. Israel should have been God's son, a light leading the Gentiles to God, teaching the surrounding nations about God's law, an exemplary nation in obedience to God. But Israel failed in this, and so Christ needed to come to earth to be what Israel failed to be. Isaiah 5 speaks of Israel as a vine in God's vineyard, given special care by God. But the vine yielded only bad fruit. Jesus, in John 15, states: **"I am the true vine"** (John 15:1). So again we see, Jesus is what Israel should have been.

These are some of the truths we learn by digging into Matthew's citation: **"Out of Egypt I called my son."** Some would have turned to Hosea, read the context, and concluded (without digging into it) that Matthew did not know what he was talking about. Many do this. They read a portion of the Bible and, because they do not immediately understand it, they conclude that it is a mistake. Then they throw up their hands and say, "See! The Bible is full of mistakes and contradictions!" This statement reflects their ignorance, laziness and arrogance. They show their ignorance by not understanding what the Bible is saying, their laziness by not seeking a true understanding of what the Bible is saying, their arrogance by jumping to the conclusion that the Bible is flawed just because they do not

understand what it is saying. The Bible is God's Word. Our minds do not immediately understand many things in it. But I have found, God rewards greatly those who dig in to difficult passages, with the desire to learn the truth about what the passages are saying.

To continue, Joseph (as stated) was obedient to God, and fled to Egypt. There were many Jews in Egypt at the time (so we learn from contemporary historians), so this journey was not all that unusual. Herod went on to **“kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi”** (vs. 16). When he says, **“in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi”**, Matthew is referring back to verse 7, when Herod **“found out from [the Magi] the exact time the star had appeared.”** Thus, we can infer that the star appeared to the Magi about two years earlier. Herod interpreted this to mean that the child they were seeking was born at that time, and so he decided to **“kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under.”** This, of course, was a very cruel act. This cruel act, though, is consistent with what we know from history about King Herod. Herod's paranoia and cruelty led him to kill three of his own sons, and one of his wives. Also, in order that the whole nation would mourn his death, Herod ordered that upon his death one member of every family in Israel be put to death (this order was not carried out). So here we see more of Herod's cruelty in killing the boys in Bethlehem.

Matthew here cites a passage from Jeremiah as being fulfilled: **“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more”** (vs. 18, citing Jer. 31:1). **“Rachel”** is seen as the mother of Israel. Certainly, Rachel would have mourned for her children in Bethlehem

being murdered by Herod. The context of the passage in Jeremiah from which this verse is taken speaks of the suffering of Israel (specifically during the exile), and the future blessings upon Israel by God through their Redeemer. So again, we have a passage where prophecies concerning the history of Israel and the life of Christ are intertwined. I encourage you to turn to Jeremiah 31 and read the whole context of this passage.

After Herod's death, Joseph was told in a dream to return to Israel (vs. 20), and again Joseph was completely obedient (vs. 21). Joseph feared to return to Judea, though, since Archelaus (Herod's son) was reigning there (vs. 22). Instead, **“having been warned in a dream, [Joseph] withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth”** (vss. 22-23). So, as stated, the visit of the Magi to Herod set off this whole chain of events that eventually brought Joseph and his family to reside in Nazareth, where God wanted Jesus to reside during His youth. Matthew says: **“So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene’”** (vs. 23). Here, Matthew is not quoting a specific prophecy (you cannot find these exact words in the Old Testament), but rather he is referring to an impression gleaned from a number of prophecies concerning the Messiah. This is why he says, **“...what was said through the prophets...”** Matthew uses the plural **“prophets”** because, again, he is not referring to a specific prophecy.

So, what does the statement, **“He will be called a Nazarene”**, mean. Nazareth was an obscure and unimportant town, known for its depravity. In fact, when Christ's disciple Philip told Nathaniel about **“Jesus of Nazareth”**, Nathaniel said: **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”** And so, the statement, **“He will be called a Nazarene”**, is really synonymous with, “He will be despised, He will be looked down upon, He will be known as one who comes from

an obscure and unimportant place.” This fulfills a number of prophecies, among them: **“He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground”** (Isa. 53:2); **“He was despised and rejected by men”** (Isa. 53:3); **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people”** (Ps. 22:6). It is significant (and I think Matthew here is implicitly pointing out the fact) that Jesus was known as **“Jesus of Nazareth”**, not “Jesus of Bethlehem” (though He had every right to be known as “Jesus of Bethlehem”). Bethlehem was the City of David, and so the appellation “Jesus of Bethlehem” would have suggested royalty. God chose the humble road for His Son. He directed Joseph to Nazareth, so that Christ would be known as **“Jesus of Nazareth.”** Jesus grew up in a humble family, in a rough neighborhood. No one would be able to say: “Oh, Jesus was sinless because He had it easy.” And so, no matter what our lot in life, we have no right to complain. We cannot say: “God, I’m a sinner because of what you made me, where you put me. Look at this neighborhood I live in! Look, I am poor!” Don’t complain. You are walking in the footsteps of your Savior. Jesus, the Creator of the universe, allowed Himself to be known as **“Jesus of Nazareth.”**

4 - MATTHEW 3

The Messiah's Forerunner

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing-floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

HAVING RELATED the events surrounding Christ's birth and infancy, Matthew jumps to many years later, to the days leading up to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry: **"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'"** (vss. 1-2). The ministry of John the Baptist was prophesied in the Old Testament: **"This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'"** (vs. 3). Matthew here is citing Isaiah 40:3 as a prophecy concerning John the Baptist. Significantly, all four Gospels cite this prophecy: see Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23. In fact, in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist himself cites the prophecy: **"John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'"** (John 1:23).

John the Baptist was well aware of God's purpose for him. He was to **"Prepare the way for the Lord."** In those days (and also in these days as well, if you think of it), whenever a king visited a city, men would be sent ahead of him to prepare the way. In those days, that required not only diplomatic preparation, but also physical preparation of the roads so that the journey for the king would be comfortable. The advance-men would be required to **"make straight paths"** for the king. Now, if earthly kings had advance-men who prepared the way, how much more should the King of the Universe, the Promised Messiah, have an advance-man to prepare the way?

The primary role of the Messiah's advance-man was to be **"a voice... calling in the desert."** Note the emphasis is on the message, not the messenger: the **"voice"**, not the man. This is just as John the Baptist would want it. He realized that he was only valuable in the service of God to the extent that he

communicated the message of God, to the extent that he was the **“voice...calling”**. This was the case for all the prophets of the Old Testament. God did not look for the strongest men, or the smartest men, or the most handsome men to be His prophets. No, He looked for those who had the ability and desire to communicate His message to the people. That is the role of prophets.

John the Baptist was the last in the line of Old Testament prophets (even though he appears in the New Testament!). As Jesus taught: **“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John”** (Luke 16:16). John’s coming broke a long silence by God to His people. It had been hundreds of years since God raised up a prophet to the Jews. Finally, God broke His silence with the **“voice of one calling in the desert.”** By fulfilling this prophecy of Isaiah, John was signaling the coming of God’s kingdom to earth. John’s purpose was to prepare God’s people for this kingdom. Thus, he cried out: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”** (vs. 2).

The word **“Repent”**, means to have a “change of mind”. In our context, this change of mind is a change concerning how one views sin and a sinful lifestyle. John is exhorting the people to go from a love of sin to a hatred of it, from living in sin to taking refuge in the salvation of God. This is an appropriate message for the forerunner of the Messiah, because the Messiah was coming to **“save His people from their sins”** (Matt. 1:21). Such a salvation was only valuable to those who had a sense of their sin. As Jesus said: **“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (Matt. 9:12).

John’s plea to **“Repent”** was no different than the Old Testament prophets who preceded him. The Old Testament prophet Joel cried out: **“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments”**

(Joel 2:12-13); and Isaiah: **“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon”** (Isa. 55:7); and Ezekiel: **“Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?”** (Ezek. 33:11). John’s message, though similar, was more urgent than the prophets who preceded him, because **“the kingdom of heaven [was] near.”** The **“kingdom”** was near because the coming to earth of the King of Kings was near. John wanted the people to be ready for their King. This entailed repentance. Contrary to contemporary popular belief, the King was not coming as a military leader that would conquer the Romans, but as a spiritual leader that would save the people from their sins. Thus, John’s message was not to take up arms and armor to prepare their bodies for the King, but to repent from sin to prepare their souls for the King.

John had the appearance and diet of one who apparently was not too concerned with worldly comforts: **“John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey”** (vs. 4). His dress was reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets, especially Elijah (see II Kings 1:8). His food was not as outrageous as it may sound to those of us in America. To eat wild honey is not all that strange, even today. And the eating of **“locusts”** is practiced even today in many countries (especially in the Middle East and Asia). Interestingly, the eating of locusts was expressly permitted in the law of God, as given to Moses: **“Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper”** (Lev. 11:22). Given all this, the thrust of this description of John was not that he wore strange clothes and ate strange food, but that he lived off the land.

Despite his appearance and diet, and despite the fact that he ministered in the desert, John was renown for his ministry:

“People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan” (vs. 6). Such success in a ministry such as John’s would be a surprise to many today. He was hardly what we would call today a motivational speaker. One would not think (on the face of it) that a strong message of repentance would be all that popular. But John’s message had one very important thing going for it: it was the truth of God. These days, we must strive, not to please men with our preaching, not to strive merely to be great orators, but to speak the truth of God.

Moreover, John did not merely preach, he called his listeners to accountability to what they heard by urging them to be baptized. They did respond: **“Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River”** (vs. 6). Their confession of sin was the fruit that demonstrated that their repentance was true. To confess sin is to acknowledge before God that it is sin. Many in their sin refuse to admit that what they are doing is sin. Needless to say, one cannot repent from sin if one does not admit to it. Confession of sin before God is urged in both the Old and New Testaments. Solomon taught: **“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy”** (Prov. 28:13; see also Lev. 5:5; Lev. 26:40; Num. 5:6-7). The Apostle John taught: **“If we confess our sins, [the Lord] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9).

It was the repentance and the confession of sin that gave the baptism meaning. Baptism is an outward rite that confirms an inward change. Baptism means nothing without the inward change. As Peter taught, it is **“not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God”** that saves you through Christ (see I Peter 3:21). Baptism is a symbol of a repentant life, a symbol of putting the old body of

sin to death (symbolically drowning it in the waters of baptism) and emerging from the waters with a new life lived for God. Paul explains baptism: “[D]on’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Thus, the decision to be baptized is a serious one. It means that you have decided to put to death your old way of life, and live a new life for God.

John certainly took baptism very seriously. He did not want anyone just “going along for the ride.” He did not want to baptize anyone who had not first experienced the inward change of heart. He did not want to baptize anyone who had not decided to put to death their old way of life. “[W]hen he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’” (vss. 7-8). John could tell that the Pharisees and Sadducees had not truly repented because their lives had not “**produce[d] fruit in keeping with repentance.**” Some see John as being very harsh here. They say, “How could he turn away people who wanted to be baptized?” But rather than being harsh, John was merciful. He turned them away for their own good. He knew they had not repented and so he knew that the baptism would not be valid in the eyes of God. The baptism would only have served to appease the consciences of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and given them a false sense of confidence that they had pleased God. A meaningless baptism would have actually encouraged them to continue in their lives of sin.

Apparently, the Pharisees and Sadducees felt that they had no need to repent. They were resting in the fact that they were

Jews, descendants of Abraham. They felt that this heritage was enough to save them from the wrath that sin brings. Sensing this, John says to them: **“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’”** (vs. 9). Our heritage will not save us from wrath. The fact that we live in a (so-called) “Christian” nation will not save us. A godly mother will not save us. Salvation comes individually through faith in Jesus.

It seems that the Pharisees and Sadducees believed that God needed them. They reasoned that God would need His people to help Him reign with the Messiah. They thought that this would be the job of the sons of Abraham. John, however, negates this idea, saying to them: **“I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham”** (vs. 9). Never think as you serve the Lord, “Oh, God really needs me.” God can raise up stones at any time to do His work.

To drive home to the people just how important repentance is, John alludes to the wrath of God that will be poured out upon the unrepentant: **“The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire”** (vs. 10). God is holy. God hates sin. He will one day pour out the full measure of His wrath upon it. We don’t like to hear of God’s wrath. Many deny it. They say, “How could a loving God pour out His wrath upon His creation?” Yes, God is loving, but God is also holy. God shows His love by giving us the opportunity to repent from our sins. God has greatly shown His love by sending His son to die for our sins, so that we do not have to experience His wrath. But God must also, eventually, show that He is holy, and that He hates sin. Those who choose not to accept the gift of God’s love in Jesus Christ are left to themselves to face the punishment for their sin.

We would all rather speak of the love of God, than the wrath of God. But as has often been said, there is no good news without there being some bad news. None of us enjoys speaking of the wrath of God, but it must be preached: the world must not go unwarned. “It is no real kindness to keep back the terrors of the Lord: it is good for us all to be taught that it is possible to be lost forever, and that all unconverted people are hanging over the brink of the pit” [Ryle, 20].

John speaks here of the wrath of God symbolically (as is often done in the Bible): **“The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire”** (vs. 10). We are not sure exactly what the wrath of God specifically will entail. That it is often referred to in the Bible through the use of symbols implies that our words cannot exactly express, or our minds cannot exactly fathom the exact means by which the wrath of God will manifest itself against sin. “So leaving aside speculations, over which vain men weary themselves without benefit, let it suffice that by these expressions, as far as our simple minds may grasp, a dreadful torment is indicated, beyond men’s ability to understand, beyond the power of words to express” [Calvin, 129].

John goes on to speak of His role as forerunner to the Messiah: **“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”** (vs. 11). John contrasts the baptism he brings with the baptism that the Messiah will bring. John baptized **“with water for repentance.”** Again, John’s baptism was merely an outward sign of confirmation that an inward change had taken place. In contrast, the baptism of the Messiah will be **“with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”** The wording in the original Greek implies that, when John

speaks of the baptism of the **“Holy Spirit”** and **“fire”**, he is not speaking of two different sorts of baptisms, but rather two aspects of the same baptism. While **“fire”** is often used as a symbol of destructive wrath in the Bible, it is also often used as a symbol of constructive purification, the symbol of a fire used by one who refines silver (see Isa. 1:25; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2-3). So here, John (I believe), when he speaks of the baptism of the **“Holy Spirit”** and **“fire”**, he is speaking of the “fiery character of the Spirit’s operations upon the soul: searching, consuming, refining, sublimating” [JFB, 12]. So, John’s baptism is inferior to the baptism of the Messiah in that the baptism of repentance is passive (a reaction to a change that has already taken place), whereas the baptism of the Holy Spirit is active (having the ability to bring about a change in one’s life).

The Baptism of the Messiah

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter Him, saying, **“I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”**

¹⁵ Jesus replied, **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”** Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.”**

— Matthew 3:13-17

IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES, John the Baptist had been telling the crowd about the coming Messiah and the superiority of His baptism to John’s own: **“I baptize you with water for**

repentance. **But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing-floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire**" (Matt. 3:11-12). Imagine John's surprise, then, when one day he looks up and sees the Lord coming to him: **"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John"** (vs. 13).

John's response to Jesus' coming to him reflected his surprise: **"But John tried to deter Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?'"** (vs. 14). The word **"deter"** used here implies a strong protest by John. John knew Christ was too worthy for baptism; John knew that he himself was unworthy to baptize Him. There is a bit of irony here. John had just refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees, the self-proclaimed religious leaders of the day, because they were unworthy for baptism (see Matt. 3:7ff). Now John is trying to refuse to baptize Jesus because John's baptism was not worthy of Jesus.

John's response reminds me of Peter's response to Jesus when Jesus sat down to wash the disciples' feet. Peter said: **"Lord, are You going to wash my feet?"** (John 13:6). And indeed, these two episodes are similar. Both reflect Jesus' mission to be a humble servant to His people, and to be an example to His people of what He desires them to be. Both John and Peter were surprised by Jesus' behavior because, in each case, Jesus was doing something that, as sinless Son of Man and Lord of the Universe, He really (from a human point of view) had no business doing. As stated, John had just declared the greatness of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire that Jesus was going to bring, and so what need did Jesus have of John's inferior baptism? In Peter's case, Jesus had just

been hailed as King as He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (see John 12:12ff), and so why would the King sit down to wash His follower's feet?

Jesus tells John why He should be baptized by him: **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”** (vs. 15). Jesus did many things for our sakes **“to fulfill all righteousness”**, to be an example to us of how a righteous life should be lived. If Jesus passed through the waters of baptism, how much should we? Many say, “Oh, I don't need to be baptized. It is not necessary for salvation.” Quite true. It is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience. As John declared: **“Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did”** (I John 2:6). God desires that we be baptized. Proof of this is that His Son (who truly did not *need* to be baptized) allowed John to baptize Him. Moreover, through Christ's humility in receiving the baptism, He has made baptism a highly honorable ritual. Our Lord was baptized. We should delight in being baptized, to follow in His steps.

Baptism is a necessary step of preparation if one wants to serve God effectively. It is a symbol of putting away the old life lived for oneself, and emerging from the waters of baptism with a new life that will be lived in the service of God. For Jesus, the baptism inaugurated His ministry. This is why He said to John: **“Let it be so now.”** **“Now”** was the right time for Jesus' baptism because Jesus was **“now”** embarking on His ministry.

God's approval of the baptism, and support of Jesus as He embarked on His ministry was immediately displayed: **“As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’”** (vss. 16-17). All three persons of the Trinity share in the inauguration of the ministry

of Christ: the Son in the baptism, the Spirit **“descending like a dove,”** the voice of approval by the Father. Again, Jesus is an example to us in this. I guarantee that, after your baptism, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity will be present. You will feel renewed as you are filled afresh with the Holy Spirit. You will feel the comfort of the Father as He declares His pleasure that you are His child. You will emerge from the waters with Jesus, guiding you in His path of service.

Christ Tempted in the Desert

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting for forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. ³ The tempter came to Him and said, “If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If You are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give You,” he said, “if You will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and angels came and attended Him.

— Matthew 4:1-11

JESUS HAD JUST experienced a great spiritual triumph. As He emerged from the waters of baptism, **“He saw the Spirit**

of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:16-17). In this chapter, right after His great spiritual triumph, Jesus faces a great spiritual challenge. This seems to be a general rule. It happens to all of us. “[S]o it often is, that after sweet communion with God in His ordinances, after large discoveries of His love and interest in Him, follow sore temptations, trials, and exercises” [Gill, in Broadus, 69]. This teaches us that, following spiritual triumphs, we must be especially on our guard against the tempter. It is at those times that the devil wants most to cut us down, so as to negate any edification we received from our spiritual triumph. In Jesus’ case, the devil (firstly) wanted to shake Jesus’ confidence that He was truly the Son of God after the Father had declared it to be so. And so, the devil begins his temptings with the phrase: **“If You are the Son of God. . .”** Then also, as we shall see, the devil wanted to cause Jesus to use improperly His office as the Son of God, thereby causing the Father to no longer be **“well pleased”** with Him.

Surprisingly, **“Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted in the desert”** (vs. 1). This same Holy Spirit who just descended upon Jesus after the waters of baptism, now leads Jesus into the desert **“to be tempted”**. Why would the Holy Spirit do this? “Sharp temptations, as they often follow seasons of high communion, so are they often preparatives for the highest work” [JFB, 18]. The motive of the Spirit was constructive: to prepare Jesus for His coming arduous ministry. Jesus was to spend the next three years “on the road”, so to speak. His ministry would be very demanding physically. What better preparation for this than forty days of fasting in the desert. Moreover, the ultimate goal of Jesus’ ministry was His sacrifice on the cross. This was the main reason He came to earth. Throughout His life, He would be tempted to forego His

sacrifice (most notably, see Matt. 16:22-23; Matt. 27:40). Here in this episode, Jesus is tempted in this same way in the third temptation as preparation for the future temptations. His resistance of this temptation will strengthen Him for the resistance He will need throughout His life on earth.

There is yet another constructive reason that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. This is, as the writer of Hebrews explains it, so that Jesus **“might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God”** (Heb. 2:17). Jesus, by becoming a man and (so to speak) walking in the shoes of a man, now has sympathy for the struggles that we face day to day. **“Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted”** (Heb. 2:18). We can be comforted by this fact, as we are tempted, and we can be emboldened in prayer by the fact that Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted: **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”** (Heb. 4:15-16).

And so we see, there were many constructive reasons that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. The motive of the devil in tempting Jesus was, on the contrary, destructive. Whereas the Holy Spirit desired to strengthen Jesus through the temptings, the devil desired to destroy Jesus and His ministry. Thus, we are hereby taught that there are two types of temptings or testings. There are constructive temptings, those that have the purpose of strengthening the one being tempted. And then there are destructive temptings, those that have the purpose of destroying the one being tempted. Throughout the Bible, we have many examples of constructive temptings sent

by God. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac to strengthen his trust in God; the Israelites were tested in the desert to strengthen them as a nation; Job was sorely tested by trials to strengthen his faith; etc. Many times, the devil is present at these constructive temptings with the motive of destroying the one being tempted. Though combined with the constructive temptings of God, such temptings by the devil are evil. It is the *intent* of the temptings that determine the goodness or evil of them.

So two principles are at work. God at times leads us into situations in which we will be tempted. The devil actively seeks to tempt us. The conclusion we can draw from this is that, yes, we will face much temptation in this life. We should not be surprised, dismayed or discouraged by this. “Deep is the disquietude which many Christians suffer from finding themselves subject to internal temptations to sin, both continuous and vehement. It staggers them to find that, without any external solicitations, they are tempted so frequently, and at times so violently, that as by a tempest they are ready to be carried away, and in a moment make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Surely, they think, this can only be accounted for but by some depth and virulence of corruption never reached by the grace of God, and inconsistent with that delight in the law of God after the inward man which is characteristic of His children. But here we see, the holy One of God, an example of solicitations to sin purely internal, for aught that we can perceive, continued throughout the long period of forty days” [JFB, 19]. To experience temptations is not evil. Even our sinless Lord faced temptations.

“After fasting for forty days and forty nights, [Jesus] was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” (vss. 2-3). In preparation for His ministry, Jesus spent **“forty**

days and forty nights” in prayer and fasting. Fasting is a good accompaniment to serious prayer and meditation. It focuses our minds on the providence of God. Through fasting, we realize just how much God has given to us. Jesus’ fast was a total food fast (Luke tells us that Jesus **“ate nothing”**), and not just a day fast (Matthew explicitly tells us that the fast was **“forty days and forty nights”**). I have heard that after the first few days of fasting, it becomes easier to fast for a while. Then, right around forty days, the hunger becomes unbearable. It is this hunger that, I believe, Matthew is referring to when he says, **“[Jesus] was hungry”**.

It was at this time that **“the tempter”** came to tempt Jesus. **“The tempter”** was none other than Satan himself (see vs. 10). Make no mistake. Satan is a real being. He is an evil being. I do not think we should jest about the devil; he’s too dark a being. We should not dress up like him at costume parties. He should not be a lovable comic character in our movies. We should not use him as a mascot at our high schools.

The devil is a sly being. He waited until Jesus was at His weakest before he confronted Jesus with the full force of his temptations. He was sly also in that his temptation of Jesus was subtle: **“If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”** On the face of it, what would be wrong with Jesus turning the stones into bread? There is nothing in the law of God that forbids the turning of stones into bread, is there? However, for Jesus, to turn the stones into bread would be to forego His mission of living as a man on earth. We men cannot turn stones into bread when we are hungry. We must depend upon the providence of God for our bread. So also Jesus, in order to live as a man, must also depend on the Father for providence, just as men do; and so He must not use His power as the Son of God for His own comfort. To do so would have threatened the validity of His mission on earth. He came to

earth to live as a man to be an example of how men should live. If He used His power for His own comfort, He would not be living as a man, and so we would not be able to use His life as an example for us.

So, the essence of this first temptation is that the devil was trying to get Jesus to use improper means, means contrary to the will of God, to get His sustenance. And though we are not tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread, are not we also tempted many times in a similar way? “The prime temptation of millions, though they often realize it not, is to use improper means of making their bread” [Morison, in Broadus, 69]. Jesus was not to use His special gifts to satisfy the desires of His flesh. So also we should be careful to use our God-given gifts to primarily serve the Lord, not ourselves.

Jesus answers the devil by quoting the Word of God: **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”** (vs. 4). The thrust of Jesus’ answer is that, yes, our daily bread is important, but obedience to God, obedience even to **“every word that comes from the mouth of God”**, is most important. As stated above, for Jesus to turn stones into bread would have been against the will of God, because Jesus was sent to live as a man on earth. Jesus in answering the devil was quoting from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 8:3. Moses in that passage was encouraging the Israelites to obey the Word of God, teaching them that to do so was more important than seeking sustenance for themselves because it is from God’s hand that sustenance comes. Moses told them: **“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had**

known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:2-3).

As we shall see, to withstand the temptations of the devil, Jesus each time quotes from the Word of God. This is a great testimony to the divine authority of the Bible. Notice that throughout His life on earth, Jesus treated the Old Testament as truth, as the holy Word of God. In this passage, we learn that the chief weapon that we can use to resist the devil is the Word of God. The Word of God is the **“sword of the Spirit”** (Eph. 6:17). But to use the Word of God, we must read and know the Word of God.

Also, each time Jesus quotes from the Word of God to resist these temptations, He quotes from the book of Deuteronomy. More specifically, He cites commandments that were given to Israel while they were in the wilderness for forty years. This suggests that the forty years in the desert for the Israelites were typical of the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert. Both the Israelites and Jesus came through the waters into a new life (Israel through the Red Sea; Jesus through the waters of baptism), and then were led by the Spirit of God to be tested in the desert. Israel, of course, failed their testings over and over. By contrast, Jesus resisted the temptations and passed the test.

“Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If You are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”” (vss. 5-6). In the first temptation, the devil was trying to get Jesus to improperly use His own powers to turn stones into bread, rather than waiting upon the providence of God. Here, the devil is trying to get

Jesus to improperly use the providence of God. To reinforce his temptation, the devil even quotes the Word of God from Psalm 91:11-12. In that Psalm, the Psalmist is teaching us of the protection that God provides those who **“make the Most High [their] dwelling”** (Ps. 91:9). The devil leaves out a portion of the verses that he is quoting. The passage reads: **“For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways ; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”** (Ps. 91:11-12). The devil omits the phrase **“to guard you in all your ways”**. This phrase suggests that the protection of God is upon those who happen into danger in the normal course of **“[their] ways”** as they dwell in the Most High. This passage in no way suggests that we should go out of our way to put ourselves in danger so as to require the protection of God.

To resist the devil’s temptation, and to refute his use of the Word of God, Jesus again quotes from Deuteronomy: **“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’”** (vs. 7). Jesus uses a clear command of God to refute a suspect application of a promise of God. This command is clear. We are not to put ourselves in a situation that forces God’s supernatural hand of protection. This is to test the Lord. The original command was made to the Israelites concerning their “testing” of God at Massah: **“Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah”** (Deut. 6:16). At Massah, a thirsty mob of Israelites demanded that God supernaturally supply water for them as proof that He was still with them (see Ex. 17:1-7). For Jesus to hurl Himself off the pinnacle of the temple would be a blatant “testing” of God, forcing a supernatural deliverance of His Son.

The seduction of this temptation lies in the fact that the spectacle of the angels supernaturally saving Jesus as He hurled Himself off the pinnacle would draw attention to all the

onlookers that Jesus was specially sent from God. Would not this be an effective way to get the people's attention? Would not the people be more apt to listen to the teachings of Jesus if they saw the angels supernaturally protecting Him? Maybe. But Jesus did not want His ministry to be based upon spectacle, but rather He wanted His ministry to be based on the teaching of the Word of God. Jesus wanted substance not spectacle. Many ministers of the Word of God today would do well to follow this example: more substance, less spectacle.

Here, the devil tempted Jesus to test God by doing the spectacular. The devil also uses the same temptation upon us, but in a more "ordinary" way. He does not take us to the pinnacle of the temple, but he tempts us to demand God's supernatural protection. For example, those who refuse to take their children to the doctor for treatment, in hope that God will miraculously heal, are improperly putting God to the test. It is to improperly put God to the test if we expect the supernatural work of God when ordinary means are available to achieve the same ends. It is pride that leads us into this temptation. We don't want to say, "Well, I took my son to the doctor. He was given medicine and the Lord worked through the medicine to heal him." No, we would (in our own pride) rather say, "Oh, I laid my hands on my son and prayed over him and God supernaturally healed him." We, in our pride, desire to display our own "spirituality" by bragging about how God supernaturally intervenes for us. "Preservation in danger is divinely pledged: shall I then *create* danger, either to put the promised security skeptically to the proof, or wantonly to demand a display of it?" [JFB, 17].

Another thing that this passage teaches is that the Word of God can very easily be improperly used. "One of the subtlest and sometimes mightiest forms of temptation to a devout mind is the misapplication of Scripture, so as to give apparent

warrant for doing what we incline to. We need not only to know the language of Scripture, but to understand the real meaning and legitimate application. A great aid in this is to compare other passages, as our Lord here does” [Broadus, 70]. Be careful! Even the devil quotes Scripture! “But what is this I see? Satan himself with a Bible under his arm and a text in his mouth!” [Bishop Hall, in JFB, 17]. To discern true application of the Word of God, we must compare Scripture with Scripture. And to compare Scripture with Scripture, we must study so that we know the whole counsel of God.

“Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give You,’ he said, ‘if You will bow down and worship me’” (vss. 8-9). First, this temptation begs the question: How can Satan offer the kingdoms of the world to Jesus? Are they his to offer? Later, Jesus calls Satan the **“prince of this world”** (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Paul calls him the **“god of this age”** (see II Cor. 4:4). Mankind through sin has, for the most part, pledged its allegiance to Satan. And so, when Satan took Jesus **“to a very high mountain”** and supernaturally (Luke tells us that the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world “in an instant”, see Luke 4:5) showed Jesus **“all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor”**, these kingdoms were truly Satan’s to offer.

The condition for giving Jesus all the kingdoms of the world was physically very easy to do: just **“bow down and worship”** Satan. However, the consequences would have been very far-reaching, for to worship Satan is to ally oneself with the enemy of God. One might ask, “Why would Jesus even consider worshipping Satan? Why was this a temptation to Him?” The reason that this was a temptation at that time was that the path that God had laid out for Jesus was a difficult one. In order for the Father to set His Son at His right hand, Jesus

would have to endure the cross. Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut. Satan was offering Jesus the reign of the earth for just the cost of bowing down to him. Jesus could have the allegiance of the world, without having to endure the suffering of the cross.

Yes, Satan's way is easier, but the consequences of it are dire. For Jesus to have taken Satan's way would have meant death for all men. It would have also meant that Jesus would have been forever separated from His Father. This would have been unbearable for Jesus. Recall Jesus' cry of anguish when He was separated from the Father for just moments: **"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"** (Matt. 27:46). And it is always the case that Satan's way is easier for the present, but the consequences are dire. To choose Satan's way is to live a life for oneself, thinking only of satisfying one's own desires. To choose Satan's way is to live without any concern for the commandments of God. To choose Satan's way is to be free from service and obedience to God. But of course, the consequence of choosing Satan's way is death: eternal separation from God. It is to cry forever: **"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"**

Jesus could very easily have chosen the quick, easy way to gather a following. To bow down to Satan would have meant instant adoration of the masses. A whole world of people would have been His followers. Many ministers of the Word of God are tempted in this today. They think they must use worldly means and tactics to gather a following. They rationalize their worldly methods by saying, "Well, to help people, I need a large following." But the consequence of using these worldly means in the ministry is a dead, compromised ministry, a ministry that leads people, not to the truth of God, but to the ways of the world.

It is our salvation that Satan is attacking here. If Jesus had bowed down and worshipped Satan and was thereby given reign of the world, He could have founded the largest, most successful religion the world has ever known. However, our salvation would have been lost. If Jesus had never endured the cross, we could never be reconciled to God. Again, it is our salvation that Satan is attacking here. And he has continued to attack our salvation throughout history by setting up false religions. Satan continues to set up religions that bypass the cross. The Mormons, the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists offer the world, but ignore the true salvation that is only found through Jesus Christ's work on the cross.

Jesus once again uses the Word of God to resist the temptation: **“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’”** (vs. 10). The result of Jesus' resistance to temptation was that **“the devil left Him”** (vs. 11). This is always the result of resistance to temptation, as James taught: **“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). Satan and his allies are not omnipresent. If you resist him, he will flee from you and go to more fertile ground for his temptations. The easiest way to be rid of your temptations is to resist them.

One other result of Jesus' resistance and victory in the desert was that **“angels came and attended Him”** (vs. 11). May the Lord be praised that we have the gift of these unseen beings, the angels, who are **“ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation”** (Heb. 1:14).

The Work Begins

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed Him.

²¹ Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and He healed them.

²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him.

— Matthew 4:12-25

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS was the ceremony that initiated His ministry. The fasting and temptations in the desert were Jesus' boot camp (so to speak), to prepare Him for His ministry. Here in this chapter, the ministry of Jesus begins in earnest. **“When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He returned to Galilee”** (vs. 1). After the baptism and testing in the desert, Jesus began gathering disciples and baptizing in the Judean countryside. This period of time is described in the Gospel of John (see John 3:22-36). When Jesus was baptizing, there was some jealousy of Jesus' success by the followers of John the Baptist. **“They came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, He is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.’”** (John 3:26). John tried to stem this jealousy by telling his followers: **“[Jesus] must become greater; I must become less”** (John 4:30). John's disciples did not realize (though he often told them) that the purpose of his ministry was to prepare for Jesus' ministry. But such is the nature of sinful man. We are so prone to jealousy, even in the work of God. If another's ministry is thriving and successful in bringing people to the truth of God, rather than praising the Lord for the success of His work, we are jealous that our work is not as successful. Oh, sinful man!

God had a solution to the problem of the jealousy of John's followers. By His will, **“John had been put in prison”** (see Matt. 14:3-12 for the account of John's imprisonment). I believe that this was the will of God. John's purpose as a forerunner to the Messiah was fulfilled. It was time now for full focus to be placed upon Jesus and His ministry.

“Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned’” (vss. 13-16). In fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus based His ministry in Galilee. This prophecy (taken from Isa. 9:1-2) was God’s promise to Galilee (a land that had suffered much under the hand of God for their sin) that light would come to drive away the darkness. It was appropriate to the purpose of Jesus’ ministry that He came to a land of darkness, rather than, say, base His ministry in Jerusalem. Jesus reached out to those in the dark, those in ignorance of the truth of God, those in misery, those in sin. His purpose was to bring them into the light, into knowledge of the truth of God, into happiness, into holiness. The light of Jesus now reaches far beyond **“Galilee of the Gentiles”**. Sadly though, “many live under the full blaze of the gospel as if they still sat in the shadow of death” [Stark, in Broadus, 82].

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (vs. 17). Note that the message of Jesus was the same as the message that John the Baptist preached (see Matt. 3:2). This makes sense. The message is from God. The same message that was appropriate for the fiery preaching of John the Baptist was also appropriate for the gentle preaching of Jesus. The message of repentance is also a message that is as appropriate now as it was then. It is a message that says to turn away from the ways of the world and turn towards the ways of God. The world often mocks the message of repentance. The world desires to maintain its hold on us.

Matthew next gives an account of the calling of four of Jesus' disciples into full-time service. **“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were 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”** (vss. 18-20). The fishermen Simon and Andrew were in the midst of their workday on the lake when they received the call from Jesus: **“Come, follow me.”** There was no hesitation, no second thoughts; but rather **“at once they left their nets and followed Him.”** (Many commentators do believe that these disciples did know Jesus before this call to full time service. It seems that John in his Gospel gives an account of the time that Peter and Andrew first met Jesus – see John 2:37-42. This fact, however, does not detract from the commendableness of their immediate response to Jesus' call to full time service).

Note *who* Jesus called: fishermen. They were probably a rough and tough bunch, with calloused hands and tanned bodies. The first teachers of Christianity were not rabbis, but fishermen and tax collectors. They were not educated in seminary, but were educated on the street, at Jesus' side. “The fact that our Lord chose ‘fishermen’ to receive and propagate His teachings, and not rabbis, shows that He relied on something better than mere human learning and worldly influence, and the success of their labors is one evidence of the divine power which attends the preaching of the gospel” [Broadus, 78].

Note *how* Jesus called them: **“Come, follow me.”** He did not say, “Come, listen to me”, but **“Come, follow me.”** True disciples of Jesus do not just hear (or read) His words, but they **“follow”** Him: they strive to walk in His footsteps, they use His life as an example of how they should live.

Note what Jesus promised them: **“I will make you fishers of men.”** They would not have to rely on their own ability to transform themselves into **“fishers of men”**, but rather Jesus was going to transform them. He said: **“I will make you...”** And yes, friend, this promise applies to you also. You do not have to rely on your own ability to transform your life in order to be a productive disciple of Christ. You must just **“follow”** Him, and He will transform you so that you may bear fruit to His glory. For Peter and Andrew, Jesus was promising to transform them from fishers of fish to **“fishers of men”**, “no longer...taking fish from the lake, but...drawing men up out of the abyss of sin and death, catching them in the great net of God!” [Dietrich, in Morris, 85]. In the transformation, Peter and Andrew would be using skills they had developed as fishers of fish (skills that they already had). If you think about it, fishers of fish and fishers of men both need (among other things) “tact, perseverance, patient endurance of frequent failure” [Morris, 82]. They would now be using these skills for God’s glory. And so also, if you follow Him, Jesus will transform you so that you may use skills that you already have for His glory. Are you a lawyer? He will use your skills of rhetoric to communicate the gospel to others. Are you a doctor? He will use your skills of healing bodies to heal souls. Are you a musician? He will use your skills of musicianship to lead His people in the worship of God. Etc., etc., etc. You too have skills that Jesus will transform for His glory.

The call of Peter and Andrew was followed by the call of James and John: **“Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him”** (vss. 21-22). Again, the gentle, yet compelling voice of Jesus caused James and John

to, without hesitation, **“immediately”** leave their boat and follow Him. But wait, James and John not only left their boat, but also left **“their father.”** We should put the work of Jesus before the work of our worldly business. We should put the tie to Jesus ahead of even our strongest family ties. The world calls those who do such things “fanatics”. And I say, “Yes! We are to be fanatics for Jesus Christ!” The world calls us, “Jesus freaks”. If so, then “Yes! I am proud to be a ‘Jesus freak!’”

Matthew continues by summarizing the work Jesus was doing: **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people”** (vs. 23). Note the three aspects of Jesus’ ministry: **“teaching”**, **“preaching”**, and **“healing”**. **“Teaching”** is the systematic instruction of God’s truth. **“Preaching”** is the terse proclamation of the Gospel message, usually directed at non-believers. **“Healing”** was one of Jesus’ primary works of service to the people.

Matthew continues: **“News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and He healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him”** (vs. 24-25). So note, it was His **“healing”**, His service to the community that brought the crowds in to hear His **“preaching”**. So also, our service to the community will endear the public to the church so that they will desire to hear **“preaching”**. Through **“preaching”**, the crowds are given the truths of the gospel, so that they may accept the truth and receive Christ into their lives. At that point, they will desire systematic **“teaching”**.

The Beatitudes

¹ Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, ² and He began to teach them, saying:

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are
persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

NOW WE COME to one of the most famous and significant portions of the Bible, the Sermon on the Mount: **“Now when [Jesus] saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them”** (vss. 1-2). This sermon taught by Jesus (comprising chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the book of Matthew) represents the highest ethical teaching in the Bible. In it, Jesus speaks not only of external purity, but also of internal purity; not only of actions of the body, but also of intents of the mind; not only of righteousness and justice, but also of mercy and forgiveness. Note that, though the **“crowds”** followed Jesus up on the mountainside, the teachings of Jesus were directed specifically to His disciples, His faithful followers. The **“crowds”** that followed Jesus up on the mountainside were the same **“crowds”** mentioned at the end of the previous chapter in Matt. 4:24-25. Many from these **“crowds”** came to Jesus specifically to be healed from various physical maladies (see Matt. 4:24). Most of them probably had never heard Jesus teach. Nevertheless, Jesus directs this teaching specifically to His disciples, not to the general **“crowds”**. It is as if Jesus wants the crowds to hear teaching specifically directed to the disciples so that the **“crowds”** may get a taste of what the kingdom of heaven is like. Having just been healed, many of the **“crowds”** were probably enamored with Jesus for His healing powers alone. Here Jesus allows them to hear the challenging teachings of the Sermon on the Mount—challenging even for His disciples to follow and obey. These teachings are so important to us, His disciples, because they teach us what our character should be, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Without them, “would we know what kind of people Christians ought to be? Would we know the character at which Christians ought to aim? Would we know the outward walk and inward habit of mind

which become a follower of Christ?” [Ryle, 32]. This is our standard of conduct.

Jesus started His teaching with what we now call “the Beatitudes”. The Beatitudes pronounce **“blessed”**ness upon the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, based upon certain characteristics of these citizens. Beginning the sermon in this way must surely have caught the attention of the listeners, as Jesus said: **“Blessed... blessed... blessed...”** One can imagine each of the listeners waiting expectantly to see which of the **“Blesseds”** applied to them.

Jesus begins: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit”** (vs. 3). What a strange saying? How could one who is **“poor in spirit”** be **“blessed”**? Apparently, Jesus’ definition of who is **“blessed”** does not correspond with the world’s definition. “Not the rich, the rejoicing and proud, not conquering warriors nor popular favorites, are the [**“blessed”**] under the Messianic reign, but *these*—the poor, the mourning and meek, the peacemakers, the persecuted” [Broadus, 88]. Jesus Himself answers the question as to how one who is **“poor in spirit”** is **“blessed”**: **“For theirs is the kingdom of heaven”** (vs. 3). In other words, those who are **“poor in spirit”** are the ones who inherit the **“kingdom of heaven”**. Knowing this, we certainly want to know: What does **“poor in spirit”** mean? Who are the **“poor in spirit”**? *Answer*: The **“poor in spirit”** are those who recognize their spiritual poverty; they understand that (spiritually speaking) they are bankrupt; they realize that (spiritually speaking) they are failures, and thus, they recognize their need for God’s mercy and God’s salvation. Theirs is **“the kingdom of heaven”** because they are the ones who accept Jesus’ gift of salvation. No one who is not **“poor in spirit”** can truly accept Jesus’ gift of salvation. Let me say it another way: if anyone thinks that he, by his own merits, deserves salvation, then he is rejecting the necessity of Jesus’ death on the cross.

Such a man is deceived, for **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). And so, it is only the **“poor in spirit”** who will inherit the **“kingdom of heaven.”** This sets up a magnificent irony: only the **“poor in spirit”** are in a position to receive the riches of Christ.

Incidentally, notice that the promise to the **“poor in spirit”** is immediately realized. Jesus said: **“For theirs *is*”** (not *will be*) **“the kingdom of heaven.”** Our citizenship in heaven begins the moment we are saved.

Jesus continues: **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”** (vs. 4). Jesus here is expanding upon the first beatitude. The **“mourning”** that Jesus is speaking of is the mourning of the **“poor in spirit”**; it is the **“mourning”** concerning our spiritual poverty. Now, there are some who realize that they are sinners, but they do not mourn over their sin. Many are even proud of their sin. They throw caution to the wind, saying, “Well, yes, I expect I’ll be going to hell, but at least I’ll go there smiling.” Needless to say, those with such an attitude will not **“be comforted”**. The one who is truly repentant mourns concerning his sin. Moreover, he also mourns concerning the sins of others. He grieves to see others stumble in sin. He does what he can to keep himself and others from sinning.

Note that the blessing associated with this beatitude is a future blessing: **“For they *will be* comforted.”** As long as we live in our fallen bodies, sin will accompany us, and so our mourning will not cease.

Jesus next teaches: **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”** (vs. 5). There is some confusion concerning what it means to be **“meek”**. **“Meek”**ness is looked down upon, even by some Christians, because they confuse **“meekness”** with **“weakness”**. Leon Morris explains what **“meek”**ness is, and clears up this confusion: **“Meekness is not**

to be confused with weakness: the meek are not simply submissive because they lack the resources to be anything else. Meekness is quite compatible with great strength and ability as humans measure strength, but whatever strength or weakness the meek person has is accompanied by humility and a genuine dependence on God. True meekness may be a quality of the strong, those who could assert themselves but choose not to do so. The strong who qualify for this blessing are the strong who decline to domineer” [Morris, 98]. And so we see, meekness is not synonymous with weakness; rather, meekness is the proper use (and constraint) of strength. And surely, how could those who are **“poor in spirit”**, who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy, be anything but **“meek”**? Those who properly acknowledge their dependence upon God for salvation will reflect this acknowledgement in their lives. They will not display a brash, arrogant attitude, as they mourn for their sin. Rather, their poverty of spirit will act itself out in life through **“meek”**ness.

The reward promised to the **“meek”** is that **“they will inherit the earth.”** This certainly must have surprised Jesus’ listeners. It was (and is) the prevailing opinion that the strong, aggressive, victorious warrior will control the earth. And so, how will it be that the **“meek...will inherit the earth”**? It is true that, in the end, a strong warrior will conquer the earth. That warrior will be none other than the Commander of the Army of the Lord, the Captain of the Heavenly Hosts, Jesus Christ. Through His victory, the **“meek...will inherit the earth”**.

Jesus continues: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”** (vs. 6). Naturally those who **“mourn”** over their own sin and the sins of the world will also **“hunger and thirst for righteousness”**. The promise associated with this beatitude is that those who

hunger and thirst for righteousness **“will be filled”**. In general, our hunger for food, our thirst for water, our passions for fleshly desires are never satisfied. As Solomon tells us: **“All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied”** (Eccl. 6:7). However, Jesus promises that those who **“hunger and thirst for righteousness... will be filled.”** This is the only kind of **“hunger and thirst”** that will be **“filled”**.

Next, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy”** (vs. 7). In the trait of being **“merciful”**, we again have a characteristic that is related to the characteristic stated in the first beatitude, that of being **“poor in spirit”**. As one recognizes his own spiritual bankruptcy, he also recognizes his own need for the mercy of God. Those who recognize their need for mercy would be hypocritical if they themselves did not show mercy to others. One who is not **“merciful”** must not truly be **“poor in spirit”**, must not truly recognize his need for the mercy of God. Thus, Jesus here ties the blessing of being **“shown mercy”** to the character trait of being **“merciful”**. In the same way, one who is not **“merciful”** will not be **“shown mercy”**. For this reason, we must all be careful to err on the side of mercy. Do not be too quick to judge others, but rather show them mercy and lead them lovingly to a knowledge of the truth.

Then next, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”** (vs. 8). A **“pure heart”** implies pure motives. It implies good deeds done out of love, not out of a necessity to please God. Purity of heart is difficult to achieve. We need the help of God in this, so we should pray (as David did): **“Create in me a pure heart, O God”** (Ps. 51:10). The blessing received by the **“pure in heart”** will be that **“they will see God”**. This should be one of our greatest desires. This was the greatest desire of David. He prayed: **“One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the**

LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4).

Jesus continues: **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God”** (vs. 9). Many of the listeners of Jesus’ sermon did not expect the Messiah to say something like this. Many of the Jews of the time were expecting a “warrior Messiah”, a Messiah who would come and wage war upon the Romans. So, they were probably surprised, and disappointed, to hear the Messiah to say: **“Blessed are the peacemakers.”** Nevertheless, this statement reflects the heart of God. God hates strife. Among the **“six things the LORD hates”** enumerated in Prov. 6:16 are: **“...hands that shed innocent blood... and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”** The Messiah (contrary to the expectation of the Jews) was prophesied to be **“the Prince of Peace”** (Isa. 9:6). At the birth of Jesus, the angels declared: **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”** (Luke 2:14). So it is no surprise, since God loves peace and hates strife, that the blessing that **“peacemakers”** will receive is that **“they will be called sons of God.”** **“Peacemakers”** follow in the steps of God, who sent His Son to bring peace between God and man, and man and man.

Also, note this: Jesus said, **“Blessed are the peacemakers”**, not “Blessed are the peace-keepers”. Those who are blessed are those who actively go out and *make* peace. To be a **“peacemaker”** is much more than just letting things slide and ruffling as few feathers as possible. To be a **“peacemaker”** is to (as David exhorted) **“seek peace and pursue it”** (Ps. 34:14).

In the last of the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches: **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”** (vs. 10). One certainly does not consider someone who is **“persecuted”** to be blessed.

Certainly, in his present state, the one who is being **“persecuted”** is not **“blessed”**, and so Jesus is teaching us not to judge **“blessed”**ness necessarily by the circumstances of our present state. We must have an eternal view of things, and understand that our trials and afflictions here on earth are not a gauge of how blessed we are, but rather are stepping stones in our Christian growth on the path toward the true **“blessed”**ness described in these Beatitudes. It was important that Jesus teach His disciples to have this eternal view of things, for they all were to experience great persecution for their faith in Him. John Calvin describes the importance of teaching the early disciples to have an eternal view of things:

“We know that it is not only the common crowd, but the philosophers also, who are caught in this error: that the happy man is he who, relieved from all troubles, in possession of all he asks, leads a happy and quiet life. Virtually every man judges happiness by his present state. So Christ, to accustom His men to bear the cross, corrects the common idea that those are the happy ones, who, according to the flesh, have it all good and prosperous. For clearly it is impossible for them to submit mildly to the yoke when there are pains and insults to be borne, if they assume that endurance is not the way of the life of blessedness. There is only one consolation by which the sharpness of the cross and all other evils are mitigated, even made sweet, and that is for us to be assured that we have blessing in the very midst of our miseries, for our endurance is blessed by the Lord, and a happier outcome will soon ensue. I admit that this doctrine is far from the general opinion, but it should be the philosophy of Christ’s disciples, that

they may set their happiness beyond this world, and above the desire of the flesh” [Calvin, 169].

The early Christians, who underwent much persecution, no doubt treasured these teachings of Jesus, and were able to bear their great afflictions because of this promised blessing of Jesus.

Significantly, the blessing promised to those who are **“persecuted because of righteousness”** is the same as the one in first Beatitude: **“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** It seems to me that Jesus envelops all of the Beatitudes with the same blessing as if to say that *all* of the character traits described—being poor in spirit, mourning over sin, being meek, thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being peacemakers, being persecuted because of righteousness—I say, it is as if Jesus is saying that *all* of these character traits should apply to *all* citizens of the kingdom of heaven. So it is not a matter of picking one of the Beatitudes and saying, “Oh, that one applies to me.” No, we should strive that *all* of the character traits set forth in these sayings apply to us. As we have seen, these character traits are all closely related to each other anyway, each of them naturally flowing (in a way) out of the first one, that of being **“poor in spirit”**. Once one is **“poor in spirit”** (that is, once he acknowledges his spiritual poverty), he will naturally **“mourn”** for his sin, he will naturally be **“meek”** through the knowledge of his own spiritual bankruptcy, he will **“thirst for righteousness”** in an effort to change his state of spiritual poverty, he will be **“merciful”** to others as he realizes his own need for mercy, etc.

Perhaps because the last Beatitude was the most difficult to grasp, Jesus expanded upon it, lest He be misunderstood: **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me”** (vs. 11). Jesus expands upon the last Beatitude as if to say, “Yes,

when I said **'persecuted'**, I really meant **'persecuted'!**" Note that, as if to bring the point home, Jesus switches to the second person and speaks directly to His disciples: **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you ..."**

Jesus adds: **"Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you"** (vs. 12). So, Jesus not only tells us that **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness"**, but He also expects us to act as if we are **"Blessed"**, for He says we are to **"Rejoice and be glad."** This, needless to say, is very difficult. It is one thing to intellectually acknowledge that, yes, eventually those who are persecuted will be blessed; it is quite another thing to *act* as if we are blessed for our persecution, and actually **"Rejoice and be glad."** Jesus reminds us that the greatest men of God were persecuted: **"For in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."** Peter expands on this idea: **"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you"** (1 Peter 4:12-14). Peter not only preached this attitude, he practiced it. In Jerusalem, Peter was brought before the Sanhedrin, arrested because the Sadducees were jealous of the success of his ministry (see Acts 5:12ff). After Peter preached Christ to the Sanhedrin, they rewarded him by having him flogged (see Acts 5:40). Peter's response to all this: **"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name"** (Acts 5:41).

8 - MATTHEW 5:13-16

Salt and Light

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:13-16

IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of the blessedness of His true disciples in the passage known as “the Beatitudes”. As He continues, Jesus now begins speaking of our responsibility as His disciples: **“You are the salt of the earth”** (vs. 13). To understand this statement, we must reflect upon the attributes of **“salt”**: salt preserves from corruption; salt seasons; salt produces thirst. Let’s look at each of these. First, salt *preserves from corruption*. Salt can be used to slow the spoilage of food. So we also have been called as disciples of Christ to preserve the earth from corruption. We must have a positive moral influence upon the earth, so that (by our presence) society is preserved from corruption— so that the moral decay of society is slowed. We can, by our godly influence, preserve from corruption the moral climate of our immediate environment. For instance, if

it is known in our work place that we do not tolerate the cursing of God's name, and then if (thereby) our co-workers are less apt to curse God's name, we have then by our influence "preserved from corruption" (to some extent) our work place by setting the moral standard that the cursing of God's name will not be tolerated there.

Second, salt *seasons*. Salt makes food taste better. So also, we as Christ's disciples must make the earth (in a sense) taste better. In other words, we must make the earth a better place to live, primarily by showing those of the earth the love of God. Salt imparts its seasoning to everything it comes in contact with. When you taste food, you can tell right away if it has been salted. So also, our influence should be evident. The love of God should overflow from our lives, seasoning all those whom we come in contact with.

Third, salt *produces thirst*. So, we as Christ's disciples are to produce thirst in those we come in contact with. Thirst for what? Jesus has just said: **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst righteousness"** (Matt. 5:6). And so, our lives lived for righteousness should cause a thirst for righteousness in those who observe us. People should look at the godliness of our lives and see the love of God flowing through our lives. They should then think, "I want that. I thirst for that life." Our goal should be to have such an influence on others.

Now, Jesus' statement to us is emphatic: **"You are the salt of the earth."** He is speaking directly to us, His disciples, in a form even stronger than a command. You see, Jesus does not say, "You should be the salt of the earth," or even, "Thou shalt be the salt of the earth." He says, **"You are the salt of the earth."** In other words, we have no choice in the matter. This is not a command that we carry out; rather, it is an unchangeable attribute of a disciple of Christ that we *are* salt of the earth. Now, sadly, many of us do not perform well our role

as **“the salt of the earth.”** Thus Jesus warns: **“But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men”** (vs. 13). And so, if we as disciples of Christ fail to have a godly influence upon society, we are worthless as disciples of Christ, **“no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”** We have seen this happen time and time again. A prominent Christian will be caught in gross sin, thereby **“losing [his] saltiness.”** After that, he is **“no longer good for anything”**, and the world certainly takes advantage of the opportunity to make sure he is **“trampled by men.”** After such a failure, the disciple of Christ can never be **“salt”**; he is ever after seen as a hypocrite. A blown witness can never be recovered. Jesus enumerates a second characteristic of His disciples: **“You are the light of the world”** (vs. 14). The disciples of Jesus are **“light”** two ways: they are a spiritual **“light”**, showing men the way to God; they are a moral **“light”**, showing men how they ought to live righteously.

Jesus enumerates these two aspects of **“light.”** He says: **“[L]et your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”** (vs. 16). By saying, **“You are *the light* of the world”**, Jesus is implying that, despite its claims of enlightenment, the world would be in utter darkness if the light of Christ’s disciples were removed.

Now, elsewhere, Jesus says of Himself: **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”** (John 8:12). Then, Paul teaches: **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord”** (Eph. 5:8). And so, we as **“light”** are to be a reflection of the primary source of **“light”**, which is Jesus Christ. The world, now that Jesus has risen to glory, sees the light of Christ primarily through our actions and behavior. Most of the world

does not take the time to study God's Word, so they infer what it means to be a Christian by looking at our lives.

Again, just as we have no choice but to be **"salt of the earth"**, so also we have no choice but to be **"light of the world"**. Jesus says: **"You are the light of the world"**, and then, **"A city on a hill cannot be hidden"** (vs. 14). Once we are identified as a disciple of Christ, we cannot escape observation by the world (which is in darkness). Just as on a dark night, one's eyes naturally are drawn to whatever light is visible; so also, the eyes of those who reside in the darkness of the world are naturally drawn to us as the **"light of the world"**.

Jesus teaches that we should not try to escape the important responsibility of being **"the light of the world"**: **"Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house"** (vs. 15). Many Christians go out of their way to hide their Christianity. Just as it would be absurd (a waste of time and energy) to **"light a lamp and put it under a bowl"**, so it is absurd (and a waste) for us to try to hide the light of Christ that shines through us. To do so is contrary to the command of Jesus to **"let your light shine before men"** (vs. 16). Jesus does not want any "secret agents". Jesus here is speaking also against monasticism. We are not as Christians to hide ourselves from the world in a monastery. This would be akin to putting our lamp **"under a bowl"**. We should consider it an honor to be appointed by Christ to be **"the light of the world"**, and to shine our **"light"**.

Jesus sums it up: **"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"** (vs. 16). This is the essence of our **"light"**hood. Jesus states the *method* (**"they may see your good deeds"**) and the *result* (**"they may... praise your Father in heaven"**). The primary *method* we are to use in being a **"light"**

to set a good example, so that others **“may see [our] good deeds”**. While preaching is good, Christianity is primarily *exemplary*. People respond to our example of service more than anything. Mother Teresa has done more for Christianity than the most knowledgeable of Theological scholars. “Men will not be saved by abstract truth, but by truth *embodied*” [Broadus, 97]. “Of all modes of inculcating Christianity, exemplifying it is the best. The best commentary on the Bible the world has ever seen is a holy life. The most eloquent sermon in behalf of the gospel that the world has ever heard is a uniform, active piety. The best version of the written truth that has ever been made is a consistent religious example. The Christian whose light thus shines not only correctly renders, but beautifies the sacred text” [Tyree, in Broadus, 98].

Finally, the primary *result* of our **“light”**hood is to glorify God, that those who see our light would **“praise your Father in heaven.”** Many do their good deeds, not to glorify God, but to be esteemed by men. Jesus speaks against this in detail later in His sermon (see Matt. 6), and so we will speak much more of this later. Suffice it to say now that no matter how beneficial our service is to the world, it fails if the result is our own glorification at the expense of God’s glory.

Let us close by noting the all-inclusiveness of our roles as **“salt”** and **“light”**. We are **“the salt of the earth”** and **“the light of the world”**. The earth and world has no other **“salt”** and **“light”** but us, and so our duty to be **“salt”** and **“light”** crucial. Also, note that **“salt”** operates from *within* upon whatever it is in contact with, and **“light”** operates *externally* upon what it illuminates. Both the near and far are covered. Our influence is to be worldwide.

Jesus and the Old Testament

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

— Matthew 5:17-20

MANY PEOPLE THINK that the coming of Jesus somehow made the Old Testament obsolete, or irrelevant. This is most definitely not the case, as Jesus makes clear here: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”** (vss. 17). By the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”**, Jesus is speaking of the entire Old Testament (at that time, the Old Testament was commonly designated as “the Law and the Prophets”). And so, rather than declaring the Old Testament obsolete and irrelevant, Jesus here confirms the importance of the Old Testament. Moreover, He gives us the reason for its importance: Jesus states that He has come to **“fulfill”** the writings in the books of the **“Law”** and the **“Prophets”**.

There are basically four types of writings in the Old Testament: 1. Poetry; 2. Prophecy; 3. Writings relating historical events; 4. The writings of the Law. Jesus “fulfills” each of these four types of writings: 1. The poetic writings point to Jesus’ life in a number of ways. Many of them are prophetic writings concerning the life and mission of Jesus (such as Psalm 22). Some point to the life and mission of Jesus through poetic imagery (such as the Song of Solomon). Much of the poetry consists of prayers for forgiveness, deliverance and salvation, each of which points to the ultimate forgiveness, deliverance, and salvation that we receive through Jesus.

2. All of the writings of prophecy of the Old Testament point in some way to Jesus’ life and mission. The thrust of prophecy in the Old Testament concerns the deliverance of Israel by the Messiah and/or the end times that the Messiah will usher in.

3. Even many of the historical events in the Old Testament point to Jesus’ life through typology. For example, we see the life and mission of Jesus typified in the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham (see Gen. 22), the life of Joseph (as the suffering servant who was exalted to sit at the right hand of the king), the history of Israel (Matthew himself pointed this out in chapter 2), etc. Some claim that Christ can be found on each page of the Old Testament, and I am inclined to agree with them.

4. The writings of the Law are fulfilled by Jesus in at least three ways: (1) by keeping the Law perfectly; (2) by fulfilling the Law’s prophetic aspects; (3) by teaching the full meaning of the Law. First, Jesus fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly. He alone is righteous; He alone lived a sinless life. He is our example of how to live in perfect obedience to the Father. Second, Jesus fulfilled the Law by fulfilling its prophetic aspects. The ceremonial aspects of the Law—the rituals and

sacrifices, as well as the Sabbath law—were all prophetic of Jesus. The sacrificial offerings for atonement were prophetic of Christ’s offering of Himself. These imperfect means of sacrifice were fulfilled by Christ’s perfect sacrifice, thus rendering the imperfect means of sacrifice no longer necessary. Likewise, the Sabbath law, which was given to man as a time to enter into God’s rest, was fulfilled by the rest we experience when we enter into Christ Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews taught: **“Now we who have believed enter that rest... for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His”** (Heb. 4:3,10). Third, Jesus fulfilled the law by teaching its full meaning, as we shall see in Matt. 5:21-48.

Of course, the followers of Jesus could not fully understand Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets until His death and resurrection. Nevertheless, Jesus gave this teaching early in His ministry in order to instill into His disciples the continued importance of the Old Testament. The essence of the Gospel of Christ is that salvation is by grace through faith in Him, apart from observing the Law. One might ask, “Then does not salvation by grace through faith nullify the importance of the Old Testament?” Jesus here is resoundingly saying, “No!”: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** Though we have salvation by the grace of God through faith in His Son, the Law still represents the standard of perfection for which we are to strive. As Jesus says later in this sermon: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (Matt. 5:48).

Jesus goes on to explicitly state the continued importance of the law: **“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until**

everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (vss. 18-19). And so, though we enter the kingdom of heaven by grace and not by observing the law, yet if we **“break one of the least of these commandments and teach others to do the same”**, we will **“be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”** Of course, in our sin nature, we **“break”** many of the commandments of God. In the original language, however, the word used here **“break”** means to “abolish”, or to “do away with”. Thus, Jesus is speaking not of those who simply transgress a law, but of those who consider a law to be abolished, and teach others that a law is abolished.

Now wait, you may ask, do we not consider the laws concerning ritual sacrifice abolished? And do we not consider the laws concerning which foods to eat abolished? Calvin explains: “It is asked whether ceremonies are not to be included among the precepts of God, and yet their observance is not demanded now. The answer is that we must consider the purpose and design of the Lawgiver. As God gave rules for ceremonies on the basis that their outward use should last for a period, but their significance be everlasting, one does not do away with ceremonies, when their reality is kept, and their shadow omitted” [Calvin, 181]. Thus, the laws concerning ritual sacrifice have not been abolished. Their reality is kept through Christ’s act, that of sacrificing Himself, and so since the reality has been fulfilled, the shadow is omitted. Thus also, the laws concerning which foods to eat have not been abolished. Their reality is kept through obedience to Christ’s teaching concerning them, even if the shadow of that law is now omitted. Jesus taught: **“Don’t you see that whatever**

enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'" (Matt. 15:17-20). Therefore, our obedience to the laws concerning clean and unclean foods is fulfilled by our obedience in keeping a pure mouth, heart and mind. Later, Jesus declared all foods clean: **"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean"** (Acts 10:15). So then, although not the least of the commandments is to be ignored, yet, the nature of practicing the law has been affected by virtue of the way that Jesus has fulfilled the law. "The law pointed forward to Jesus and His teaching; so it is properly obeyed by conforming to His word. As it points to Him, so He, in fulfilling it, establishes what continuity it has, the true direction to which it points and the way it is to be obeyed." [Carson, 146]. As fulfiller of the law, Jesus is the supreme authority on its interpretation.

Next, Jesus made a statement that must certainly have shocked His hearers: **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven"** (vs. 20). The Pharisees were seen by the Jews of the time as the primary keepers of the law. They were meticulous at keeping what they saw as the letter of the law. The Pharisaical way of life was even envied by the Jews in that it was seen as a sure way to heaven. So, if they could **"certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven"**, then who could? Jesus would answer this question: **"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"** (Matt. 19:26). The

Pharisaical life is not the way to heaven. Another way is needed: through Jesus Christ.

You see, though the Pharisees had interpreted the law in such a way that they believed they were keeping its external obligations, they were ignoring its inward demands of holiness. Jesus summed up their attitude when He chastised them: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former”** (Matt. 23:23). So, the Pharisees were meticulous in the external aspects of the law such as tithing. They even meticulously tithed their **“spices”**, their **“mint, dill and cummin”**, in an effort to be perfectly “holy”. But they ignored internal, spiritual aspects of the law—aspects that only God could verify—such as **“justice, mercy and faithfulness.”**

Jesus had a continuing dispute with the Pharisees concerning their view of the law versus the true meaning of the law. From the point of view of the Pharisees, Jesus took the law lightly because to them, He at times purposely violated the letter of the law. However, Jesus only violated the letter of the law when there was an overriding aspect of **“justice, mercy or faithfulness”** involved. For instance, when the Pharisees were **“looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked Him, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’”** (Matt. 12:10). They said this while Jesus was in the presence of a man with a shriveled hand. Jesus replied, **“[I]t is lawful to do good on the Sabbath”** (Matt. 12:12), then He healed the man. Earlier that day, the Pharisees “caught” Jesus’ disciples at a more clear-cut (to them) violation of the Sabbath. Jesus’ disciples **“were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to [Jesus], ‘Look! Your**

disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:1-2). In reply, Jesus cited an episode when David and his men, while fleeing from Saul, ate consecrated bread from the tabernacle (see I Sam. 21:3ff). David told the priests that Saul sent them on an important, secret mission (see I Sam. 21:2), in order to convince the priests that it was okay for his men to eat the consecrated bread. Jesus justifies His disciples’ actions and also David’s actions in the cited episode by saying: **“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent”** (Matt. 12:7). So, though the disciples seemed to violate the law, they were innocent, because their violation of one law was overridden by the keeping of another law. **“Mercy”** overrides **“sacrifice”**.

It all boils down to this: when Jesus was asked, **“Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**, He answered: **“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”** (Matt. 22:37-40). You see, it is inevitable at times that two commandments will conflict—that the keeping of one commandment will at times violate another. Jesus here has given us a precedence whereby we may determine which commandment to keep. He says the most important commandment is: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”**, and then, the second most important commandment is: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Then He tells us: **“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”** And so, when the disciples were hungry on the Sabbath, Jesus allowed them to pick grains and eat them

because the law of love takes precedence over the law of the Sabbath.

We see this rule of precedence in the Bible various times, especially in regard to telling lies to protect someone's life. For example, when Rahab was hiding the spies from Israel, she purposely lied to protect them, telling the king of Jericho that the spies had left before the city gate was closed (see Joshua 2:2-7). Now, the Pharisees would condemn Rahab, for has not God commanded: **"Do not lie"** (Lev. 19:11)? The Pharisees would say that Rahab was not showing faith in God by purposely lying to the king of Jericho. But wait, what does the Scripture say? Is Rahab condemned for her lack of faith? By no means. On the contrary, Rahab is commended by the writer of Hebrews for her faith: **"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient"** (Heb. 11:31). She is honored by being given a place in the great chapter on faith (Hebrews 11), alongside Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses. Rahab was showing love for the spies of Israel by lying to the king of Jericho, for surely he would have killed the spies had he caught them.

A similar occurrence takes place in Egypt after the Pharaoh had ordered the Hebrew midwives to throw newborn Israelite boys into the river. The Hebrew midwives did not comply with the Pharaoh's command. When he summoned them and asked them why they had not complied, they purposely lied to him, saying: **"The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive'"** (Ex. 1:19). Rather than being condemned by God for their lying, the next verse says: **"So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous"** (Ex. 1:20). The Hebrew midwives kept the spirit of the law by

showing love to their neighbors. So also, we have an answer to the following oft-posed moral “dilemma”: Suppose you are living in Nazi Germany in 1940. And suppose you are hiding Jews in your attic. Suppose now that Nazis knock at your door and ask: “Are you hiding Jews in your attic?” Now, the Pharisaical would say that you should answer truthfully, thus sending the Jews to an almost certain death. But is answering truthfully in this case carrying out the commandment: **“Love your neighbor as yourself”**? Most certainly not. Indeed, the right, the just, the moral thing to do in this case is to lie to the Nazis and protect the Jews who are hidden. I am not saying all this because I approve of lying. Indeed, to lie is almost always the wrong thing to do. These moral dilemmas—when two commandments of God conflict with each other—very rarely occur. In nearly all cases, the keeping of the commands of God is clear and unambiguous. But we must, in all things we do, keep the two greatest commandments in mind: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”** and **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Do Not Murder

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”.

— Matthew 5:21-26

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, we looked at Jesus’ statement: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”** (Matt. 5:17). We taught that Jesus fulfilled the Law in at least three ways: by keeping the Law’s requirements perfectly; by fulfilling its prophetic aspects; and by teaching its full meaning. In the next few sections of Matthew, we see Jesus carrying out the last of these as He teaches us the full meaning

of some of the Law's commandments. In these teachings, Jesus reveals the true spirit of the Law. For the most part, the Law as given in the first five books of the Old Testament consists of commandments regulating external behavior. Indeed, in order to be enforceable by the nation of Israel, the Law (as given to that nation to enforce) had to concern itself with external actions, because men are incapable of adjudicating internal attitudes. However, God *is* capable of adjudicating internal attitudes. As the Lord Himself told Samuel: **“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”** (1 Sam. 16:7). So, in these next sections, Jesus will teach us the Law's full meaning and spirit, as it is enforced by God. We will learn that the commandments that regulate our external actions are just the physical aspects of the true and full law of God, which regulates both our external actions and internal attitudes.

Jesus teaches: **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell”** (vss. 21-22). Jesus begins here by giving the spirit of the commandment which said, **“Do not murder.”** Though **“it was said to the people long ago”**, simply, **“Do not murder”**, the full spirit of the law is that **“anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”** Now, Jesus is not merely giving us an exhortation that springs from the spirit of the law **“Do not murder”**; much more than that, He is giving us the full meaning of the law against the external act of murder, and extending it to also include the internal attitude of being angry with one's brother. Just as the one who **“murders”** will be

“subject to judgment”, so also, the one **“who is angry with his brother”** will also be **“subject to judgment”**. Of course, men cannot adjudicate the commandment against anger because men cannot see the attitudes of the heart. Thus, the law as given in the first five books of the Bible (which was given to the nation of Israel as the law of their land) only gave the part of this commandment which concerned the physical act of murder, so that the leaders of Israel could properly administer the law.

Note the way in which Jesus emphatically gives the true intent of the law. He says: **“But I tell you...”** Jesus here is implying that He has the authority to teach us the true meaning of the law. *Question:* By what authority can He do this? *Answer:* By virtue of the fact that He is the Son of God, which was itself proven by His resurrection from the dead. Paul teaches us that Jesus **“was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead”** (Rom. 1:4). We would do well to listen and take to heart what Jesus says about the law because it is He who will judge us. Again Paul: **“Who is He that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised from the dead—is at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us”** (Rom. 8:34).

Jesus goes on to give us an example that illustrates the importance of this law: **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift”** (vss. 23-24). This is backward from the “normal” thinking of the time. For the Jews, the offering of a sacrifice at the altar was very important because it was their means of atonement for sin, as well as one of their primary means of worship. For the Pharisees, given their meticulous adherence to the letter of the law, the offering at the altar,

which to them was an act of reconciliation with God, would take precedence over any act of reconciliation with their brothers. But Jesus is giving precedence to being reconciled to one's brother: the precedence of reconciliation is higher than that of worship. The Lord says the same thing when He tells us: **"I desire mercy, not sacrifice"** (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; Matt. 12:7).

Reconciliation is so important that Jesus tells us to stop in the act of worshipping, if we remember that we need to be reconciled. He says: **"[L]eave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift"** (vs. 24). Note again, Jesus does not say that we should make a mental note to be reconciled later, but He says that we should stop the act of worshiping and be reconciled before we continue to worship. Thus, dear reader, the study of God's Word is also an act of worship. Do you have anything against your brother? Does your brother have anything against you? If so, then stop reading this right now and go be reconciled!

By the way (now that you are back from being reconciled to your brother), it is noteworthy that the Lord did not say, "If you have anything against your brother, then go be reconciled." Rather, He said: If **"your brother has something against you"**, then go be reconciled. "We are more likely to remember when we have something against others than when we have done something to offend others. And if we are truly concerned about our anger and hate, we shall be no less concerned when we engender them in others" [Carson, 150]. So let us note, we must be concerned not only with our own anger, but also the anger we engender in others.

Jesus next gives an example that illustrates the practical advantages for being reconciled to your enemies: **"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to**

court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny” (vss. 25-26). When you are reconciled to your adversaries, you save yourself from their retaliation, and its consequences. We should all take note of this. In fact,... wait: Are not we all on the way to our ultimate court date? Are not we all on a journey towards our final judgment? In this case, our “adversary” is God, against whom we have spent our lives sinning. We must all be sure to **“settle matters quickly”** with God, who is taking us to our final judgment. We must all be sure that all matters between us and God are settled before we get to our final judgment or, most certainly, we **“will not get out until [we] have paid the last penny.”** Fortunately for us, God has provided a way for us to be reconciled to Him, even though, because of our sin, we are God’s enemy: **“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”** (Rom. 5:8-10). May God be praised! He has done His part in being reconciled to us. He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sins, so that when we get to the final judgment, we can say, through Jesus Christ: “The matter is settled.” All we have to do is to accept God’s great gift of reconciliation by receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Do Not Commit Adultery

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

— Matthew 5:27-30

IN THIS SECTION, we continue the portion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus teaches us the full meaning of God’s Law. As we mentioned in the last issue, the Law, as given in the first five books of the Old Testament, for the most part consists of commandments regulating external behavior. The reason for this is that the Law was given specifically to the nation of Israel for enforcement. Men, of course, can only enforce laws that regulate external behavior. The full intent of the Law of God, as given here by God’s Son Jesus Christ, does regulate the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. God has commanded His people: **“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy”** (Lev. 19:2), and true holiness deals with thoughts and attitudes, as well as external actions. Given this, we should not be surprised that the Law of God has such a far reach.

Jesus teaches: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”** (vss. 27-28). Jesus is saying essentially that the crime is in not only the act, but the intent is enough to make one guilty of breaking God’s law. As the LORD Himself told us: **“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”** (I Sam. 16:7).

These days, in the world, adultery is taken very lightly. For the most part, modern society does not treat the sin of adultery with proper gravity. In most societies, adultery is not even a crime. Many people of the world consider the sin of adultery a private matter between the husband and wife affected by it. Many people even would say that adultery is not a sin as long as the husband and wife allow the adultery. This attitude is not a godly view of adultery, or marriage (for that matter). In God’s law, marriage is a sacred institution, a vow before God, and so, adultery is a very serious crime, a capital offense, every bit as serious as murder. In fact, adultery is like murder in this respect: adultery murders the *one* person created from the union of marriage. As it is written: **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”** (Gen. 2:24). Adultery rips apart the **“one flesh”** that has been joined together through marriage. As no one would tolerate a mad man tearing apart a body with an ax, so no one should tolerate the tearing apart by adultery the **“one”** body united through marriage.

Given the seriousness of adultery, we can also understand the seriousness of the sin of lust. Lust is the first step on the road towards adultery. There has never been an instance of adultery where there was not first the sin of lust. Thus Jesus teaches concerning lust: **“But I tell you that anyone who**

looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (vs. 28). As the godly man is properly expected to flee from adultery, so he should also flee from lust. As the godly man is properly expected to confess to God and repent from the sin of adultery, so he should also ask forgiveness from God the sin of lust and treat the sin of lust with the seriousness that Jesus here treats it.

And in fact, Jesus speaks very seriously of the sin of lust. He goes on to say: **“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell”** (vs. 29). This is a radical saying. With it, Jesus is trying to communicate the seriousness of the sin of lust. He goes on to speak of the seriousness of sin in general: **“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell”** (Matt. 5:30). Complete and utter righteousness is required for salvation from being **“thrown into hell.”** If the loss of an eye or hand could lead to righteousness and, thus, salvation, it would be worth gouging it out or cutting it off. Of course, sin comes from the heart of man, as Jesus later teaches: **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”** (Matt. 15:19). And so, the cutting off of the hand of a sinner would leave a handless sinner, and the gouging out of the eye of a sinner would leave an eyeless sinner. There is a much better way to achieve righteousness, a way that was not yet available when Jesus spoke these words. Later, Jesus Himself did a far more radical thing for our righteousness than the cutting off of a hand or the gouging out of an eye. He gave His life for us that we may be righteous. As Peter teaches: **“He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His**

wounds you have been healed” (I Peter 2:24). Thus, it is not necessary for us to gouge an eye out or cut a hand off. To be righteous, we must accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the punishment of our sins, turn our lives over to Him as our Redeemer, put the confidence of our salvation upon Him as our Savior. In this way, we do far more for our righteousness than cutting off our hand would do. We say as Paul said: **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”** (Gal. 2:20).

On Divorce

³¹ **“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’** ³² **But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”**

— Matthew 5:31-32

GIVEN THE PRECEDING teaching on the seriousness of the sin of adultery, we can understand more clearly the teachings of the Bible on divorce. Jesus teaches: **“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery”** (vss. 31-32). To begin, Jesus cites a passage from the law that was being greatly abused at the time. Here is the entire context of that passage:

“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance” (Deut. 24:1-4).

Note that the thrust of this passage, rather than being to explicitly allow divorce, was to forbid remarriage of a husband to his original wife after they had been divorced. As Stonehouse comments: “Whatever grounds for divorce the Mosaic enactment may have had in view, the thrust of the passage in its original setting is not to establish grounds for divorce, but presupposing the practice of divorce on various grounds, to provide some protection for the woman from the harshness of her husband. The aim of the legislation is not to condone divorce as such, but to mitigate its evil consequences” [Stonehouse, in Morris, 120]. God never approved divorce. He explicitly stated: **“I hate divorce”** (Mal. 2:16). Jesus tells us that it was **“Moses [who] permitted you to divorce because your hearts were hard”** (Matt. 19:8). There were those in Israel who would use Moses’ permission of divorce as a way to present themselves as being guiltless before the law, while being unfaithful to their wives. For example, a man would divorce his wife (yet keep her in his house), marry a mistress and, when he tired of his new wife, divorce her, then remarry his first wife again. By going through the legal formalities, the man would use the law to bless his dalliances, and get around

being accused of committing adultery. This passage in Deuteronomy forbids such manipulation of the law. It places three restrictions on divorce: there must be something **“indecent”** in the wife; the husband must give his wife a certificate; remarriage to each other is forbidden. These restrictions discourage hasty divorce. Getting the certificate was a legal proceeding. The **“indecent”** thing he has found must be significant enough for the certificate to be granted. The prohibition of remarriage forces the husband to think about whether he is really sure that he wants the divorce, because it is irrevocable.

In the time that Jesus spoke, just as in our time, divorce had become far too common. Moses' allowance for divorce was still being abused. Jesus here is reestablishing the importance and sacredness of marriage, and God's abhorrence of divorce. In this passage, Jesus is laying guilt upon the man who divorces his wife. The man who divorces his wife is leading her into adultery; he is, in effect, prostituting his wife. As Calvin points out: “As it was the object of the bill of divorce that a woman released from her first husband should go on to a new match, he is well condemned as an enticer, who prostitutes his wife to others, against all right and religion, when she has been given him in holy matrimony” [Calvin, 190]. The only case in which the man is not guilty of leading his divorced wife into adultery is when she has already been unfaithful.

Read this passage carefully. Do not read too much into it. Note well this: Jesus is not here allowing divorce in cases of marital unfaithfulness (God, in all cases, **“hates divorce”**). Rather, He is merely saying that in those cases, the man is not guilty of causing the divorced wife to commit adultery. Again, Jesus is not here allowing or in any way approving of divorce in any case, including cases of marital unfaithfulness. This is consistent with another passage in which Jesus speaks on

divorce: **“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.”** (Mark 10:11-12). Here, Jesus gives no qualification. He states that **“anyone”** who divorces and remarries is guilty of adultery. This all supports the sacredness of marriage in God’s eyes. In God’s eyes, a man and a woman who marry are *literally* one person. Moreover, they are *one* person that God Himself has joined together. And so, as Jesus our Lord stated unequivocally: **“What God has joined together, let man not separate”** (Mark 10:9).

On Swearing Oaths

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

— Matthew 5:33-37

HERE, Jesus continues speaking to His disciples concerning the Law of God. Recall that Jesus prefaced this section of the Sermon on the Mount by saying: **“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”** (Matt. 5:20). Then He proceeded to give His disciples six examples of how their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees: concerning anger (vss. 21-26), concerning lust (vss. 27-30), concerning marriage (vss. 31-32), concerning truthfulness (vss. 33-37, the text we will look at in this study), concerning revenge (vss. 38-42), and concerning love for others (vss. 43-47). Jesus will end this section of His discourse by summing it all up: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (vs. 48). And so, the goal of all these teachings is that we would **“be perfect”**. “But wait!”, you may say, “Jesus desires that I be perfect!? I

can't do that!" Quite right. The holiness of our Lord Jesus requires that His teaching demand perfect righteousness. Therefore, these teachings will be difficult—yes, impossible—to consistently and unerringly carry out. Jesus knows quite well that we cannot attain perfection in this world. That is why He went to great lengths to see that His perfect righteousness may be credited to us. He died for us, taking the punishment that we deserve for our lack of perfection, so that He could bestow upon us His righteousness as a gift. Praise be to the Lord!

We are currently in the midst of these teachings concerning how our **“righteousness should surpass that of the Pharisees.”** Jesus begins this section concerning truthfulness: **“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord’”** (vs. 33). Jesus cites here the teaching that the people had been hearing from the Pharisees about oaths: **“Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.”** The sense here is that the Pharisees were saying: “You shouldn’t break your oaths, but always make sure you keep your oaths that are made to the Lord.” At the time, there was Rabbinical teaching that said that only oaths made “by God” were legally binding. Furthermore, the Rabbinical teachers themselves defined for the people exactly what an oath made “by God” was. Later, Jesus dresses down the Pharisees for inventing such regulations:

“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men!

Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it" (Matt. 23:16 -22).

The result of the pharasaical reading of the law concerning oaths was that no one knew if a man would keep his oath: truth was compromised. If a man swore an oath "by heaven", the hearer may have thought that it seemed that this man would tell the truth, because, after all, God lives in heaven. But technically, according to this pharasaical teaching, the swearer was not legally bound to keep his oath because he did not swear by something close enough (in their view) to God. So, rather than strengthening the truth, oaths became vehicles for telling lies.

In the case of oaths, the Law of God was far more strict than the Pharisees made it out to be. Here is the actual teaching from the law: **"When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said"** (Num. 30:2). The law is unequivocal: in any case, a man **"must not break his word but must do everything he said."** The essence of the law is that *all* oaths must be completely carried out. They are not to be taken lightly. Moreover, the Law of God forbids us to make oaths in any other name than the name of God: **"Fear the LORD your God and serve Him. Hold fast to Him and take your oaths in His name"** (Deut. 10:20; see also Deut. 6:13). This part of the law concerning oaths is conspicuously absent from the pharasaical regulations on taking oaths. Rather than forbidding oaths in other things, the Pharisees merely declared those oaths to be non-binding.

In Jesus' time, oaths and vows were very important in the business world. They did not have written contracts or contract lawyers: a person's word was the contract. Thus, a businessman had to be confident that an oath was binding in order to be able to carry out business. Jesus here is commanding that oaths be used as originally intended by God: as a surety that the swearer considered himself to be bound by the oath. And so, Jesus here forbids the specious use of oaths by saying that his disciples are not to swear at all **"by heaven... or by the earth... or by Jerusalem... or by [one's] head"** (vss. 35, 36). By disallowing these oaths, Jesus was requiring that the disciples righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees, who did not forbid, and even themselves used, the specious oaths.

Jesus sums up His teaching: **"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one"** (vs. 37). In other words: *Just tell the truth!!!* When you speak, people shouldn't have to do any calculating to determine whether or not you are telling the truth. Your words should be true in both literal and implicative meanings. Your character should exude truthfulness. Jesus desires that his disciples always speak truthfully. The world should consider that the word of a Christian can be relied upon. If you speak truthfully, and everyone knows it, there is no need for the taking of oaths to support your statements. As Jesus states, anything beyond the absolute truth **"comes from the evil one."**

Love, Not Revenge

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you: Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

— Matthew 5:38-39

JESUS CONTINUES here to speak on the ideal standards of conduct for those who belong to the Kingdom of God. Of course, not all whom we meet in life follow these standards of conduct. In these verses, Jesus addresses what our response should be to those who treat us badly, who do us an evil turn. The essence of his teaching is love towards the one who wronged us, not revenge. Jesus teaches: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you: Do not resist an evil person”** (vss. 38-39).

In saying this, Jesus was in no way nullifying or abolishing the original Law that He cites here. The original Law that specified **“Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth”** was a guideline for the leaders of Israel to use in determining the punishment of criminals (see Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). This guideline was never meant to be used by individuals in redressing personal wrongs. On the contrary, the Lord Himself commanded in the Law: **“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD”** (Lev. 19:18).

As used properly, in a society for sentencing criminals, the guideline **“eye for eye, and tooth for tooth”** is excellent in its

fairness and justice. Such a guideline makes sure that the punishment does not exceed what it should be, while at the same time it makes sure that the punishment is sufficient to punish the crime. However, “good law in court may be very bad custom in common society.” [Spurgeon, 60]. The guideline **“eye for eye, tooth for tooth”** does not work well at all in redressing personal wrongs. If everyone followed it, each wrong would turn into a never-ending series of retaliations. Each retaliation would tend to escalate, for a wrong seems much greater in the eye of the victim than it does in the eye of the perpetrator. And so, far from achieving justice and peace in the society, the guideline would spawn hatred and range wars between families. In the hands of sinful men, rather than being an instrument of proper justice, **“eye for eye, tooth for tooth”** becomes a license for cruelty and hatred. It’s just too easy to find personal wrongs that have been done to us (just as it is so easy for others to find wrongs that we have done to them).

Jesus commands His disciples to put a stop to all the retaliation. Again, rather than **“eye for eye, tooth for tooth”** retaliation, Jesus commanded: **“Do not resist an evil person.”** To illustrate what He means, Jesus gives us four examples of what, in lieu of retaliation, our response should be. Each of these examples offers an alternative to vengeful anger. First: **“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”** (vs. 39). Many regard this verse (as Spurgeon points out) as “fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly” [Spurgeon, 60]. Yet, on the other hand, this passage has inspired many great men (Christians and non-Christians) in their great work, such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Many stumble on this verse because they get hung up by extreme applications of it. They ask, “Does this mean Christians cannot be soldiers in war? Does this mean we cannot protect ourselves if a murderer invades our house? etc...” In

concentrating on these extremes, they are distracted from the heart of the matter: be first in peace; show love to your enemy. This is the principle Jesus is teaching. It is not a general rule that applies to any and every instance of evil perpetrated, locally and globally. It does not prevent Christians from serving in war, for war is a societal action, not a personal slap on the face. It does not prevent Christians from defending themselves from a murderer, for a murderer is not seeking to insult with a slap, but to take human life.

Having said this, let us get back to the heart of the matter: be first in peace; show love to your enemy. Let us review the situation: **“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”** A strike on the right cheek implies a slap with the back of the hand (since most people are right-handed). Such a slap is the action that accompanies a demeaning insult. In this situation, Jesus is commanding that, instead of rearing back with our right hand, we hold our peace, even **“turn to him the other [cheek] also.”** Be first in peace. “But wait!”, you may ask, “would not turning the other cheek encourage more violence, more evil on his part? In that way, would we not be inciting him to sin?” An interesting objection, but to turn the other cheek is the best option. Think about it. If you fight back, **“eye for eye”**, you yourself are led into sin, and the perpetrator will think that his cruel action was justified. Alternatively, if you turn and run away from the insult, the perpetrator declares victory. His insult has achieved its objective. However, if you turn the other cheek, what has the perpetrator achieved? His insult has not achieved its desired effect, because you turn as if to want more. And then, what good would striking you again do for him, for you have literally asked for it? His failure to phase you, his failure at his insult, causes him to think twice about what he has done. It is then,

his conscience begins its work, showing him the cruelty of his actions.

By turning the other cheek, you follow Paul's exhortation: **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"** (Rom. 12:21). Our Lord Jesus, of course, practiced what He preached. He Himself was slapped in the face (see Matt. 26:67; John 19:3), and even more. Through all of His suffering, He had the power to retaliate, but chose not to. Instead, He chose to **"overcome evil with good."**

In day-to-day life, we are seldom slapped in the face, but we are often insulted in other ways. Jesus' command to **"turn the other cheek"** can be applied perfectly to these day-to-day situations. Is there someone reviling you behind your back? Do not do the same behind his. In fact, in keeping with the spirit of **"turning the other cheek"**, you would do well to admit your faults to him in person. Does a coworker speak badly to your boss of your performance? Do not speak badly of his. **"Turn the other cheek"** and admit your faults to your boss. He may be impressed by your honesty. Are you often mocked to your face? **"Turn the other cheek"** and laugh right along.

Not only did our Lord Jesus put up with literal slaps in the face, but our God is continuously slapped in the face by men. Listen to the talk on the streets. Is not our God continuously blasphemed, insulted, reviled, cursed? Does not He turn the other cheek and continuously reach out to those who curse Him? Has not He turned the other cheek and sent His own Son to die for us, that we might live? Lord, forgive us. Praise be to the Lord! May we be more like you.

Maintaining a Light Grasp on the World

⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

— Matthew 5:40-42

JESUS' FIRST EXAMPLE of how we avoid revenge concerned personal insult. This next example concerns our hold on personal property. Jesus teaches: **“And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well”** (vs. 40). In this case, your adversary evidently thinks he has a right to your **“tunic”**, thus he brings suit against you. Jesus' command is, rather than let things get contentious over such a small thing as a tunic, settle matters without contention, and let him have your tunic. Moreover, give him your cloak as well. In other words, do not let your hold on your earthly possessions be so strong so as to engender feelings of revenge, cause strife, and precipitate lawsuits. Does your adversary think that your tunic should be his? Well, give him both your cloak and your tunic. He may just then think (as he is holding your cloak in his hand): “Hmmm. I have no right to his cloak. As a matter of fact, I probably have no right to his tunic, either.” Such treatment to your adversaries follows Paul's advice (himself quoting the Book of Proverbs): **“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”** (see Rom. 12:17-21). Submission to those with evil intent has a way of activating their consciences, and in this way, **“heap burning coals on [their heads].”** Love to your enemies is the most effective way to change their behavior.

The next example concerns enforced labor: **“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”** (vs. 41). Jesus here is alluding to a Roman law which allowed a Roman soldier to press anyone into service to carry the soldier’s burden for a mile (actually for a thousand paces). Interestingly, Simon from Cyrene was pressed into service in this way to carry Jesus’ cross on the way to the crucifixion (see Luke 23:26). Little did Simon know, but that he was easing the burden of the Lord of the Universe by being obedient to the request of the Roman soldiers!

Jesus commands that, in any case, rather than grumbling about being pressed into service, rather than thinking of how to get the soldier back for asking such a thing, we should not only go one mile with him, but two. We should use the opportunity to show love for the requestor: give him more help than he had a right to expect. Though there is no longer a law that allows soldiers to press us into service in this way, this verse is directly applicable in our lives in a variety of situations, especially in our work places. How often does your boss ask you to do something that you feel is entirely unreasonable (though it be within the scope of your job)? Don’t fight it, go the extra mile. Such an attitude could only improve your career!

By the way, the importance of these teachings of Jesus can be demonstrated by how portions of two of these verses have become well-known idioms in our language, used by both non-Christians and Christians. In an unpleasant situation, how often have you heard the advice to “turn the other cheek.” Or, when receiving encouragement, how often has someone advised you to “go the extra mile”. Praise the Lord that such sound advice has passed into everyday language!

The final example that Jesus has for us in this matter concerns sharing our possessions: **“Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to**

borrow from you” (vs. 42). In context, Jesus is advising us to not have such a strong hold on our earthly possessions, such that a request for help engenders angry feelings, and a desire for revenge. Relax your grip on the things you grasp so tightly. As Paul exhorts, we who are blessed materially in this world are to **“be generous and willing to share”** (I Tim. 6:18). “We are beggars, to whom [God] gives liberally, and we must return to Him by giving to our fellowmen” [Broadus, 125]. Alas, though, giving can be complicated. Many request gifts, some don’t deserve them. Broadus has these words of advice on knowing when to give: “(1) We must not refuse all because many are impostors. (2) We should strive to ascertain who are really needy and deserving, and to inform others. (3) We must not turn beggars away simply because offensive or annoying—this would be a very petty selfishness. (4) Where there is public provision for beggars we should act in harmony with such arrangements, but cannot remit the matter wholly to them. (5) To open some means of supporting themselves is far better than to support them” [Broadus, 125].

Love Your Neighbor

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

— Matthew 5:43-48

JESUS HERE concludes this section of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus speaks about specific commandments of the Law. He teaches: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”** (vss. 43-45). Note well that, unlike His previous teachings, Jesus here is not citing a Scripture, for nowhere does the Law say: **“Hate your enemy”**, though of course the Law does say: **“Love your neighbor”** (see Lev. 19:18). Far from sanctioning hatred for enemies, the writings in the Old Testament command and encourage love for enemies: see Ex. 23:4-5; I Sam. 24:5; Job 31:29; Ps. 7:4; Prov. 24:17,29; Prov. 25:21ff.

So, in this case, Jesus' reference, **“You have heard that it was said...”**, was not to the actual writings of the Law of God, but rather to the teachings that the people were hearing concerning love. There has been found archaeological examples of such teaching. In the Dead Sea scrolls, in the writings of the Qumran community (a sect of Jews at the time Jesus walked the earth), the members of that community were enjoined “that they may love all that [God] has chosen and hate all that He has rejected” [Vermes, in Morris, 130fn]. And though we have no direct evidence that the mainline Jewish teachers (the Pharisees and the Sadducees) said these exact words, we do know by their actions that hatred of others, especially hatred of the Romans and the Samaritans, was common among them. In general, teachers of God's Word must be very careful not to give the impression that it's OK to hate others. Any disparaging words against others while teaching God's Word—against non-believers, against blatant sinners, against government leaders, etc.—can be taken by the hearers as license to hate others.

Jesus makes clear the true Law of God: **“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”** (vs. 44). Jesus spells it right out, so that no one can be mistaken: **“Love your enemies.”** He also gives the primary action by which we can show love for our enemies: **“Pray for those who persecute you.”** Praying for our enemies has a two-fold benefit: it is a demonstration of love for our enemies; it also helps to increase our love for our enemies. Try it, and you'll see what I mean. Through prayer for our enemies, we are in communication with God concerning them. Through prayer for our enemies, God speaks to us and so we begin to see our enemies as God does. Of course, God loves our enemies, and so if we see them as He sees them, our love grows for them.

Jesus commands us to love our enemies **“that [we] may be sons of [our] Father in heaven.”** When we love our enemies, we are God-like, we are Christ-like. God loves His enemies. Through our sin, we have all been enemies of God. God has gone to great lengths to show His love for His enemies. He sent His Son to die for His enemies. All on earth have the same opportunity of salvation through Jesus Christ. God treats His enemies fairly, and gives them blessings, just as He gives His children blessings. As Jesus points out: **“He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (vs. 45). Many have struggled with the question, “Why do the wicked prosper here on earth?” Jesus here gives us one reason why God blesses the wicked: It is an example of love for enemies, an example that we are to follow.

Jesus next points out the absurdity of a command that would urge love for just those who are not enemies: **“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”** (vs. 46). **“Tax collectors”** were despised as among the most immoral in Israel at that time, because they were allowed by the Roman government to extort as much money as they could from the people, and usually did. (Interestingly, Matthew, who wrote this gospel, is a tax collector). And so, if **“tax collectors”** are able to love those who love them, surely we don’t need a command that enjoins love for friends. Although, in these ungodly times, we have fallen so far away from knowing what true love is, even our love for friends is greatly flawed. Certainly, the high divorce rate testifies to this. If we could even love those who love us, there would be no need for divorce. Instead, we love, as long as it is not inconvenient; we love, as long as we can still do what we want; we love, as long as we do not have to make any sacrifices. This is not love. We fall far short of loving even as

well as **“tax collectors”** do. John defines love, and this is the love we should show for both friends and enemies: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”** (I John 3:16).

Jesus then gives us an idea of a very simple way to show love for enemies: **“And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”** (vs. 47). As a starting point to showing love for enemies, greet them as you pass them in the hall, or on the street. What a simple, effective way of showing love: a nod and a smile; a cheerful “Hello”; a shake of the hand, or a pat on the back. We must be set apart from others in our behavior, otherwise, why take on the name “Christian”? Our love for others should be evident, exemplary. In loving our enemies, we are a witness for God’s love. Don’t think that your enemies will not notice your love. They will. They may not directly respond to it, but they will notice it. And the greatest reward that you can get for your love will be if **“they see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us”** (I Pet. 2:12). “Unfailing courtesy, kindness, tenderness, and consideration for others, are some of the greatest ornaments to the character of a child of God. The world can understand these things [even] if it cannot understand doctrine” [Ryle, 45].

To sum up, Jesus commands: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (vs. 48). I believe that in this verse, Jesus is summing up, not only His words concerning love, but His entire discourse concerning the Law (e.g., all that He has said from Matt. 5:17 through 5:47). As David tells us: **“The law of the Lord is perfect”** (Ps. 19:7). Being a perfect law, from a holy and righteous God, the Law of God necessarily demands perfection. “But wait,” you may say, “Have you not heard the saying, ‘Nobody’s perfect?’” Yes, indeed. But just

because we, in our sin nature, cannot attain perfection, does not mean that God should compromise His Law and allow imperfection. What kind of law would that be? Could a holy God give commandments such as these: “Try to love your enemies. Try not to divorce. Try not to steal. Tell the truth, except when you’re in a really bad fix. etc.”? No. A holy God, a righteous God commands: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** This is the standard for the Kingdom of God. This is the Law for the Kingdom of God. And when we enter His Kingdom, we will experience the gloriousness of a Kingdom that operates under this rule of Law.

Until then, we are stuck in these fallen bodies, we are stuck with our sin nature, such that, though we may strive for God’s perfection, we fail miserably, minutely. But thanks be to God, that though we fail, we can still be clothed with righteousness through Christ’s sacrifice. We fail, but Jesus has paid the price for our failure, so that our sins may be forgiven through Him. And so, God can remain holy and righteous, and His law can reflect His holiness and righteousness, yet we can escape judgment because God, in His love for us (His enemies) gave His Son to pay the price for our sin. Praise be to God! Praise Him for His love! Praise Him for His perfect plan! To Him be the glory forever and ever!

Ostentation

¹ “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

— Matthew 6:1-8

JESUS HAS just completed a section in His Sermon on the Mount where He spoke to His disciples on how they should obey the Law of God in its full intent and meaning (see Matt. 5:17-48). Here, He begins a section on how His disciples should

(and should not) perform their acts of righteousness. For, yes, sinners that we are, we can even manage to perform acts of righteousness in the wrong way. Jesus' teaching on this subject "is very needful, as there is always the danger of selfishness in virtuous action, and no work is so praiseworthy as not to incur from it many faults and stains" [Calvin, 200]. Jesus teaches: **"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven"** (vs. 1). The essence of Jesus' criticism of the way many acts of righteousness are performed is that they are done **"to be seen by [others]"**. They are done (improperly) with a view to receive praise from others, rather than (properly) to benefit others and to glorify God. Jesus will go on to give examples of how the following three **"acts of righteousness"** are often performed in an improper manner: giving to the needy (6:2-4); praying (6:5- 7); and fasting (6:16-18).

First, concerning giving to the needy, Jesus teaches: **"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men"** (vs. 2). Note first that Jesus says **"when you give to the needy..."**, not **"if you give to the needy."** As Christians, we are expected to give to those who are in need. John tells us: **"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth"** (I John 3:17-18).

So, *when* we give, Jesus tells us, **"do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do... to be honored by men"** (vs. 2). A true test of your motives when giving to others is whether you feel you must tell others that you gave. If so, you are giving, not to glorify God by helping others, but to glorify

yourself. Jesus further clarifies: **“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret”** (vs. 3-4). Sadly, many churches violate this principle of giving in secret by publishing the tithes and gifts of their members in the church bulletin. Or again, some churches will encourage gifts for, say, the building of a new church, by promising to engrave the names of the givers on the pews, or on the bricks, or windows, etc. Such incentives to giving are sinful actions by the churches who use them, because they are encouraging their members to violate the clear teaching of our Lord Jesus to give in secret. To publish in any way the names and amounts of givers to a church or charity is to encourage the givers **“to be honored by men”**. In doing this, these churches cheat the givers out of the heavenly rewards for their giving, for Jesus tells us that those who give to be honored by men **“have received their reward in full”** (vs. 2).

However, concerning those who give in secret Jesus states: **“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you”** (vs. 4). You see, the manner in which you give reflects the strength of your faith. If, in giving, you must **“trumpet”** your giving, you betray that you lack faith that God sees your gift, and will honor you for your giving. But you can be assured, by the clear promise of the Son of God, that if you give in secret, then **“your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

Likewise, Jesus teaches concerning prayer: **“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full”** (vs. 5). It may be surprising that there is a wrong way to pray. But Jesus teaches us that it is wrong if we **“love to pray... to be seen by men”**. Jesus here stresses the

importance of the personal nature of prayer. Prayer is speaking personally to God. And so, genuine prayer, even if it is in a public place, should be personal. Prayer should be “undertaken with a single eye on God, not with a side glance at people who could be impressed” [Griffith Thomas, 461].

The **“hypocrite”** has no personal prayer time. He goes out of his way to put himself in a public place—**“standing in the synagogues”** or **“on the street corners”**—when he prays. Jesus tells us that His disciples must have personal prayer time: **“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen”** (vs. 6). The total absence of personal prayer time in one’s life is evidence of a lack of faith. It shows that one regards prayer as valueless in itself, regards prayer as only having value when other people are there to hear it. If you truly believe that God hears you, you will pray to Him often. Moreover, you will set aside a time and a place to pray with full concentration, as Jesus suggests: You will **“go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father.”**

Jesus takes this opportunity to point out another common error in praying: **“And when you pray, do not keep babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words”** (vs. 7). Prayer is not a ritual. Rather, it is personal conversation between you and God. It is not the length of the prayer that makes it effective, but the sincerity of heart, the depth of faith. “Christians’ prayers are measured by weight, not by length” [Spurgeon, 67]. Don’t bore God with many words, but no heart.

Now, Jesus is not teaching us that all long prayers are improper. He Himself would often pray all night (see Luke 6:12). Nor is Jesus teaching us that we should never repeat the same requests in our prayers. He Himself repeated the same requests three times in Gethsemane (see Matt. 26:39- 44).

Rather, He is speaking against **“babbling”**, thinking that the many words, in and of themselves, will cause the prayer to be answered.

In fact, Jesus points out that God does not even need our words: **“Do not be like [the pagans], for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”** (vs. 8). Jesus here is reminding us that, when we pray, we are speaking to the True and Living God, the Omniscient and All-Powerful God. Since He knows everything, He certainly knows what we need. Thus, Jesus is teaching us here that the words themselves in the prayer are the least important aspect. It is the deepened relationship with God that comes through speaking with God that is the most important aspect of prayer. When we pray, we wrongly tend to focus on the petitions to God. We should try to get away from focusing on what we need from God when we pray, and focus rather on knowing God and His heart. “The faithful do not pray to tell God what He does not know, or urge Him to His duties, or hurry Him on when He delays, but rather to alert themselves to seek Him, to exercise their faith by meditating upon His promises, unburdening their cares by lifting themselves into His bosom, and finally to testify that from Him alone, all good for themselves and for others is hoped and asked.” [Calvin, 204].

Jesus Teaches How to Pray

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name,

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

— Matthew 6:9-15

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, Jesus gave some instructions on how not to pray. First, He said not to pray “**to be seen by men**” (vs. 5). Then, He said, “**And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words**” (vs. 7). A great thing about the teachings of Jesus is that He instructs us, not only by precept, but also by example, in order that we may know what He really means by His teachings. So here, Jesus provides us with an outstanding example of a short, powerful prayer, given

as a contrast to ostentatious prayers and the meaningless babble spoken of in the previous verses. Containing a mere six petitions, Jesus has given us a prayer that expresses all that a child of God need desire. The extent to which our own desires reflect the petitions in this short prayer, is the extent to which we have been conformed to the mind of Christ.

This prayer is, of course, very well known to hundreds of millions of people, many of whom recite it regularly. It is ironic, and sad, considering the teaching of Jesus that prayer should not consist of meaningless babble and vain repetition, that many people pray this very prayer meaninglessly and repetitively. Some even superstitiously pray this prayer, thinking that the words in and of themselves (even if unfelt by us) have some magical power of their own. To pray this prayer vainly, repetitively, unfeelingly, is wrong, and contrary to the very teaching of our Lord for which this prayer is an example. Don't get me wrong, though. I am not saying we should avoid praying this prayer. It is a beautiful prayer to pray! So when we pray this prayer, we should ponder, meditate and feel what we are saying. If we do not feel what we pray, our prayer becomes meaningless babble: a noisy, unpleasant din to God's ears.

The structure of this prayer is very simple: an opening address; three petitions for God's glory; three petitions for our own sake. The prayer opens by addressing the One we are praying to: **"Our Father in heaven"** (vs. 9). This address is effective for us when we pray, because it reminds us of the goodness (**"Our Father"**) of God, and power (**"in heaven"**) of God.

The address **"our Father"** is an excellent preparation for prayer, because it builds our confidence by reminding us of the accessibility of God. He is our loving **"Father"**, so certainly He will listen to our prayer. As **"our Father"**, He personally cares for us. Never forget how great a privilege it is to be able to call

the Creator of the Universe **“our Father”**. John reminds us: **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”** (I John 3:1).

While saying **“our Father”** reminds us of God’s accessibility, adding **“in heaven”** reminds us of His ability: He is God **“in heaven”**, so He is certainly able to answer our prayers. Moreover, since He is an exalted Father, a Father **“in heaven”**, and not a father in this fallen world, He is not saddled with the frailties and fickleness of our fathers on earth. He is a Father with perfect love for His children.

The first three petitions in this prayer concern God’s glory. Many of us, many times, forget to pray for God’s glory. We jump right to our own needs, and go on and on about them. “It is quite absurd if we only take care for our own business, and neglect the kingdom of God, which is so much more important.” [Calvin, 205]. By placing the petitions about God’s glory first, Jesus gives them the highest priority. So should we. The first petition in Jesus’ model prayer is: **“Hallowed be Your name”** (vs. 9). This petition expresses a desire that the **“name”** of God—which denotes His entire character as revealed in the Bible: His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, truth, etc.—I say, this petition expresses a desire that the **“name”** of God be revered here on earth. This petition is greatly needed, because it is far from being accomplished in this fallen world. Rather than being **“hallowed”**, God’s name is blasphemed and belittled. Rather than appreciating the exalted character of God, we blame Him for everything that goes wrong in the world. Oh, that the whole world would realize that the main purpose for our existence is to glorify God. For this we pray, when we say: **“Hallowed by Your name.”**

The second petition is **“Your kingdom come”** (vs. 10). There are two aspects of the kingdom of God for which we are praying: the present and the future. We pray that the present

aspect of the kingdom of God would be strengthened: that God's salvation would be extended to more and more people; that His rule and reign would be submitted to more completely by His people; that the laws of His kingdom would be respected and obeyed by all. At the same time, we pray for the soon coming of the future aspect of God's kingdom: when Jesus Christ will return to reign directly over the earth; when His name will be exalted in every corner of the world; when every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. By the way, to pray such a petition as **"Your kingdom come"** is to (in order to avoid hypocrisy) desire in one's heart the coming of God's kingdom, and to be committed to the action of furthering God's kingdom on earth by devoting one's time and resources to that end.

The third petition is **"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"** (vs. 10). Now, the inhabitants of **"heaven"** are in constant and perfect willful submission to purposes of God. And so, this is essentially a prayer that we, here on earth, would yield ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that God's purposes may be carried out through us, willingly and joyfully. To pray such a prayer sincerely requires that we ourselves be open to God's guidance through His Spirit.

The next three petitions concern our own needs. The first of these is: **"Give us today our daily bread"** (vs. 11). Note well: God supplies our physical needs, as well as our spiritual needs. We have just prayed exalted petitions concerning God's glory: His name, His kingdom, His will; but, in this present life, we must also be concerned with the physical details of our existence. Many times, any deficiency of physical needs, and the anxiety that such a deficiency engenders, interferes with our seeking the (in many ways) more important spiritual needs that we have. Thus, Jesus places this petition concerning our physical needs as the first of petitions that pertain to our own

needs. Jesus phrases this petition wisely. This petition asks for physical needs, while avoiding greed. It asks for **“bread”** (a modest request), and then also, just our **“daily”** bread, our bread for this day only: not luxuriousness but sufficiency. Moreover, to ask for **“daily”** bread implies that we will ask God for the next day’s bread also: we acknowledge our constant, daily dependence on God for our needs, just as the Israelites daily depended on God for manna in the wilderness. Note also that the **“daily bread”** for which we ask is **“our”** daily bread: the bread that we ourselves have toiled for, not bread that belongs to someone else. “The idea of God giving the food in no way diminishes responsibility to work, but presupposes not only that Jesus’ disciples live one day at a time, but that all good things, even our ability to work and earn our food, come from God’s hand” [Carson, 171].

The second petition concerning our own needs is: **“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”** (vs. 12). Because of God’s goodness to us, we owe Him perfect obedience, and so, our sins are appropriately called **“debts”** here. To ask God for forgiveness of sins is an always needful, though often forgotten (especially in public prayer) petition. We are constantly falling into debt to God by our frequent sinning. Our unforgiven sins are a **“cloud”** over us (see Lam. 3:44), separating us from God, rendering our prayers ineffective. Isaiah taught: **“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear”** (Isa. 59:1-2). God, in His great mercy, has provided us a way through confession of sins to be assured that our sins are forgiven. He promised: **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”** (I John 1:9). Spurgeon rightly notes: “No

prayer of mortal men could be complete without confession of sin.” [Spurgeon, 68]. We need to establish a continual habit of confession of sin to God.

In order to avoid hypocrisy, Jesus reminds us that, if we are to expect forgiveness for our sins from God, we must also forgive others for their sins against us. **“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors .”** One who does not forgive others does not really understand full import of the great gift of God’s forgiveness (Jesus eloquently illustrates this in the parable found in Matt. 18:22-35). Jesus clearly considered this important, because, after He finished this model prayer, He returned to this specific point. He clearly stated: **“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”** (vs. 14-15). “To ask God for what we ourselves refuse to men, is to insult Him... But as no one can *reasonably* imagine himself to be the object of Divine forgiveness who is deliberately and habitually unforgiving towards his fellow-men, so it is a beautiful provision to make our right to ask and expect daily forgiveness of our daily shortcomings, and our final absolution and acquittal at the great day of admission into the kingdom, dependent upon our consciousness of a forgiving disposition towards our fellows” [JFB, 41].

The final petition is: **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”** (vs. 13). James states: **“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed”** (James 1:13-14). So, whatever the situation, our temptation to sin comes from our own evil desires. **“The evil one”**, known also as Satan, does what he can to incite our evil desires to lead us into sin. God

does test us, but not with a view that we would fall. Rather, God tests us so that we would be strengthened by the success of passing His tests. So, in the petition here, **“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”**, we are asking that God would order circumstances so that we would not be put into situations in which our own weaknesses would cause us to fall. And if we are to undergo testings (as we certainly will in this life), we are asking that the testings serve to strengthen us and make us grow up in spiritual maturity. In the Bible, we have an example of the importance of this petition. In Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, John and James to **“watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation”** (Matt. 26:51). Instead of praying as Jesus exhorted them, they fell asleep. Later, Peter was led into temptation, and failed miserably by denying His Lord three times (see Matt. 26:69-75).

In some Greek manuscripts of the Bible, a doxology is added to the end of the prayer: “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” Beautiful as this doxology is, most scholars do not believe it was originally part of Matthew’s Gospel, but they believe it was added later to some manuscripts by scribes. There are three main reasons scholars do not think that it was originally part of the Gospel: it is not contained in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts; it is found in differing forms in the manuscripts that do contain it; it was not commented on by the early church fathers who had access to the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, Tertullian (who lived in the late 2nd/early 3rd centuries, and so he had access to a very early manuscript) explicitly stated that **“deliver us from the evil one”** is the conclusion of this prayer. This is not to say that we must refrain from praying this doxology. In fact, the well-known doxology is very similar to part of one of David’s prayers: **“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and**

the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all” (I Chron. 29:11).

When You Fast

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

— Matthew 6:16-18

IN THESE VERSES, Jesus continues His teaching concerning ostentation in performing spiritual acts. Recall that He has warned us against ostentation in giving to the poor (see Matt. 6:2-4), and in praying (see Matt. 6:5-8). Here, He warns against ostentation during fasting: **“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full”** (vs. 16).

Fasting was a not uncommon practice of the Pharisees, as well as of the early church. In the Old Testament, fasting was commanded for one occasion: the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7). Beyond this, fasting was voluntary. There are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament. Most of the examples are fasts carried out by groups of people in prayer for God’s help during times of distress, or in prayer seeking the guidance of God when an important decision needs to be made (see Judges 20:26; Neh.

9:1-2; Jonah 3:5; II Sam. 1:12; II Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esth. 4:16). Fasting continued on in the early New Testament church (e.g., Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23), and of course, is still practiced today.

The purpose of fasting is to bring the body into subjection to the Spirit. Fasting is accompanied by prayers, for which the discernment and/or power of the Spirit is especially needful. “Prayer may be said to be that by which we *attach* ourselves to God, and fasting that by which we *detach* ourselves from the world” [Griffith Thomas, 83]. Though fasting starves the body, it simultaneously fattens the soul. Jesus in this passage assumes his disciples (including us) will fast from time to time. He says: **“When you fast...”** We all go through times of distress, or times of especial perplexion concerning God’s direction. These are the times to fast.

Jesus, later, also seems to indicate that there are times when fasting is inappropriate. Times of rejoicing are not times to fast (see Matt. 9:14-17). “The Saviour clearly teaches that fasting is right only when one’s condition makes it natural. In a time of joy, fasting would be unnatural, and could not express a genuine feeling. But persons who are in great distress are naturally inclined to abstain from eating” [Broadus, 143].

Specific times of fasting are not commanded for Christians. “It seems to be left to everyone’s discretion, whether he will fast or not. In this absence of direct command, we may see great wisdom. Many a poor man never has enough to eat, and it would be an insult to tell him to fast; many a sickly person can hardly be kept well with the closest attention to diet, and could not fast without bringing on illness. It is a matter in which everyone must be persuaded in his own mind, and not rashly condemn others who do not agree with him” [Ryle, 55-56].

As stated, the purpose of Jesus’ teaching in this passage is to warn us against ostentation when we do fast: **“[D]o not**

look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting” (vs. 16). It is implied that these hypocrites are going out of their way to look miserable in order to impress men, attempting to let others know how “holy” they are by their fasting. To do such a thing, of course, is ridiculous. “To look miserable in order to be thought holy is a wretched piece of hypocrisy” [Spurgeon, 70]. And beyond hypocrisy, to look miserable when one is not really suffering is a great insult to God, who has blessed us so much. Jesus suggests that those who fast with such hypocrisy will not have their prayers heard by God: **“I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full”** (vs. 16). Their reward is any praise from men that they might possibly receive from their hypocrisy.

Jesus instructs us how properly to fast: **“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you”** (vs. 17-18). To **“put oil on [one’s] head and wash [one’s] face”** was the normal way to prepare oneself for going out in those times. And so, Jesus here is saying that, when you fast, you should go through your normal daily regimen and dress normally, so as not to draw especial attention to your fast. After all, you are not fasting to get the attention of man, but to get the attention of God, to bring your petitions to Him with the power of the Spirit, as you ignore the desires of your flesh. And be sure: God **“sees what is done in secret”**, and Jesus assures us that He will **“reward”** us.

Three Choices to Be Made

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

— Matthew 6:19-24

IN THIS SECTION, continuing His instructions for His disciples, Jesus points out how our devotion to God can be hindered by the things of the world, and our focusing on them rather than the things of God. Jesus speaks on three choices that we make in this world: the choice between storing up treasures in heaven versus treasures on earth; the choice between living in light versus darkness; the choice between serving God versus serving money. Making the correct choices in these matters relates to one of the greatest challenges for us as Christians: how to live *in* the world, but not be *of* the world (see John 17:15-18).

Jesus begins: **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (vss. 19-21). Interestingly, the exhortation that Jesus gives here, **“Do not store up...”**, could also be rendered, “Stop storing up treasures on earth”, as if Jesus is assuming that, in fact, we all *do* have our hearts set on storing up treasures on earth. I dare say that this exhortation applies to *all* of us to some extent. “It is a major plague, which we find rampant amongst mankind, that they have a mad and insatiable desire for possessions” [Calvin, 215].

And indeed, it is an easy trap to fall into, for it is not unlawful to obtain material possessions, it is not unlawful (in and of itself) to be rich, and it is certainly not unlawful to work hard for a living. In fact, we are told that we must provide for ourselves and our relatives. Paul tells Timothy: **“Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”** (I Tim. 5:7-8). Paul told the Thessalonians to **“warn those who are idle”** (I Thess. 5:14). We are also told that **“everything God created is good”** (I Tim. 4:3), and that He **“richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”** (I Tim. 6:17). And so, working hard for a living, and enjoying what God has given us is commendable. The problem occurs when, over and above providing for our families, the storing up of treasures on earth becomes the goal of our existence, to the neglect of storing up treasures in heaven—when we are not satisfied with the good things that God has given us for our enjoyment, but we devote ourselves to gathering more and more treasures on earth, above and

beyond what God desires that we have. You may ask, “How do I know when I am striving for things beyond what God desires that I have?” Ask yourself this: “Am I serving Him? Am I storing up treasures in heaven?” If you are serving God *first*, if you are seeking His will *first*, as your primary employer, then you are storing up treasures in heaven, and you can be confident that your treasures on earth are from the hand of God. It is just as Jesus will tell us later in this chapter: **“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Matt. 6:33).

And so, I ask, “Are you serving Him? *How* are you serving Him?” Far too few Christians actually *serve* their Lord. What, exactly, specifically, are you doing to serve God? There is no shortage of work to do. There are poor to feed, there are children in Sunday school to teach, there are sick in hospitals to visit, there are Bible studies to lead, there are fervent intercessory prayers to be prayed, there is hospitality to be shown, there is a cup of cold water to be given to a thirsty soul, there are millions of unsaved people to be reached out to, etc. etc. etc. If someone asked you, right now, “How exactly do you serve God?”, could you give an answer? If so, then you are storing up treasures in heaven. If not, you are striving for that which will perish.

Jesus warns us of the danger of storing up treasures on earth: they are perishable. **“Moth and rust destroy... thieves break in and steal”** (vs. 20). Treasures they may be, but they are vanishing treasures. In contrast, the treasures you store up in heaven are imperishable and unassailable: rust cannot fade their luster, and they are out of reach of thieves. We Christians are pilgrims in this world. Our true citizenship is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20). And there are certain, shall we say, “customs” laws concerning what we can take with us out of this land when we go to our true country, our true home in heaven: we cannot

take with us the things of this world. And so, we would be wise to exchange whatever currency we have here in this land, to the currency of heaven before we get there, by storing up treasures in heaven.

Jesus gives the reason for His exhortation to store up treasures in heaven: **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (vs. 21). In the culture of those days, the **“heart”** referred, not only to the seat of affections (as we see it now), but “the seat of all the powers of the soul, [including] intellect, sensibilities, and will” [Broadus, 144]. Thus, Jesus’ reference to **“heart”** would be equivalent to us saying “head, heart and soul.” Jesus knows that your **“heart”** will naturally settle on that for which you labor. And so, Jesus wants you to labor for treasures in heaven so that your head, heart and soul will be in heaven, not in the stock market or your bank account.

The second choice that Jesus speaks on in this section is the choice between living in light or darkness: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”** (vss. 22-23). Having spoken of the heart, Jesus now turns to the eye. The eye here symbolizes our moral vision. Clear moral vision, looking to God’s perfect law, allows light in, and drives darkness out. Poor moral vision allows no true light in, and so the **“whole body is full of darkness”**. Such darkness then breeds on itself, confusing the whole moral outlook. Jesus states this enigmatically: **“If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”** To those who know the true **“light”**, this seems impossible. How can darkness be the **“light within you”**? But for those whose **“eyes are bad”**, those who have lost their moral vision, there is no true light, and so darkness becomes their light. We see this today. Moral

confusion: People following their own light, rather than looking to the true light of God's law. They say, "If it's good for me, and I can rationalize its bad effects, then it must be all right." Their darkness has become their light. Selfishness ("what's good for me") has become their moral standard. Blindness to the true moral light leads to utter darkness. As Jesus put it: **"How great is that darkness!"**

Before stating the third choice, Jesus teaches a general truth: **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other"** (vs. 24). This must be understood and affirmed before we can truly appreciate the third choice we must make: **"You cannot serve both God and Money"** (vs. 24). Unstated here is another fact that we must understand: everyone has a ruling passion, everyone serves a god as master. Jesus is speaking here to His disciples, and so it is assumed that they do not overtly serve a god of a false religion. But sadly, many of Christ's disciples serve the god of worldly things, named here **"Money"**. They, in many cases, fall into service of this deity unwittingly. As stated above, it is necessary that Christians labor for a living, and provide for themselves and their families. In the process of doing this, some focus too much on obtaining wealth, and find themselves serving the god of Money, at the expense of serving the True and Living God. "Whatever efforts we make to obtain wealth must be in entire subordination to the service of God, and, in fact, a part of that service; He alone must be Master" [Broadus, 147]. Do not think you can serve both God and Money. They are opposites. God and the world will never agree. Why do so many have problems living a godly life? They are trying to serve two masters.

Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?”

²⁶ “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

— Matthew 6:25-34

IN THIS SECTION, Jesus speaks on worry and anxiety. Jesus not only tells us why worry and anxiety are both unnecessary and futile, He also gives us a godly remedy for and an

alternative to worrying, by which we shall gain, without worrying, the very objects about which we were worrying. Jesus ties this teaching to the previous section by beginning, **“Therefore...”**. In that section, He warned us, **“You cannot serve both God and Money”** (Matt. 6:24). So here, by saying **“Therefore...”**, He is saying that we cannot serve God if we are constantly in a state of worry, and that to worry is, in effect, to serve the god of Money.

Jesus begins: **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear”** (vs. 25). As we study this teaching, we must remember that Jesus lived in a society where hunger was a much greater concern than it is now, for most of us who are reading this. So, if the command not to worry was appropriate then, it is even more so now. And yes, note this, Jesus is giving us a command: **“Do not worry.”** Jesus’ disciples are not to live a life of worry. It is a disservice to their Master. To worry is to belittle all the great things our Lord and Master has given us.

Jesus next gives us some reasons why it is unnecessary to worry. First, He says: **“Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?”** (vs. 25). Jesus is making an argument from the greater to the lesser. God has given us the greater things, life and a beautifully created body, so He will also give us the lesser, food to sustain life and clothes to protect the body. “It is truly no small offense we do God, in not trusting Him to supply us with food and clothing, as though He cast us into the world without any heed. When a man is firmly persuaded that God clearly sees the state of our life—of which He is the Author— he will have no doubt that, in fact, He considers its necessities very well” [Calvin, 221].

A second reason not to worry: **“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more**

valuable than they?” (vs. 26). Jesus now gives us an argument from the lesser to the greater. God provides for the lesser things—the birds of the air—and so He will certainly also provide for us, who are **“much more valuable”** to Him. “If it were firmly fixed in our minds that by God’s hand nourishment is brought to the birds, it would be easy to take hope for ourselves, for we are founded on His image, and are reckoned among His sons” [Calvin, 221].

Make no mistake: In the sight of God, in whose image we have been made, we humans (just as Jesus has said here) are **“much more valuable”** than the birds of the air, or any other living creature. We have been favored by God on earth. Look around! Which species has dominion over the earth? As David said, thanking God for man’s dominion: **“You made [man] ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds and beasts of the field; the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas”** (Ps. 8:6-8). In the beginning, God commanded us to have dominion over the earth: **“[F]ill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground”** (Gen. 1:28). Yet, despite this dominion over the animals that we have been given, we foolish humans must here be taught by them. “We behave so shamefully that a feeble sparrow must stand in the gospel as doctor and preacher of the wisest of men, and daily hold forth before our eyes and ears, teaching us to trust God, though we have the whole Bible and our reason to help us” [Martin Luther, in Broadus, 153].

Jesus chooses wisely the example of the **“birds of the air”**. Through them, we have an example of how God provides for His creatures. Even though birds have not been given the ability to **“sow or reap or store away in barns”**, yet they are fed by God. But note well: God provides for the birds through

the industrious labor of the birds themselves. Birds do not just sit around and wait for God to drop food into their mouths, but rather, they busily search for and gather their food. So also, God provides for us through the talents and the abilities He gives us, that we might work for our food and, in so doing, valuably contribute to society at the same time. Thus, the point of Jesus' teaching is not that we do not need to work for our sustenance, but that we need not worry about our sustenance because God will see that we have the opportunity to work for it.

Jesus gives us yet another reason why we should not worry: **“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”** (vs. 27). Certainly, worry accomplishes very little. And far from lengthening our lives, as we know from today's medical sciences, worry is much more likely to shorten our lives. Implicit in all this teaching is that, as David realized, **“My times are in Your hands”** (Ps. 31:15). God will feed us, clothe us, and take us home when He chooses. Our worrying will not lengthen our lives. And we will not die until God has determined that our work is done.

Jesus further teaches: **“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”** (vss. 28- 30). Jesus moves on to talk about worrying about clothing. Again, He uses an example from nature, **“the lilies of the field”**, which God clothes with splendor greater than Solomon's. So again, we can learn from that which is much less valuable in the sight of God, that we too shall be clothed. I dare say that many more of us worry more about the **“splendor”** than the clothes themselves.

And if worrying about clothes is wrong, certainly worrying about splendor is sinful. But God is gracious. He gives us not only clothes, but promises that we shall be clothed with **“much more”** splendor than the lilies of the field, and even with more splendor than Solomon in all his glory. We will receive the clothes here on earth, and the splendor in heaven, when we join our Lord to live in eternal glory.

Jesus continues: **“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them”** (vs. 31). Worry, Jesus suggests here, is unworthy of a Christian: it is a pagan activity. “As they see it, they must seek the supply of these necessities by their own efforts and out of their own resources. Anxiety is natural for them. But worry should not characterize God’s children” [Morris, 161]. Pagans either see no God, or believe in an unconcerned God who sleeps in heaven. All the onus of life’s responsibilities and troubles is upon themselves. We believe in a caring, loving God, who not only created us, but also remains concerned for us. He made all, and knows all, and so He can certainly help us through life’s difficulties. He went to great lengths to reconcile us to Him, even sending His own Son to die for us, and so will He not also feed and clothe us?

Again, God is not a God who is aloof and unconcerned about our welfare, for as Jesus says, **“...Your heavenly Father knows that you need [these things]”** (vs. 32). What a blessing! God knows our needs. He personally knows what each and every one of us needs. In fact, He knows what we need better than we do! God also knows what we *don’t* need. I dare say it is in this that most of us have a problem with God’s providence: when He denies us things that we don’t really need.

Next, Jesus gives us a remedy for worrying, a productive alternative to worrying: **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (vs. 33). “Our Lord does not simply command us to avoid worldly anxiety, but gives us something positive to do instead, as a means of precluding it” [Broadus, 151]. We are to replace worrisome fretting with an active pursuit of God’s will. Let God do the worrying, you do the serving. By **“first”**, Jesus does not mean “first in time”, but “first in importance”. “Jesus is clearly saying that the disciple’s first and best effort is to be directed toward God’s kingdom, not any personal needs” [Morris, 161]. If you are primarily occupied with seeking God’s will and serving Him, you won’t have time to worry about the other things.

Jesus enumerates two things to **“seek first”**: **“His kingdom”** and **“His righteousness”**. These are almost synonymous. To seek **“His kingdom”** is to be submissive to God as King, seeking to do the things that He wills, as well as battling to expand His kingdom. To seek **“His righteousness”** is to obey His law completely, including the teachings on true righteousness given by Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus concludes this section: **“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”** (vs. 34). This almost sounds like a worldly teaching, kind of a “Don’t worry, be happy” philosophy. But Jesus’ teaching, **“Do not worry”**, is in the context of faith that God cares for us today, and will care for us in the future. Moreover, this life is full of trouble, and **“each day has enough trouble of its own.”** Thus, to anticipate future troubles by worrying about them today is to double them. Blessedly, though troubles visit us daily, so does God. By His grace we will pass through the troubles of this life, enduring them, learning from them, being strengthened from

the journey, until we enter into His kingdom and glory forever, where we will never again hunger or thirst, where we will be led to springs of living water, where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (see Rev. 7:16-17). May the Lord be praised!

A Judgmental Attitude

¹ “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

— Matthew 7:1-5

JESUS CONTINUES His teachings to His disciples with another warning: **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you”** (vss. 1-2). Here Jesus is continuing where He left off in Matt. 6:18, with another common example of hypocrisy: some have a judgmental attitude concerning others, when they themselves need to get their own houses in order.

We must be careful to understand these verses in context. They are often misunderstood and misapplied. These verses are favorites of unbelievers, who are quick to throw them in the face of believers who defend the law of God. “Obviously men make false use of this [teaching] when they would make it a pretext to remove from the scene all discrimination between good and evil” [Calvin, 225]. Jesus is not saying that it is wrong,

under any circumstances, to form an unfavorable opinion on the behavior of others. Such a statement would contradict many other parts of the Bible. For instance, in I Cor. 5:2, Paul scolds the Corinthian church for not putting out of their fellowship a brother who is in sexual sin. Paul himself makes very strong judgments concerning the teachings of others (see Gal. 1:8-9; Phil. 3:2,18- 19). In fact, as if to prevent such a misreading of this passage, Jesus follows this teaching in verse 6 (as we shall see) with a command to use our judgment in deciding whom to preach the Gospel to. Then also, later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives a procedure we are to follow when we have been wronged by a brother, a procedure that requires making judgments: **“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”** (Matt. 18:15-17). Such a procedure—to **“show him his fault”**, and in the end, to **“treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”**—requires that a judgment be made.

So, to reconcile the teaching here in Matthew 7 with the other teachings in the Bible, we must look very carefully at the context of the teachings here. And we don’t have to look very far. If we read the entire passage (verses 1 through 5), we see clearly that Jesus is not commanding against judgment in any and all circumstances, but rather, He is warning against hypocritical judgment. His warning is that **“in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged”** (vs. 2). And so, if you are quick to magnify the trifling offenses of others, if you are in the habit making rash and hasty judgments with few facts

to support them, if you condemn behavior of others that is not condemned in the Bible, God will see to it that these same standards of judgment be applied to you.

Great care should be taken when passing judgment upon others. Jesus is telling us to look at our own lives first: **“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”** (vss. 3-5). “The judging faculty is best employed at home” [Spurgeon, 78]. Jesus here expresses the importance of clearness of vision when judging others. If there is a plank in your own eye, you may very well be mis-seeing the speck in your brother’s. “Casting out the [plank] will make us more clear-sighted, more sympathetic, and more skillful, in casting out the [speck]” [Broadus, 162]. And, note well, that Jesus does not say to ignore the speck in your brother’s eye. He says **“first”** take the plank out of your own eye, **“then”** you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. “The would-be helper’s first priority must be to remove the obstacle to clear-sightedness from his own eye. That done, he is equipped to bring aid to his brother. We should not overlook the point that the speck is to be removed... It is not unimportant that even this small defect be rectified” [Morris, 167].

Discernment

⁶ “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

— Matthew 7:6

JESUS NEXT WARNS: **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces”** (vs. 6). To understand more clearly what Jesus is saying here, we must understand how people of that time thought of **“dogs”** and **“pigs”**: “The **‘pigs’** are not only unclean animals but wild and vicious, capable of savage action against a person. **‘Dogs’** must not be thought of as household pets: in the Scriptures they are normally wild, associated with what is unclean... The two animals serve together as a picture of what is vicious, unclean, and abominable.” [Carson, 185]. In general, of course, it is a godly and admirable thing to speak of the **“sacred”** and share the gospel. But there are times when it is inappropriate, and counterproductive. “Everything is beautiful in its place and season. Our zeal is to be tempered by a prudent consideration of times, places, and persons.” [Ryle, 63]. There are those who would use your sharing of the gospel as an opportunity to **“trample it under their feet”**, to vilify the glorious Gospel, and to mock our Lord. It would be unwise to speak of holy things to such people in the presence of others who may be influenced by the rantings of the unholy. “Some persons do harm by expressing, in mixed society, those intimate feelings of personal Christian experience with which only the devout can sympathize.” [Broadus, 158]. Then again, there are some who react with violence to things sacred, who

“turn and tear you to pieces.” We are informed here, mercifully, that the Lord does not call us to endure their abuse over and over. And yet, we should ever look for openings, ever look for the times when the **“pigs”** or **“dogs”** turn tame. A **“dog”** may come with a thorn in his foot, and need a word of comfort; a **“pig”** may come spiritually hungry, in need of food that feeds the soul. **“There is a time for everything... [God] has made everything beautiful in its time”** (Eccl. 3:1,11).

In the matter of speaking of godly things, and spreading the gospel, it is far better to err on the side of zeal than of caution. **“Let your light shine before men”** (Matt. 5:16). A wise strategy is to “make the trial, and then continue our labors or not according to the results and prospects.” [Broadus, 158]. Our Lord later taught His disciples such a strategy when he sent them out to spread the gospel: **“Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town”** (Matt. 10:11-14). And later, Paul and Barnabas used such a strategy: **“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles’”** (Acts 13:44-46).

Prayer

⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!”

— Matthew 7:7-11

GIVEN THE DIFFICULTY of the teachings in verses 1 through 6, the teaching here in verses 7 through 11 concerning prayer is very timely: **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”** (vs. 7). More beautiful words than these do not exist in all of literature. Of course, much of their beauty lie in the fact that these words come from our Lord, who is speaking God’s truth concerning the efficacy of prayer. What a gracious, loving God we have! Why do we skimp on our prayer life? We have a God who is willing and eager to answer our prayers. Here, our Lord Jesus is practically begging us to pray! “What pains the Savior takes to make us pray! And His word is crowded with gracious invitations and precious promises, such as ought to conquer all our unbelief, and fill us with joyful trust in coming to God.” [Broadus, 158].

Note well Jesus’ next words: **“For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”** (vs. 8). Note that He said **“everyone”**. God won’t turn anyone away. He will answer the prayers of

“everyone”. Yet, though Jesus makes no qualifications based on person, He does make the following qualification concerning answers to prayer: God is a loving Father, so He will not give you what is harmful: **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!”** (vs. 9-11). Since God is a loving Father, if we as His children unwittingly ask for what looks to us is a loaf of **“bread”**, but is really a **“stone”**, God will not give us the stone. And if we ask for what looks to us is a **“fish”**, but really is a **“snake”**, God will not give us that. No loving father would do such a thing. We, even in our fallen nature, know this. “Bad as our fallen nature is, the *father* in us is not extinguished.” [JFB, 57].

The Golden Rule

¹² **“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”**

— Matthew 7:12

IN PERHAPS, Jesus’ most widely known teaching, He commands: **“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”** This, of course, is what is known throughout the world as the Golden Rule. Some have noted that similar teachings were given by other notable teachers. Confucius (ca. 500 BC) said: “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” [*Bartlett’s Quotations*]. Aristotle (ca. 350 BC) said: “We should behave to our friends as we would wish our friends to behave to us.” [*Ibid.*]. In the Apocryphal book of Tobit, it is taught: “What thou hatest, do to no one” (Tobit 4:15). The Talmud relates that Rabbi Hillel taught: “What is hateful to thee, do not do to another” [cited in Broadus, 161]. Philo taught: “One must not himself do what he hates to have done to him” [*Ibid.*]. These are similar to the teachings of Jesus, but they are different. Notice that all of these teachings (with the exception of Aristotle’s, which applies only to “friends”) are stated in the negative. They tell what you should “not do”. Only Jesus’ teaching is stated positively (**“Do to others...”**), and Jesus’ teaching applies to all, both enemies and friends. “Our Lord makes it a rule for positive action, and towards all men” [*Ibid.*]. In other words, Jesus is not just telling us to refrain from doing evil, He is commanding us to actively do good to others. This

is a far cry from the example set by the religious leaders of that time. “The morality taught by the Scribes and exemplified by the Pharisees, seems to have been—‘Do to others as they do to you—Love your neighbor, hate your enemy—Love them that love you, do good to them that do good to you—Lend to them from whom you hope to receive again; and as to those who do you injuries, the rule is, An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’” [Brown].

The poor example of the religious leaders of the day made necessary Jesus’ teachings concerning the Law. And what better way was there to conclude His teachings than with one easily memorized rule that summarizes all He taught concerning the Law in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus ties the Golden Rule to His previous teachings by beginning, **“So in everything...”** (which can also be translated, “Therefore...”). The Golden Rule can be seen as a summarizing, concluding statement for all of Matt. 5:17 through 7:11. Note that in Matt. 5:17, Jesus referred to **“the Law and the Prophets”**, saying that He had not come to abolish them. Here He gives a rule that **“sums up the Law and the Prophets.”** And so, Jesus enveloped His teachings concerning the Law in the Sermon on the Mount with a reference back to the Old Testament, as if to underscore the continued importance and validity of the Old Testament teachings.

Indeed, Jesus’ statement that the Golden Rule **“sums up the Law and the Prophets”** adds extra weight to the rule, and gives us extra incentive to pay special attention in carrying it out. To practice this rule, and to make it the basis of our dealings with others, is not merely to apply a trite saying to our lives, but it is to live a life in compliance to the written commands of the Almighty Creator of the Universe. It is to please the Living God. It is to live a life acceptable to Him.

It is quite interesting to me that the Golden Rule, which **“sums up the Law and the Prophets”**, takes advantage of our natural love for ourselves. We are to **“do to others what [we] would have them do to [us].”** Since we all naturally love ourselves, to practice this rule is to show love for others. Jesus elsewhere gave a similar command, which He also said summed up the Law: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”** (Matt. 22:37–40). The command to **“love your neighbor as yourself”** assumes as its basis that we love ourselves. And we do. This is how God has made us. We all love ourselves. Those who say they do not love themselves are self-deceived. Someone may wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and exclaim: “Blech! Look how ugly I am! I hate myself.” But his statement, “I hate myself”, is a lie, for if he hated himself, he would not be so concerned that he was ugly. The very fact that he is concerned that he is ugly demonstrates that he loves himself.

Jesus uses the natural, God-given trait of love for oneself as the basis of the Golden Rule in order to give a general rule for obeying God’s law that is understandable to everyone. There is no need for interpretation by learned theologians. If there is any question as to how to keep God’s law in your behavior towards another, remember the Golden Rule. Even a child can readily understand the Golden Rule. “This is a golden rule indeed! It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and overreaching; it does much more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and man; it prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases; it sweeps the whole debatable ground with one

mighty principle; it shows us a balance and measure, by which every one may see at once what is his duty” [Ryle, 66]. Now, there are some who (I guess) do not think the Golden Rule is clear enough. They would invent hypotheticals, such as, “...but what if I desire that someone do evil to me? Should I then do evil to him?” Don’t be absurd! Use your God-given common sense to interpret this rule of life. “Put yourself in another’s place, and then act to him as you would wish him to act towards you under the same circumstances. This is a right royal rule, a precept always at hand, always applicable, always right” [Spurgeon, 80].

Sadly, though the Golden Rule is very easily understood, we fail miserably in keeping it. “We all know how easy it is to read such a statement, or to listen to an exposition of it, or to read an exposition of it in a book, or to see some great picture which conveys it, and to say, ‘Yes; wonderful, marvelous,’ and yet to fail completely to put it into practice in actual life and living” [Lloyd-Jones, 207]. Even we, who aver that this magnificent rule should be the basis of all our dealings with others, fail consistently at living up to its standard. “The tragedy is that, having praised it, [we] do not implement it. And, after all, the law was not meant to be praised, it was meant to be practiced” [*Ibid.*, 211]. Even we who love the Lord, who delight in the worship of the Lord, fail in treating our fellow men in the way our Lord commands. “It is utterly vain to speak like angels when on our knees before God, if we act like devils in our transactions with men” [Pink, 206].

In dealing with our fellow man, we far too often take our cue from the world. We follow the world’s version of the Golden Rule: we seek to treat others in the same way they treat us. We demand our rights. We demand our justice. If I am crossed, I will cross. If I am wronged, I will wrong. “Worldly pride and honor will say, Treat them as they have treated us—

return a kindness, revenge an injury. Jesus says, 'Treat them as we should wish them to treat us— forgive, forbear, make the best of the past, hope for the best in future.—To carry out this rule requires imagination, sympathy, unselfishness' [Broadus, 163]. The rule is not: 'Treat others as they treat us.' The rule is not conditional upon others observing this rule. Even if they don't, we must. The rule is not a rule of justice, but of love, of God's love. The Golden Rule is based on God's willingness to give: God gives to us even when we do not deserve it. So also, we should give to others, even when they are not giving toward us. Our behavior, as children of God, should without exception be better, more giving, more loving, than the behavior of others toward us. Such behavior should set us apart as Christians. "A man is never in a right frame of spirit until he takes as much delight in doing others good as he would take in having good done to himself; nay, more; for our Lord tells us that **'it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive'** (Acts 20:35). Why a more blessed thing? Because this comes nearest to the nature of God, who gives, all, and takes of none" [Manton, 374]. God well knows that there are some upon whom we would rather not practice this rule. "They're evil! They're sinners!", we cry. But wait: are you not a sinner? But for the grace of God, would you not be doing the same thing they are? But for the guidance and conviction of the Holy Spirit, would you not be delighting in sin? Those of us who know the joy of the salvation of the Lord, also know the depths of our own depravity. This realization should help us in carrying out this rule. We know the mighty work that the love of God has wrought in our lives, and so, we should be willing, indeed eager, to practice the love of God toward others.

Then there are some who are ready and willing to practice the Golden Rule in their dealings with those who do not know God, but they seem to forget to practice it in their dealings with

brothers. Don't just practice the Golden Rule out in the world, be sure to practice it at home, and in everyday, ordinary situations. "In the ordinary relations of life, this rule may be of the greatest use. Were husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, often applying this rule, how full of peace and happiness would be the domestic scene!" [Brown, 312]. Love your brothers; build them up; commend them; complement them; defer to their needs and desires. And in every situation, stop and ask yourself this question before you act: "Is this what I would have others do for me?"

The Narrow Gate

¹³ **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

— Matthew 7:13-14

JESUS BEGINS to bring His Sermon on the Mount to a close with some warnings concerning the difference between true and false discipleship. The first warning: **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”** (vss. 13– 14). There are two distinguishing characteristics given here of the road that **“leads to life”**: it is narrow; and, only a few find it. It is narrow in that it requires the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the acceptance of His teachings, which have been presented in the Sermon on the Mount, as the rule of life. Those who are on the **“broad”** road which leads to the **“wide”** gate bow to any number of lords; and they accept as the rule of life any number of philosophical, moral and ethical teachings. They are even free to come up with their own standards of living (and indeed, many of them do). Since they are on the broad road, and since they believe that the broad road leads to life, one often hears them say (in direct contradiction of Jesus’ words), “There are many ways to God; there are many ways to life.” But what is

the basis for this belief of theirs, that “there are many ways to God”? On whose authority have they assurance that this is true?

We learn here, by the authority of Jesus Christ, as stated in the Word of God, that **“small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.”** There are not “many ways to God”: there is only one way, and that is through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus stated unequivocally: **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** (John 14:6). Elsewhere, He stated: **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”** (John 11:25); then, to prove the truth of these words, He raised Lazarus from the dead. Anyone can utter the words, “I am the resurrection and the life”; Jesus proved that He was speaking the truth, proved that He indeed is **“the resurrection and the life”**, by raising Lazarus from the dead. And so, given Jesus’ proven authority to make these statements concerning the way to **“life”**, we have no choice but to believe His words here concerning the way to **“life”**: **“Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.”**

So, you would do well to ask yourself: “Which road am I on?”, for you must be on one road or the other; if you are not on the **“narrow”** road, then you are on the **“broad”** road. “If it be the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult, and exceedingly narrow; for it demands self-denial, and calls for strictness of obedience, and watchfulness of spirit” [Spurgeon, 81]. “We may well tremble and be afraid, if our religion is that of the multitude. If we can say no more than this, that ‘we go where others go, and worship where others worship, and hope we shall do as well as others at last,’ we are literally pronouncing our own condemnation” [Ryle, 67]. The broad road is easy to find, and easy to stay on. No special navigation is required. Do nothing, and you are there. Moreover, the broad

road is spacious. It easily accommodates you and all your baggage. Bring anything and everything with you; you will not be crowded out.

The narrow road, on the other hand, does require navigation: you must seek to do the will of God; you must seek to follow your Lord Jesus Christ. It is His guidance that will help you find your way on the narrow road. And the road is narrow, so you must travel light. You can't make any progress on the narrow road while carrying a lot of the baggage of the world. And though the way may be more difficult on the narrow road, and though you won't have as much company on the narrow road—all your friends may choose the broad road—the narrow road has a great advantage over the broad road: it **“leads to life”**, whereas the broad road leads to **“destruction”**. And is not the purpose of taking a road to get to the proper destination? When embarking on a journey, you normally do not choose a road primarily on the basis of how comfortable the road is. The primary requirement for the path you take is that it must lead you to the correct destination! “No man, in his wits, would choose to go to the gallows, because the way to it is smooth and pleasant, nor refuse the offer of a palace and a throne, because the way to it is rough and dirty; yet such absurdities as these are men guilty of in the concerns of their souls” [Henry, cited in Broadus, 173].

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

¹⁵ **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.**
¹⁶ **By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles?** ¹⁷ **Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.** ¹⁸ **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.** ¹⁹ **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**
²⁰ **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”**

— Matthew 7:15-20

THE SECOND WARNING that Jesus gives, as He brings His Sermon on the Mount to a close, is: **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”** (vs. 15). “Alas! it is not enough that we have personally so much difficulty in finding the way to life, and that so many set us a bad example; there are others who deliberately attempt to lead us astray” [Broadus, 166]. But then again, since the way to life is narrow, and **“only a few find it”**, it stands to reason that there would be many false prophets teaching the broad way.

“Prophets” are those who speak in the name of God. In our day and age, it is the men of the pulpit, generally, who speak in the name of God. People by and large turn to men of the pulpit to learn the truth of God. Jesus tells us to **“watch out for false prophets”**, warning us that not all those who pretend to speak in the name of God speak the truth. “This is a warning which is much needed. There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion, if they hear it from an ordained minister... Their teaching must be weighed in the balance of Holy Scripture: they are to be followed and believed, so long as

their doctrine agrees with the Bible, but not a minute longer” [Ryle, 68].

The task of watching out for **“false prophets”** is made more difficult because they come to us **“in sheep’s clothing”**, even though **“inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”** They appear in the clothing of the most harmless of animals. “At first glance they use orthodox language, show biblical piety, and are indistinguishable from true prophets” [Carson, 191]. However, the false prophet is “not only not a sheep, but the worst enemy the sheep have, that comes not but to tear and devour, to scatter the sheep, to drive them from God and from one another into crooked paths” [Henry, cited in Broadus, 166].

And so, we must learn to tell the difference between **“false prophets”** and those speaking the truth of God, to tell the difference between false teaching and the the truth of God. Jesus gives us a way to detect those who are **“false prophets”**: **“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit”** (vss. 16–18). In order to use this method of discernment, one must know what **“good fruit”** looks like. And in order to know what good fruit looks like, one must study the Word of God, which defines what good fruit is. “What is the best safeguard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the Word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp for our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105)... It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear” [Ryle, 68]

The fruit of a tree clearly reveals what type of tree it is. Where I work, there are fruit trees in the parking lot. In the spring they blossomed, and the fragrance was beautiful. The

fragrance reminded me of the orange blossom fragrance I used to smell from orange trees when I was a child. And so, I thought the trees were orange trees—until the fruit revealed that they were grapefruit trees. So also, we may be fooled by a false teacher for a time: we may be taken in by the blossom fragrance, so to speak. But when the fruit appears, we will know what type of teacher he is. Now, the fruit of a teacher consists of what that teacher says and does. It includes his words and actions, his teachings as well as the example he sets. Does his teaching conform to the sound doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Does he live a godly life, respecting and obeying the commandments of God? Is the goal of his teaching to glorify God, not himself? These are some of the questions you should ask, as you become “fruit inspectors”. And yes, the onus is upon you to be a fruit inspector. “Let us remember this. Our minister’s mistakes will not excuse our own. ‘If the blind lead the blind, *both* shall fall into the ditch.’ (Matt. 15:14)” [Ryle, 68].

In the end, through the perfect discernment of God, the false prophets are revealed: **“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”** (vs. 19). “In words reminiscent of those of John the Baptist (see Matt. 3:10), [Jesus] reminds His hearers that people who run orchards do not put up with rotten trees” [Morris, 178]. And note well this: “It is not merely the wicked, the bearer of poison berries, that will be cut down; but the neutral, the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire” [Spurgeon, 82]. “Interestingly, Jesus does not speak of what the tree does, but of what it does not do: in the last resort it is not the tree that actively bears bad fruit that is condemned, but one that fails to produce good fruit” [Morris, 178].

False Disciples

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

— Matthew 7:21-23

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, Jesus warned His disciples against heeding false prophets. In this section, Jesus speaks about false disciples: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”** (vs. 21). Just as false prophets are recognized **“by their fruit”** (see Matt. 7:15–16), so also, those who do not do the will of the Father are not true disciples of Jesus. Our words are not sufficient to make us disciples of Christ. Though we say, **“Lord, Lord”**, repeating the word **“Lord”** to demonstrate our fervency, yet such a profession does not, in itself, make us a disciple of Christ. The life of a true disciple of Christ will reflect that Christ is truly his **“Lord”**, not merely by calling Him **“Lord”**, but also by doing the will of God in his life.

Jesus goes on to say: **“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’**

Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (vss. 22–23). The false disciples in this example try to convince Jesus that they are true disciples. They boast of ways that they think they have done the will of the Father: **“prophesy... drive out demons... perform many miracles...”** Many of us, seeing these things, would be deceived by these false disciples. They would probably be made leaders in the church, after people see them boldly **“prophesying”** in the name of Jesus, **“driving out demons”** in the name of Jesus, **“performing many miracles”** in the name of Jesus. We would think that these things are the fruit of a valid profession of belief in Christ. In this case, we would be mistaken.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, teaches His disciples how they should live, and not once does He state that His disciples must **“prophesy”** in His name, **“drive out demons”** in His name, or **“perform many miracles”** in His name. Men consider these things great; not so Jesus. Men are awed when a person **“performs many miracles”**; not so Jesus. Rather than concentrating on **“prophesying”**, **“driving out demons”**, and **“many miracles”**, the false professors should have strived to truly act as a disciple of Christ is taught to act in the Sermon on the Mount: being a light of the world (Matt. 5:14), keeping the commandments in the Word of God (Matt. 5:19), not being angry with others (Matt. 5:22), reconciling with others who are angry with them (Matt. 5:25), not looking lustfully upon women (Matt. 5:28), not divorcing (Matt. 5:32), speaking truthfully (Matt. 5:37), turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), loving and praying for their enemies (Matt. 5:44), not doing acts of righteousness to be seen by others (Matt. 6:1), forgiving others (Matt. 6:15), storing up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20), trusting in God’s providence (Matt. 6:25ff), not having a judgmental attitude (Matt. 7:1ff), seeking the Lord (Matt. 7:7),

doing to others as they would have others do to them (Matt. 7:12). These are the things they should have been proud of when speaking to Christ **“on that day”**.

Instead, these false disciples boasted about the more flamboyant, more showy aspects of religion, as if to impress, as if wanting people to look at them and say: “Ooh, aah... look at them... they prophesy, they drive out demons, they perform miracles.” The false disciples erred in concentrating on these showy aspects of religion, to the exclusion of truly doing **“the will of the Father.”** “We may be baptized in the name of Christ, and boast confidently of our ecclesiastical privileges; we may possess head knowledge, and be quite satisfied with our own state; we may even be preachers, and teachers of others, and do **‘many wonderful works’** in connection with our Church: but all this time are we practically doing the will of our Father in heaven? Do we truly repent, truly believe on Christ, and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession, we shall miss heaven at last, and be forever cast away. We shall hear those awful words, **‘I never knew you: depart from me’**” [Ryle, 70]. “While most persons within the pale of the Christian Church are ready to admit that, not professed, but proved subjection to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—not lip, but life service—will avail **‘in that day,’** it is not so readily admitted and felt that services such as ‘prophesying in Christ’s name, and in His name casting out devils, and in His name doing many miracles’—or, what in later ages correspond to these, [such as], eloquent and successful preaching (even to the deliverance of souls from the thralldom of sin and Satan); learned contributions to theological literature; great exertions for the diffusion of Christianity and the vindication of religious liberty; and princely donations for either or both of these—may all be rendered in honour of

Christ, while the heart is not subjected to Him, and the life is a contradiction to His precepts” [JFB, 50].

The false disciples, who cried **“Lord, Lord”**, thought that their flamboyant works for Christ were enough. They thought that, since Christ was working through them (for they did their flamboyant works **“in [His] Name”**), that that was enough to be a true disciple of Christ. They were self-deceived. They felt that they didn’t need to dedicate their life to Christ, to truly act as though Christ were their **“Lord”**. They felt they didn’t need a pure heart that seeks God’s will. Yet in the end, Jesus tore off their mask of false discipleship, and said, **“I never knew you”** (vs. 23). And take note, dear reader, if He **“never knew”** these who prophesied, drove out demons, and performed many miracles, how much less does He know those who give even less evidence of being His disciple! Look at your own life. Examine yourselves. Seek first to do the will of the Father. Don’t look for religion to bring you something: to bring you fame through doing flamboyant works for God, or to bring you accolades as others see how ‘holy’ you are. Rather, seek first to know and to carry out the true will of the Father. Get on your knees. Turn your life over to Him. Make the decision that Jesus is your Lord and Master, and live your life so as to reflect His true Lordship in your life.

There is one more thing that we must note concerning this section. Jesus speaks here with great boldness. This passage is a claim by Jesus Himself that He is the Messiah, and more. This passage is a claim by Jesus Himself that the destiny of men after death (**“on that day”**) is in His hands: their entrance into the **“kingdom of heaven”** is based upon whether Jesus Himself acknowledges knowing them. There are some who would claim that Jesus was a great moral teacher, but nothing more than that. Jesus Himself in this passage makes the claim that He is

much more than a great moral teacher: He is the One who holds the destiny of men in His hands.

A Sure Foundation

²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

— Matthew 7:24-27

TO SUM UP, Jesus gives an illustration of the advantages of putting into practice His teachings: **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”** (vss. 24–27). To **“hear”** the words of Christ, *and* to **“put them into practice”** is to build one’s life upon a firm foundation. There are many who **“hear”** the teachings of Christ—they make sure they never miss church on Sunday morning, they sit near the

front, they heed each word that is said by the preacher, they read their Bibles every morning—and yet, they do not **“put into practice”** what they hear. Why waste your time **“hearing”** if you are not going to **“put into practice”** what you hear? James tells us: **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says”** (James 1:22).

Note that in Jesus’ illustration concerning these two houses, the difference between the houses is discovered when affliction comes. Both houses looked fine when the sun was shining. The flaw in the foundation of the house built on sand was discovered during the storm. So also, one sure way to tell the difference between the foundation of true discipleship of Christ—subjection to Him and obedience to His Word—versus the loose foundation of empty profession, is through the reaction to affliction. The false believer flounders in times of trouble, because his religion is all outward adornment. He has not gained the strength and faith that results from obedience to God’s Word. On the other hand, the true believer will not be demolished by trials, but he will cling to his faithful God, knowing from his consistent walk with God that the Lord is working all out for good. “In the time of trial his religion does not fail him; the floods of sickness, sorrow, poverty, disappointments, bereavements beat upon him in vain. His soul stands unmoved; his faith does not give way; his comforts do not utterly forsake him. His religion may have cost him trouble in time past; his foundation may have been obtained with much labour and many tears; to discover his own interest in Christ may have required many a day of earnest seeking, and many an hour of wrestling in prayer. But his labour has not been thrown away; he now reaps a rich reward. The religion that can stand trial is the true religion” [Ryle, 71].

The Reaction of the Crowd

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, ²⁹ because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

— Matthew 7:28-29

SO ENDS the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' listeners were appropriately in awe. Oh to have been there! To have heard the words of the Master in person! Throughout this sermon, Jesus speaks, not as a mere teacher of the Law, but as the fulfillment of the Law (5:17), as one who, as such, is the right and final interpreter of the Law of God. He also presents Himself as the One who has the power over our destiny after death. Separation from Him—for Him, on judgment day, to say to us **“Away from me”** (7:23)—is to be barred from entrance into the kingdom of heaven. “If the Speaker were a mere creature, no language can express the mingled absurdity and profanity of such assumptions; but if He was the Word, who at the beginning was with God and was God,... then all that He says here is worthy of Himself, and shines in its own lustre” [JFB, 51].

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